

Adult Quarterly

SUNDAY SCHOOL

FALL QUARTER, 2009

Fullness of Joy

A Study in 1, 2, 3 John and Jude

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QUARTERLY AIM: The pupil will learn how to have fullness of joy based on the increased knowledge of God gained in this study.

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American Baptist Association Through-the-Bible Series Sunday School Lessons

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
2009	John 13—21	Ezra; Nehemiah Habakkuk; Haggai Malachi; Esther	1 Peter 2 Peter	1, 2, 3 John Jude
2010	Daniel Ezekiel Zechariah	Revelation 1—7	Revelation 8—22	Genesis 1—11 Job
2011	Genesis 12—50	Matthew 1—13	Matthew 14—28	Exodus
2012	Romans	Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Hebrews	Joshua Judges Ruth
2013	Acts 1—14	Acts 15—28	1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1—4 1 Chronicles 1—10	Mark 1—8
2014	Mark 9—16	2 Samuel 5—24 1 Chronicles 11—29 1 Kings 1; 2	James 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians	Psalms 1—72
2015	Psalms 73—150	Galatians	1 Kings 3—22 2 Chronicles 1—24 2 Kings 1—13 Joel; Obadiah	1 Corinthians
2016	Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Luke 1—13:21	Luke 13:22—24	Hosea; Amos; Micah; Jonah; 2 Kings 14—16 2 Chronicles 25—28
2017	2 Corinthians	Isaiah 1—39 2 Chronicles 29—32 2 Kings 17—20 Nahum	Isaiah 40—66 2 Kings 21—23 2 Chronicles 33—35 Zephaniah	Philemon Philippians Colossians
2018	Ephesians	1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus	Jeremiah Lamentations 2 Kings 24; 25 2 Chronicles 36	John 1—12

1

Fellowship with God

Text: 1 John 1:1-10

Focus: 1 John 1:1-10

Key Verse:

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

1 John 1:7

Sunday Devotional: Called To Fellowship in His Son, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 10.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must be in fellowship with God the Father, Jesus the Son and other believers.

A FIRST LOOK

Today we begin a study in 1 John. This is one of five books God gave to the beloved apostle. In this book John dealt with practical and relevant aspects of our faith in Jesus. John began with the foundational truths of fellowship with God, joy in Christ and the forgiveness of our sins. What three things could be more spiritually important to God’s children?

The world tends to think of Christians as sour people who do not enjoy life. It seems as if the Bible forbids anything that most people think of as fun. These notions are wrong. The truth is that no one has more potential for happiness than a Christian, and no one is more miserable than those who do not know Christ.

One foundation for our joy is the clear Bible teaching that, whatever God does for us, it is always for our benefit. God never leads us into disaster. The Holy Spirit always acts in our best interests and leads us in the

Daily Devotionals

- M. — In the Beginning, John 1:1-3.
- T. — The Word Became Flesh, John 1:14.
- W. — Holding Forth the Word of Life, Philippians 2:12-16.
- T. — The Light of Life, John 8:12.
- F. — Walk as Children of Light, Ephesians 5:8-11.
- S. — Redeemed by the Blood, Ephesians 1:7.

paths of righteousness. On the other hand, Satan comes to kill and to destroy. Satan is not happy, and he does not want anyone else to be happy. The world promises a false and fickle kind of joy, but only Jesus can offer joy unspeakable and full of glory, the joy that passes our understanding and allows us to function no matter what our circumstances.

Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Real joy, as we shall see, comes from the peace that Jesus gives. The world cannot supply this peace to us.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. The Basis of Fellowship

I John 1:1, 2

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;

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;)

John was writing from his personal experiences as well as from the revelation of God. John knew Jesus in the flesh. He walked with Him and listened to Him, and he was an eyewitness of many of the wonderful events of the public ministry of our Lord. When John spoke of fellowship, he was talking about a personal and physical contact with Jesus.

Often we define *fellowship* as shared pleasure. We have fellowship when we mutually enjoy an experience, like sharing a meal with other Christians. This is not a bad definition, but, *fellowship* in the Bible means “things shared, or things that we have in common, most often, shared labor.” One of the ways to be happy in life is to have meaningful and shared work. We are in fellowship when we work together to reach a common goal. A great part of reaching this goal for Christians is to share the experiences we have with others. John was doing

this in this letter. He had personally seen and known Jesus and now He wrote about his experiences so that others could share the wonderful work of spreading the gospel.

John presented this message of fellowship in terms of our physical senses. He talked about what he had seen with his own eyes, about what he had heard with his ears and what his hands had handled. This teaches us that the life of Jesus had been thoroughly observed by John, but it also tells us that happiness and joy must touch all parts of our lives. For John, Jesus was not a philosophy or a spirit. Jesus touched all parts of John's life, and, if we would be happy, He must touch all parts of ours as well.

To have fellowship with Jesus, we must believe that He is as real as we are. We also have to believe that He will reward us for what we do for Him. Likewise, when we begin to think of God as being far away or long ago, our fellowship weakens. When John wrote these words, he was looking back on a lifetime of service; yet, his memories of Jesus were clear in his mind because Jesus was real in his life.

The basis of fellowship is to have a personal and lasting experience with Jesus. Only when He lives in your heart can He be revealed in your life.

II. The Basis of Full Joy

I John 1:3-5

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.

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

5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The purpose of this book is declared plainly in verse 3. It was written to meet two great goals. The first was to build and increase fellowship. The second was to bring the joy that is the result of doing things that matter and sharing our work with others.

The idea that joy can be full suggests at least three conditions that relate to our joy, or lack of it. We can have little or no joy.

If we look honestly at what the world offers, we will see many people living sad and lonely lives. They seem to have little to look forward to. Often they may have wealth and numerous material things; yet, inside they are lonely. Then, we see those who have some happiness. This is where we might find the majority of human beings. They have some joy some of the time. Some things make them happy and some things make them sad. They are at the mercy of their surroundings and the people in their lives.

Think about this kind of joy for a moment. If someone can make you happy or make you sad, that person controls your emotions. They can do with you as they will. Sobering is it not; yet, this is how many people see joy. For them their joy depends on everyone else behaving as they expect. Since others seldom behave as we wish they would, much of the time such people live without much joy.

John presented a third way of thinking. This was what he called full joy. Through the wonderful power of Jesus it is possible to have full joy. Full joy gives you happiness in all the circumstances of all your life. It does this because it puts Jesus in control of all of your life. You are no longer in control and your friends and neighbors are not in control. Jesus is in control, and, when He leads and we follow, we will find our lives literally filled with joy.

God is always seeking the best for every human being. God leads the lost to be saved and He leads His children to serve Him in a New Testament church. In every spiritual transaction, the one who benefits the most is the one who makes the transaction. John told us that the message from the beginning was that God is light and that there is no darkness in Him at all. This is a picture of good versus evil. Light and dark are mutually exclusive. One always replaces the other. When the light shines, the darkness recedes and when darkness falls, the light goes away. Light and dark are not matters of opinion; they are matters of fact.

We may say one thing but practice another, but there is no joy in hypocrisy. Hypocrites are some of the most sour, joyless people in the world. They are pretending to have things they really do not possess, and they are living in fear of being found

out to be what they really are. We might say that we are in the light, but, if our practice does not live up to our profession, we are telling a lie.

As bad as it is to lie to others, it is worse when we lie to ourselves. If we lie to others, we might be found out and exposed. Then the lie would be obvious and we would have to face it. But, if we lie to ourselves, how is the lie ever going to be exposed? If we walk in ignorance, we will be walking in darkness. Consequently, we will be living without fellowship and joy. Personal honesty is a basic need of every human being, and, when we lie to ourselves, darkness increases and it becomes difficult to find the light.

III. The Basis of Forgiven Sin

1 John 1:6-10

6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

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

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

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

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

Jesus helps us have joy by dealing with our sins, but we also learn here how men try to deal with sin without involving Jesus. These verses reveal that doing what Jesus said works and other things do not.

One of the ways the world deals with sin is to deny that it happens. We have invented many clever terms to disguise and deodorize sin. People do not lie; they misspeak. They do not commit fornication; they have affairs. People are not drug addicts; they are chemical abusers. We could go on, but you get the idea. We can give sin a catchy name, but it is still sin, and it robs us of our happiness. We are deceiving ourselves when we attempt to ignore sin.

The world tells us an often repeated lie about sin and it is that sin can have a happy ending. This is a constant theme of popular fiction. The characters in the story do everything wrong. They lie, cheat, steal and murder, and, by the end of the story, they live happily ever after. This is fantasy and it is wrong. In the real world, those who sin and fail to seek forgiveness of their sins, condemn themselves to a miserable existence.

We may deceive ourselves, but truth is still true. Truth is true for everyone and it never changes. When the truth comes home to us, we will see that denying sin never solved the problem of sin. No matter what we call it and no matter how we try to avoid it, sin is coming short of the glory of God, and it robs us of the happiness that we can only find in Jesus.

We might not deny that there is sin in the world, but we can simply claim that we do not personally commit sin. We can see sin as the things that others are doing, not the things that we are doing. It is easy to justify what you want to do. We can know that it is wrong for others to do certain things; yet, when we do the same things, we can fool ourselves into thinking that we are an exception to the rules that apply to everyone else.

When we do this, we make God a liar and the truth is not in us. We must realize that the spiritual laws of God are as unbreakable as the physical laws of the universe. When we attempt to break them, we only succeed in proving them. For instance, gravity works. Water runs downhill and things fall from high places. If you do not believe this, jump off of a short stool. You will not float about the room; you will fall to the floor. You may think that you will float around, but you will not. You will prove that the law of gravity is still in effect and that it applies to you personally.

In the same way, when we sin, we prove that spiritual laws are in place. They apply to everyone and no one is an exception to any of them. God has told us the truth in the Bible and it is truth for everyone. Our happiness and peace depend on our compliance with God's divine laws. We may or may not like them and we may or may not agree with them, but they are binding on all of us just the same.

Now, we come to the right way to deal with our sins. God does not want us to deny it in principle or in practice; He wants us to confess it. Here is the avenue to real joy. When we admit to God that we cannot solve the problem of our own sins, the problem is solved. He forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

First, our sins are forgiven. To forgive something means to take away any penalty for it. Forgiveness frees the one who has done wrong from payment for his actions. This happens because Jesus has taken our place and His blood was shed for us. He became our sacrifice and what He did for us when He died on the cross is sufficient to forgive us of every sin we could ever commit.

Then, we are cleansed or made clean from our unrighteousnesses. The stain and penalty of sin, the part of sin that makes us dirty and ashamed, is taken away. It is not that we have never sinned. When we deal with sin realistically, we admit it and then we trust God to take care of it.

It is difficult for us to say, "I was wrong. It was my fault." We will go to ridiculous lengths to keep from admitting what everyone else already knows; that we have sinned. But, when we are willing to admit our sins, we find the way to the remedy for our sins.

Forgiven sin is not an obstacle to our happiness. Our joy can be full because we no longer have to live in doubt and dread, wondering whether or not our sins will be found out. The way to deal with sin is both by trusting Jesus as our Savior and then by confessing our sins every day of our lives.

A FINAL WORD

We also learn a wonderful thing about ourselves when we are willing to confess our sins. We lose some of the desire to sin. John tells us that we are to sin not. This does not mean that we can exercise some miraculous self-control or inner strength; it means to see things as they are, and to see that Jesus Christ is the remedy for our sins and for the sins of the

whole world. We learn to live in harmony with the laws of God not in contradiction to them.

Think of those physical laws mentioned earlier. We are foolish to challenge them. It is far better to understand them and to live in harmony with them. So it is with spiritual laws. We can know what they are and how they work, and then we can learn to adjust our thinking and our behavior to live in harmony with them. This does not mean that we can live sinless lives, but it does mean that we can live with less sin in our lives. And, less sin will always bring us closer to God and increase our joy.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What is the ground or foundation of our fellowship with one another and with God?
2. Why is it important that what we say and what we do are in harmony?
3. What does it mean to walk in darkness? What does it mean to walk in the light? Give some practical examples of each type of walk.
4. Why is it important to admit and confess one's sin?

2

Walk with God

Text: 1 John 2:1-14

Focus: 1 John 2:1-14

Key Verse:

“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 our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

1 John 2:1, 2

Sunday Devotional: Walk in Him, Colossians 2:6, 7.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must live in harmony with God and His Word daily.

A FIRST LOOK

The Bible uses many metaphors to help us understand our relationship with God. One of them is walking. When we walk, we take steps, one after the other, and we repeat the process as often as necessary to arrive at our destination. Walking is learned, and, when we first begin to do it, the process is tentative. We stumble and occasionally we fall.

Spiritually our walk involves two steps. The first is, we must put off the old man. The second step is we put on the new man. To walk with God we take these two steps and repeat them throughout our lives (Col. 3:5-17).

Putting off the old man involves understanding the process of forgiveness for our sins and putting on the new man involves understanding and obeying the commandments of Jesus. Only when we take both steps are we truly walking. If we attempt to take one step without the other, we will at best merely hop along and at worst we will stumble and fall.

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Interceding for Us, Romans 8:34.
- T. — One God—One Mediator, 1 Timothy 2:5.
- W. — Another Comforter, John 14:16.
- T. — Christ Died for All, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15.
- F. — God’s Propitiation, Romans 3:24-26.
- S. — Abide and Obey, John 15:4-8.

We must be careful to note that no saved person will ever fall and lose his or her salvation. Our fall represents a spiritual failure to live up to the will of God for our lives. Peter failed in this way when he denied the Lord three times, but he did not lose his salvation. As long as we are on this earth, we are in sinful bodies and we must deal continually with the sin that so easily besets us.

Thankfully, God has a way for us to do that and to live so that we bring Him honor and glory and enjoy spiritual joy as we do.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. We Keep His Commandments

I John 2:1-5

1. 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:

2. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for *the sins* of the whole world.

3. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

Our first reaction to sin should be that we simply do not commit it. John gave us this sound advice. A saved person always has a choice in matters of sin, and our best choice is to refuse to sin. However, we are weak, and, in spite of our knowledge, we will sin. God knows this, and He has provided a way for His children to deal with personal sin.

We have an advocate before the Father in Heaven. This advocate is Jesus. Jesus is there to present our case before God and to assure us that we belong to Him. Jesus does not deny that we have sinned, but He does declare that He has paid the

price for our sin. Jesus paid the price for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. John was making a contrast between the sins of a child of God and the sins of a non-Christian. Jesus died to forgive all men of every sin, but this forgiveness only takes effect when men receive it. Lost men and women who refuse forgiveness must live without it.

The same thing is true for the child of God. Jesus has already paid the price for every sin we can possibly commit, but, if we refuse to confess our sins and seek forgiveness for our sins, we will deny ourselves the joy of forgiveness.

The joy of forgiveness leads to obedience, and obedience leads to security. Many truly saved people want to know that they are saved. They seek assurance and assurance is found in obedience. If you want to be certain that you are saved, keep the commandments of Jesus. If you are not saved, you will find it impossible to keep the commandments. If you are keeping them, it is evidence that a real spiritual change has taken place in your heart.

John puts it strongly. If we claim to know Jesus and fail to keep His commandments, we are lying and the truth is not in us. Salvation is not a matter of making a claim or an admission, it is a matter of a real change of spirit and soul made in the hearts of men. Keeping the commandments of Jesus in our physical lives is evidence of a change in our inner lives.

We must be careful here to keep the order correct. Keeping the commandments will not change our souls. The change must be from the inside out. We may attempt to keep the commandments of Jesus, and we may succeed externally to a degree, but our souls will not be changed in the process.

But, when we truly are changed in our souls and keep the Word of God, a wonderful thing happens. The love of God is perfected or completed in our hearts. When this happens, we have real assurance that we are in Christ. This does not mean we live above or without sin. It means we realize that God loves us, and, when we sin, we come to God and He forgives us of our sins. When this happens, we are even more assured of our standing before our Heavenly Father.

II. We Love Our Brethren

I John 2:6-11

6. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11. 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.

John was careful to note that he was not writing a new commandment or a new addition to the practice of Christianity. John was reminding those to whom he wrote about the things Jesus said from the beginning of His ministry. In every way all the dealings of God with mankind are about Jesus. Jesus is the centerpiece of history and ultimately the fullness of all the ages will center around Him.

If we properly understand the Old Testament, it will be testifying of Jesus. Jesus said this directly to the Sadducees (John 5:39). However, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, and we do find a new way of life when we follow Him. John used the picture of darkness and light to illustrate the difference. We can keep commandments out of fear or respect. We can obey laws because we fear the consequences of disobedience. We can obey because we have respect for the law itself or for those who make the laws. These motives will only go so far, and we will find ourselves like those Jesus spoke of in Matthew who kept the Law outwardly but violated the Law in their hearts (Matt. 5:21-48).

Jesus taught a new way to live. That way is based on love and a changed life. When we are changed in soul by the grace of God, we learn to love the Lord. When we do, we obey out of desire not out of fear. The darkness of fear is replaced by the light of love. A child of God does not serve the Lord because he is afraid of what will happen if he does not serve. A child of God serves the Lord because he wants to serve Him. If we can truly understand this motive, we make a permanent change in our life-styles. No one will have to prompt us to serve Jesus. No one will have to remind us or urge us. We will serve because service is the true desire of our hearts.

This motive of love will be shown plainly in how we regard our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a definitive test. We might say that we love our brethren, but if we truly do not, we are still in darkness. The word *hate* as used here means “a choice relative to a situation.” This term indicates that we choose one thing over another and we hate the thing we do not choose. This does not mean that we must feel some positive dislike for anyone, just that we love our brethren more.

When we are truly saved and we walk in the light of God’s love, we will love the others who share our faith. We will live so we do not give the others in our lives an occasion to stumble. If we do not love our brothers in Christ, we are still in darkness. If we walk in darkness, we suffer two consequences. First, we do not know where we are going. Our lives drift from place to place and situation to situation without purpose or meaning. Sadly, many live this way. The second consequence is, the darkness blinds us so we do not see there is any other way to live.

Only the grace of God can deliver us from such a condition. This happens not through self-reformation, but through a real salvation experience with Jesus.

III. We Grow Spiritually

1 John 2:12-14

12. I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.

13. 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.

14. 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.

When we walk with God, we will grow spiritually. This is illustrated in the way we grow physically. John illustrated this with three stages of physical life and tied them to similar stages of spiritual growth. We must make an important distinction here. Physical growth is linear and predictable. We will grow physically no matter what happens to our souls. Our bodies will age and develop whether we desire growth or not. Spiritual growth does not take place in that way. We will only grow in the grace of God as we grow in the knowledge of God. We grow spiritually when we learn about Jesus and apply those lessons to our hearts.

We all begin in Jesus as little children. When we are born again, we are like small children who need to be nourished and cared for with tenderness and love. We have to learn everything, and we are needy and dependent. However, our sins are forgiven and we grow on that basis. The forgiveness of our sins is the beginning of our spiritual lives.

Then, we become like young men, grown up and strong, but lacking in maturity. We can overcome the wicked one, but we do not know all that we think we know. There is an arrogance in youth that will mostly disappear with advancing years. God can use the strength of youth, but it must be tempered with the wisdom of age.

Then, there are the fathers, those who are mature enough to have children of their own. The fathers have realized the blessings that were in the beginning of their spiritual lives and have built on that firm foundation. They are able to use their wisdom in conjunction with the strength of the young men to accomplish much in the work of the Lord.

A FINAL WORD

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that we are to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us and despitefully use us, and He said, “Ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:45). It is by our behavior that we demonstrate and manifest that we are children of our Father, who loves all men and sent His Son to save us.

God’s love is not the love of the lovely but the love of the unlovely, a concern and willingness to mix with, talk with, deal with and help those whom we find it difficult to respond. That is the love of God. If we walk in God’s love toward one another, there is no problem that cannot be worked out. There is no reason for division or schism among us. There is nothing that can separate us if we walk in the light as He is in the light. The world is hungry for the manifestation of that kind of love. Those yearnings can be satisfied by Christians who demonstrate the love that was first in the heart of God.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What did John mean when he commanded children of God to “sin not”? (1 John 2:1).
2. What does it mean to you that you have an advocate with the Father when you sin? Does this fact provide a license to sin? Why or why not?
3. In what way does keeping His commandments affect one’s assurance of salvation?
4. Why is it so important to love the brethren? What does it mean if you do not love the brethren?

3

Heed God's Warnings

Text: 1 John 2:15-29

Focus: 1 John 2:15-29

Key Verse:

“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.”

1 John 2:28

Sunday Devotional: The Hatred of the World, John 15:18, 19.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must maintain unity and be alert to falsehood.

A FIRST LOOK

Most of us do not like being warned at the time the warning is given. Warnings interrupt our activities and call our attention to dangerous situations. By their nature they are intrusions into what we have judged to be a peaceful situation. But, when we are made aware of the danger around us, we immediately appreciate the warning.

The spiritual warnings in the lesson today are serious and urgent. The dangers here are real. They threaten great harm to anyone who does not heed them. We live in a darkening world, and it is tempting to put our heads in the sand and pretend that everything is getting better and better or that we can safely ignore God's spiritual laws. This attitude will lead to hurt and disappointment.

God is love, but there are also things that God hates. Love and hate are not mutually exclusive.

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Right Friends and Enemies, James 4:4.
- T. — The Temporal and the Eternal, Isaiah 40:6-8.
- W. — Forever Surrounded by God, Psalm 125:1, 2.
- T. — Safe in His Hand, John 10:28, 29.
- F. — Kept by God's Power, 1 Peter 1:5.
- S. — Known by Their Fruit, Matthew 7:16-18.

The hatred of God is not arbitrary. It is not based on preference or desire. Instead, God hates the things that are contrary to His will and the things that hurt and destroy His children.

Every saved person should take these warnings seriously. We must not place ourselves in the position of loving what God hates and hating what God loves. Remember the things God warns us about in these verses will not be in Heaven. Not only can we live without them, but we will one day definitely do so. How much better if we begin now to learn and heed God's warnings to us.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Love not the World

I John 2:15-17

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.

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.

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

John began with a simple warning and then gave us three reasons why we should heed it. We are not to love the world. The word for *love* here is *agape*. This is directed and conscious love, not passing affection. The world here is one's physical life and everything that goes with it. Loving the world means that we can become so enamored with the world that we never want to leave it. We make this present world everything in our lives. We bind up all our hopes and dreams in the physical world. The result is that we neglect our spiritual lives.

Every human being should realize the great and simple truth that we cannot stay here. We are on this earth for a short time, and we must then go somewhere else. To love the world is to waste our time on earth. Like Abraham of old, we should look for a city whose builder and maker is God.

We should not love the world because, if we do, the love of the Father is not in us. This does not mean that God stops loving us. It means that we no longer love in the same way God loves. If we want to reflect the love of God, we must regard the physical world in the same way He does. God loves the world in the sense that He loves the creatures made in His image who live in it. When we love like God loves, we will love people and use things. When we begin to love things and use people, the love of the Father is not in us.

We should not love the world because there is nothing in the world worth loving. John told us that the world contains only three philosophies. These include the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Sadly, these are the only motivating forces for many people. Now, all these things begin with good ideas that go bad. For instance, God has given us good and proper desires. It is not wrong to be hungry, but if we overeat, it can become gluttony. There is nothing wrong with thirst, but we can overindulge and become drunkards if we overindulge in the wrong kind of drink. Sleep is a gift from God, but we can become slothful and lazy when we give in to every urge to stop and rest.

We can set our eyes on Jesus, or we can use them to lust for physical pleasure. Looking is not wrong, it is what we look at that produces lust. Pride is not evil in itself, but, when we become proud of physical accomplishments and ignore our souls, sin quickly enters. Knowing what is in the world may keep us from falling in love with the world.

Finally, we should not love the world because it is temporary. There are only two conditions here. There are two and only two—we either love the world that will pass away or we do the will of God and abide forever. When we put it that way, there is not much of a choice, is there? No matter what we have or what we do physically, we must die and leave it all behind. One day the world and all that is in it will be destroyed. Why grieve over something you cannot keep? Why not give it up and gain something you cannot lose? That is the logic of serving God.

II. Beware of Antichrists

I John 2:18-23

18. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

19. 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.

20. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

21. 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.

22. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: *[but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*

John declared twice that we are now living in the last time, or last hour. I believe he was referring to the fact that Jerusalem had been destroyed and the Jews scattered. The times of the Gentiles had come and this would be the last period of time before Jesus returns to the earth. Presently, we are nearer to the second coming of Jesus than ever before and indeed this is the last times.

One sign of this is the presence of many antichrists. These were present when John wrote these words and they are still with us today. John told us some interesting things about these men.

First, he told us that they had their roots in the truth. They were at one time a part of the fellowship of believers, but they departed or split off from true churches. As John wrote, the simple fact that they left the truth for another doctrine indicates that they were never committed to the truth. If they really believed the truth, they would have stayed with those who believed the truth.

From the beginning of Christianity there have been those who thought they should change it, improve it or make it

better. There have also been those who sought to weaken it and make the truth ineffective. Those who hold such ideas usually manifest it by splitting off and starting a new movement of some kind. This has happened all through the church age and it is still happening today. This kind of activity is not of God. It is anti-Christian in every sense. The truth of the Bible is unifying and peaceable. The idea here is not compromise. The truth is that every human being must give up every human doctrine and meet Jesus. We must accept, without question, everything that Jesus has taught us and everything that the Bible declares. We must put these doctrines to work in our lives, regardless of the effect on our lives or the lives of others. To do less is to eventually become anti-Christian.

This warning was a spiritual reminder to those who already knew this truth. This was not a new idea when John wrote about it. However, then and now we need to be reminded of the simplicity of truth. The truth is true and there is no such thing as a true lie. No lie is of the truth. Truth and lies are mutually exclusive. This is the way we can easily identify an antichrist.

The test is simple and profound. Who is Jesus? Is He the Christ, the Son of God? The answer to that question will reveal the condition of your soul. An antichrist and those who follow him will deny that Jesus is the Christ and that He is the Son of God. Anyone who denies Jesus does not have the Father. There is one God and one Mediator between God and men and that is Jesus.

The world's lie is that there are many ways to God and it really does not matter which spiritual road you are on. The truth is that there is one God and Jesus is His only begotten Son. There is no way to come to the Father except through Jesus. Any other doctrine is the work of an antichrist.

III. Be Prepared for Christ's Return

I John 2:24-28

24. 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.

25. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

26. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27. 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.

28. 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.

29. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

The cure for the influence of an antichrist is simple. We must let the truth we knew from the beginning continue to live in our souls and change our lives. Every child of God has the witness of the Holy Spirit in his soul. That leadership will never take us down the wrong path. When we study the Bible and follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we will not follow anyone who makes claims contradictory to either. The key here is to abide in Jesus. This literally means to live in Him and to let Him live in us. The closer we get to Jesus, the further away we get from error of every kind.

The reason to be right in these matters is obvious. Jesus is coming again. In the early churches those who were antichrists denied the second coming. They questioned everything from creation to revelation and such are still with us today. They were, and are, wrong. God made the world, and Jesus is coming back to the earth. He is not coming as a baby in a manger, but as a king coming in triumph, first to rapture those who are His and then to rule with a rod of iron. These are not hopes and dreams and they are not idle promises. The events of the second coming of Jesus are more certain than yesterday's news. They will definitely happen and nothing on earth, in Heaven or in hell will prevent them.

John's warning is for us to keep the second coming fresh in our minds and to base our behavior on this wonderful promise.

A FINAL WORD

This world and antichrists will not be in Heaven. In Heaven the second coming of Christ is not in dispute. However, in this present world, we must not be ignorant of Satan's devices. Satan has no original ideas; instead, he is a counterfeiter. An antichrist imitates the work of God. Note that Satan has counterfeit preachers (2 Cor. 11:13-15), who preach a counterfeit gospel (Gal. 1:6-12), that will produce counterfeit Christians (John 8:43, 44), who will then exhibit a counterfeit righteousness (Rom. 10:1-4).

In the parable of the tares, both Jesus and Satan are pictured as sowers. Jesus sows the truth; but Satan sows to the children of the wicked one. These two look alike while they are growing. The servants were to leave both alone until the time of harvest. Judgment will take place when the fruit appears. Satan's strategy is to plant counterfeit believers wherever Christ plants the true ones.

John warned us to use our spiritual resources to be able to detect the counterfeit and separate the teachings of Christ from the false teachings of antichrists. We can do this by depending on the leadership and teaching of the Holy Spirit. Every believer has access to the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit who will teach us the truth. That truth will always be about Jesus.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. In practical terms, what does it mean to love the world in our day?
2. Why is the love of the world so contradictory to the love of the Father? Why cannot they coexist?
3. Are the doctrines and teachings of antichrists still in existence? Where do you see or hear them?
4. How may we have confidence and not be ashamed at Christ's coming?

4

Behave as God's Children

Text: | John 3:1-10

Focus: | John 3:1-10

Key Verse:

“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.”

| John 3:2

Sunday Devotional: We Will Be Changed, | Corinthians 15:51-57.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must conduct ourselves as God's children.

A FIRST LOOK

The best way to spot an imposter is to be thoroughly and completely familiar with the real thing. A talented and trained person can spot a pretentious amateur easily. It is the same in spiritual matters. When we know the truth and practice the truth in our daily lives, it becomes easy to spot the hypocrites who pretend to have faith they do not possess.

In these verses, God gave us solid and certain information about our new life in Christ and about our relationship to God and to each other. This relationship is based on our new birth in Christ. By being born again we become children of God and we become brothers and sisters spiritually.

However, we must remember that Satan also has children in this world (John 8:44). Satan has deceived many and led them to believe that his followers would be obviously evil in action and appearance and that we could easily recognize them. The Bible teaches that Satan is an imitator, a counterfeiter,

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Fashioned Like Jesus, Philippians 3:20, 21.
- T. — Christ Came To Take Away Sin, John 1:29.
- W. — Walk in the Spirit, Galatians 5:16-26.
- T. — Born of God, John 1:12, 13.
- F. — Privileged Sons of God, Romans 8:14.
- S. — Live Looking for Jesus, 2 Peter 3:13, 14.

who looks like the real thing until we examine him closely. Read the parable Jesus gave about the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30.

Satanic imitation is revealed as we come to know the truth better. When we understand the wonderful future in store for those who are saved, and, as we see the relationship of sinful behavior to a saved soul, and, as we understand our security in Jesus, imitation Christianity stands out clearly. These are important necessary lessons for the difficult times that are upon us.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Our Future

I John 3:1-3

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.

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.

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

For a child of God, the future is as bright as the promises of God. This hope is not based on a meaningless optimism born of smoke and mirrors theology. Like all great truths, this is based on the love God shows us daily. The love of God, which is beyond human understanding, is freely bestowed on every human being. It is by His grace, mercy and love that we have heard the gospel and had the chance to respond to it. All God has to do to punish the world is to leave it alone. But God loved the world and sent His Son into the world to save the world. It is through this act of divine love that we have hope now and in the future.

The love of God results in our salvation and our identification as the sons of God. This term does not exclude ladies; this is a generic term which includes both men and women. The

term conveys both endearment and position. As we love our children, God loves and cares for us (Luke 11:11-13). How wonderful to understand that, no matter who we are or what we do, God loves us. This will lighten the darkest moment of your life if you will accept it. The title also signifies our position. We are sons of God, the heirs of God and the joint heirs of Jesus Christ. Whatever God has in store for Jesus, He has in store for you and me. That wonderful promise makes our future assured and blessed.

The world we live in does not understand this. In the same way the world rejected Jesus, it rejects us. This should not confuse or depress us at all. The servant should expect no better treatment than his master. An evil world and the evil people in it rejected the love Jesus showed them and an evil world will treat us the same. When we know this, we are protected from many personal hurts.

We do not know what the future will hold for us. We do not have the answers to many of our questions about Heaven. But, we do have one overriding assurance that takes care of all of our doubts. We will be like Jesus. After His resurrection, Jesus was a real, physical being. He possessed many powers that we do not, but He was real in every way. Heaven is not a concept or an idea. Heaven is a place. God is there, Jesus is there and one day those who are God's children will be there. This is reality. We often think of the physical world as being the real world. The truth is that the spiritual world is the real world. The physical world will pass away and there is nothing we can do to stop it. When physical life is over and the physical world is destroyed, Jesus will be there, and we will know the ultimate reality of His presence.

Those who have this hope are different from those who do not. For the lost person the best that can be is right now. This world offers him his only hope. This is sad but true. The child of God knows that there is a better world coming, and he lives a different life because he understands that promise.

II. Our Present Lives

I John 3:4-7

4. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

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

6. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

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

It is important to understand that God has a plan to deal with the sins of His children. When we study the great heroes of faith mentioned in the Bible, we see that every one of them sinned at one time or another. God knows that we cannot be sinless, but He also knows what we know, that we can sin a lot less than we do.

The power to deal with our sin does not come from within ourselves or from the world. This power comes from Jesus. This is why the children of the devil do not have it. Sin is revealed by the Law. When we sin, we know that we have sinned and done wrong because God has given us the Law. The Law was written on tables of stone in the Old Testament, but it is also written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit. *Sin*, by definition, is the transgression of the Law, a stepping over the boundaries that separate right from wrong.

Spiritual laws are as inviolable as physical laws. When we try to break a physical law, we only prove that the law works. If you step off a high place, you will not float through the air, you will fall. This proves the law of gravity. If you lie or commit adultery, you will only prove that these things are wrong and harmful. You will not change God's Law; you will only prove that the laws are in effect. The simple truth is that sin never has a happy ending, no matter how clever and resourceful we may be.

Jesus came to deal with human sin. He died to take away our sins and He Himself had no sin. Jesus is the spotless and sinless Lamb of God, and He was offered so we might live and so we might deal with our daily tendency to sin and come short of the glory of God.

Here is an identifying characteristic of all saved people. They will not habitually and continually sin. This does not mean that they will never sin at all in any way. It means that they will not live a life of habitual sin. When we are saved, God

creates something in our hearts that simply will not allow us to live in habitual sin. If we do, that is ample evidence that we have never been saved.

We should be careful here not to allow our feelings and emotions to override this obvious truth. Those who practice righteousness are righteous. They are righteous in the same way that Jesus was righteous. Jesus did the will of His Father and those who are God's children will also do the will of their Heavenly Father.

People may profess many things, and it is relatively easy to stand and proclaim that you love the Lord, but the proof is in a changed life-style. Those spiritual changes will mean the elimination of habitual sin from our lives. A child of God has the power of God to change the way he lives. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away and all things are become new. Knowing this will allow us to quickly spot those who claim to be saved, but, by their behavior, demonstrate they are not.

III. Our Spiritual Security

I John 3:8-10

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

Here we have a striking contrast in the natures of those who are of the devil and those who are born of God. Note carefully the difference in natures. Those who habitually and uncontrollably practice sin are of the devil since this is the character and nature of Satan. From the beginning Satan rebelled at the will of God and sinned in doing so. Those who imitate his behavior and resist the appeals of the Holy Spirit are merely giving evidence of the Adamic nature that is in mankind from birth. In short, we are sinners because

our parents were. And our parents are sinners because their parents were and so on back until we come to the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. And, beyond that Satan sinned in the eternal presence of God.

In contrast, there is a new nature in a child of God and that new nature will not allow a saved person to habitually practice sin. The body is not saved; in fact, no matter what we do it will perish, and Adamic sin will die with it, but, the soul of a saved person is forever free from Adamic sin. As the seed of Adam is in all humanity, the seed of Christ is in those who are born again through faith in the only begotten Son of God. When we are saved, God makes our souls alive and those living souls cannot sin.

The word here is interesting. It literally implies that the soul of a saved person does not have the power to sin. The body may sin and the mind may sin, but the soul is saved forever and it cannot sin.

Here is a kind of acid test that will positively reveal the nature of any individual. How do you feel about sin? How do you feel about righteousness? How do you feel about your brothers and sisters in Christ? Lost people literally love sin. Look around and you can easily see this attitude everywhere. Most people are only constrained by opportunity to sin or by a threat of punishment if they are caught. In contrast, truly saved people do not sin simply because they do not want to. In addition, God has placed in their hearts a love for their brethren. In place of a desire to sin and harm others, a Christian has a desire to love and help others. This is the true spirit of Christ that was shown in His life on earth.

A FINAL WORD

Because a child of God has both an old and a new nature, how does he or she overcome the desire and influence of the old nature? One must yield his body to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). This involves two steps. The first is, we must not be conformed to this world. Literally, we must not be pressed into the pattern of the age. The way we do this is by renewing

our minds every day through our study of the Bible and our communion with the Holy Spirit in prayer.

As we go through the day, we must depend on the power of the Spirit at work in the inner man. When temptations to sin come, we must immediately turn to Christ for our victory.

The Word of God hidden our hearts will keep us from sinning (Psalm 119:11). However, if we do sin anyway, we should confess our sin and ask God to forgive us. When we do, God is faithful to forgive us and restore our souls. Through the process of continually yielding our physical lives to the Holy Spirit, we will receive the power we need to overcome temptation.

A child of God should always remember the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the quality of love it takes for God to love us and Christ to die for us?
2. Is eternal salvation a present possession? Why is that important?
3. What does it mean to be like Jesus?
4. In what ways do God's people practice righteousness? What are some practical examples?

Love the Brethren

Text: 1 John 3:11-24

Focus: 1 John 3:11-24

Key Verse:

“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

Sunday Devotional: The New Commandment, John 13:34, 35.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must love our brethren fully.

A FIRST LOOK

We have studied about maintaining our fellowship with Jesus and with each other. We have studied about maintaining truth and about maintaining righteousness. Now we come to maintaining love.

The love God showed to the world when He sent Jesus is the most compelling force the world has ever known. Long after the power to hurt and destroy has faded away, the love of God remains. It was this love that compelled Paul (2 Cor. 5:14). It was this love that changed John. It was John and James who came to the Lord when a village refused to welcome them and said, “Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” (Luke 9:54). At times John and James quarreled with the other disciples. John was not naturally loving, but, when he was born again, when he believed in Jesus Christ, there was born into his heart the life of God and John began to show and

Daily Devotionals

- M. — The Sin of Cain, Genesis 4:2-7.
- T. — Open Thine Hand Wide, Deuteronomy 15:7-11.
- W. — Be Ready To Distribute, 1 Timothy 6:17, 18.
- T. — Keys to Answered Prayer, Psalm 34:15-17.
- F. — Love as He Loved, John 15:11-13.
- S. — Walk in Love, Ephesians 5:2.

understand love. This is why he became known as the apostle of love.

John realized the importance of love. Paul would write that love was the greatest spiritual gift and John encouraged us to love each other and shared with us some of the blessings of Christian love.

We must note that the love mentioned here is not the selfish love the world knows. Lost humanity loves selfishly. We love our families, our homes and even our dogs. We love them because they belong to us and they satisfy our needs. God loves those who will never love Him back. This is the kind of love taught in these verses.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. The Message from the Beginning

I John 3:11-15

11. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12. 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.

13. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

John began by reminding us that the selfless love of God was present from the beginning. The relationship of Adam and Eve and Abel and Cain was based on love. God loved Adam and He expected the creatures He had made in His image to love each other. Sadly, this love was not present in the life of Cain.

The example of Cain is interesting. Simply put, Cain was selfish. He loved himself instead of loving his brother, his

parents or God. That selfish spirit eventually led to the first murder. Cain killed Abel because his own works were evil. Cain loved himself too much to learn and change so he killed Abel.

There is a kind of twisted perverted love in the world that fails God's standard. Jesus mentioned this in His teaching. In Matthew 5:46, Jesus asked the probing question, "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" This is a kind of animalistic love that simply mirrors the actions of others. No doubt, Cain loved like that, but, when he was challenged to go beyond selfishness, he failed. The lost world is still failing this test.

It should come as no surprise to us that the world does not understand and appreciate the love shown to it. A lost world killed Jesus when He came to help it. For a moment, just think about who Jesus was and what Jesus did. He was a Teacher sent from God who went about healing and helping. He had remarkable powers and used them to help others. Why did the world conclude that He had to die? The world hated Jesus, and it still hates those who follow Him.

Jesus loved the world, and we should follow His example, but, before we love the world, we must learn to love each other. Our love for our brethren is not the natural, selfish love we give those who belong to us or can help us. We are to love our brethren because God has changed us. When we are saved, we become new creatures, and, because we are saved, we love our brethren.

This is a sure test of our salvation. If we love the brethren, we have passed from death to life. If we hate our brethren, we are committing murder in our hearts toward them, and this is a sure indication that our hearts have not been changed (Matt. 5:21, 22).

II. The Expression of Love

I John 3:16-18

16. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

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?

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

The love we are to show each other is not merely a verbal declaration. It is right and proper to tell others that you love them. Jesus challenged Peter to do exactly that in John 21:15-19, but there is more to love than a verbal declaration.

God loved the world and Jesus died to show the world how much. John challenged us to be willing to do the same. Note that we can lay our lives down in a moment of crisis, and we can also give our lives one moment at a time in service to God and each other. Love demands time. We will spend our time doing the things we love, and, if we love each other, we will spend our time with each other. A man who proclaims how much he loves his family and voluntarily spends all his time in other pursuits does not love his family. If you love your brethren, you will find the time to enjoy fellowship with them.

For those who truly love the Lord and the Lord's children, time spent in communion with the Holy Spirit sharing the Word and sharing fellowship are precious moments. These are not obligations or duties; these are opportunities. We look forward to them when they come and hate to see them end. The difference here is attitude. When we truly love others, we will give the moments of our lives to them.

Love also involves physical action. If we have things that others need, and we see that they are truly in need, and we selfishly keep what we have and deny our brethren, then the love of God is not dwelling in us. Here we see again the kind of perverted love that is simply selfishness wearing the mask of love.

The selfish man refuses to help others because he wants to keep what he has for himself. A selfish person can imagine a thousand reasons not to help. A loving person will find a thousand ways to give.

John offers us four ways to love—two effective and two lacking. We can love with our words and our tongues. This

is not wrong, but, as James said, it will not warm us when we are cold or feed us when we are hungry. We should love in word and tongue, but we should also love in deeds and in truth. When we see love in action, we know that love is real. Everyone will love you if it does not cost them anything.

III. The Assurance of Loving

I John 3:19-22

19. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

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

A question that haunts many Christians is “How can I know that I am saved?” The answer is right here. Love someone who does not love you and who will never love you back. If you can do that, then you are of the truth, and you will find assurance from God that you are His child. The lost world simply cannot love that way.

We must be careful here not to let emotions cloud our thinking about love. The two are related but not interchangeable. We can love something or someone that we do not particularly like. Feelings and emotions vary and change, but real love does not. Our hearts can condemn us, or make us feel good, but our hearts are desperately wicked and we can never truly know them (Jer. 17:9).

We must never trust our feelings because God is greater than our feelings. Through His power we can love the people others find objectionable. Jesus did this. He ate with sinners and even ate with those who would not wash their hands ceremonially proper way, and He was criticized for spending His time with such people. Jesus did not approve of the sinful life-style of anyone, but He loved everyone.

If our feelings contradict our love, we should ignore our feelings and rely on our love. If our feelings reinforce our need to be loving, then we can have confidence toward God knowing that God can and will change how we feel about everything. True assurance is allowing God to change our minds. When we become new creatures in Christ, our attitudes and feelings can change. Old things we once enjoyed can pass away and new things that we once might have despised can become the focus of our lives. These changes in us are proof of the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts.

Added to this is the assurance of answered prayer. We tend to focus only on the prayers we think have not been answered and forget the many, daily prayers that God has answered for each of us. Have you ever prayed for daily bread? Did you eat that day? Then God answered your prayer. We ask and we receive of Him, but we soon forget, and we fail to learn that answered prayer is a great source of assurance.

Our prayers must be within the will of God for our lives. We must ask according to His commandments and we must be seeking to do the things that are pleasing in His sight. Selfish prayer, like selfish love, will harm us, not help us.

IV. The Commandment of Christ

I John 3: 23, 24

23. 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.

24. 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.

Note that what we read here is a commandment not a suggestion. Jesus did not offer this as a take it or leave it matter. The commandment of Jesus involves belief and behavior. Our behavior comes from our belief. If we believe right, we will behave right. We must never get these reversed. They will not work that way. No amount of good behavior will change what we truly believe.

First, we must believe on the name of Jesus Christ. This is the new birth, or salvation. God is not willing that any should perish but that all men everywhere should believe in Jesus. When we believe in Jesus, we have the power to behave and to love each other. As Jesus taught, all the commandments and laws ever devised are summed up in this one statement, "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" (Matt. 22:37-40). All right behavior comes from the understanding and practice of divine love.

When we keep the commandments of Jesus, we enjoy the indwelling presence of Jesus. This is the power God gives us to do His will and love each other as He loved us. Jesus repeatedly declared He did what He did because of the power of God. It is by the same power we can love each other and serve the Lord. We do not have to reach down inside ourselves and find the strength to love. God gives us the power every day when we allow Jesus to live in our hearts and influence our behavior.

We know that this is happening when we yield ourselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is by and through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us that we have the ultimate assurance that we can love, no matter what the situation.

A FINAL WORD

Jesus loved and prayed for the men who crucified Him. He loved Jerusalem and wept over that city even though the people had rejected Him. Jesus loved Peter when Peter denied Him. Jesus loved and we can love because He did. Jesus taught us to love each other, not like the world loves, but like God loves.

We can do this because He first loved us. We may find it challenging to love each other, but God will give us the power we need to fulfill the first and great commandment and to

love each other. The result will be our own security. As we put God's Word into practice, we will have our own souls renewed, and we will see the love of God perfected in our own hearts.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Why is genuine love among church members so important?
2. Read 1 John 3:14. Why do you think brotherly love is an assurance of salvation?
3. Read 1 John 3:16-18. What are some evidences of brotherly love today?
4. Name and discuss some of the benefits of brotherly love in your church.

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6

Discern the Spirits

Text: 1 John 4:1-6

Focus: 1 John 4:1-6

Key Verse:

“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.”

1 John 4:4

Sunday Devotional: Beware of False Prophets, Matthew 7:15, 16.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must believe in Christ’s deity and proclaim His salvation.

A FIRST LOOK

Today, we still face many of the challenges of the first century. Satan is still able to conceal his agenda and disguise his servants. Note that all of the cults and false religions make their appeal to men on the basis of love. They claim to be reaching out in love to those the world has rejected.

The truth is that there is a great battle raging in the world today, and it is beneath the surface of our physical lives. Jesus clearly saw this conflict, and, if we look at the world the way He did, we will see it as well. According to Ephesians 6:12, our battle is not with flesh and blood but with spiritual wickedness in high places. Sadly, most people do not realize this fight is happening.

There is a devil. He has servants on this earth and they seek to do real damage to the souls of men everywhere. Satan is a murderer and a liar. His agenda is to do as much harm as he can before he is finally cast into the

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Sound the Warning! 2 Peter 2:1, 2.
- T. — The True Spirit Glorifies Jesus, John 16:13-15.
- W. — We Preach Christ, 2 Corinthians 4:3-5.
- T. — Do Not Be Surprised, John 15:19, 20.
- F. — The Holy Spirit Indwells, Romans 8:9-11.
- S. — Jesus Promised Comfort, John 14:16-18.

lake of fire. If that is the bad news, the good news is that Christians can deal with Satan and defeat him through our understanding of the Bible and our knowledge of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts and our willingness to yield ourselves to God.

We will never recognize false spirits by using our earthly knowledge to examine the claims they make or the works they do. We will only recognize them as we understand what the Bible teaches and as we apply these divine standards to our everyday encounters with evil.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Try the Spirits

I John 4:1

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

Here we are given two choices and one good reason for making the right choice. By implication there is a third possibility as well. Like the Sadducees of old we can simply deny the existence of the spirit world (Acts 23:8). Many take this position. They only believe in the physical world and deny the spiritual world exists at all. This position denies reality. In truth the spiritual world is the real world. Everything physical will eventually perish, but spiritual truths will endure.

Another choice, as John mentioned, is to simply accept every spirit of every kind in every situation. Again, there are many who feel this way. Sadly, many are so hungry for spiritual contact that they will believe the most obvious of lies to have a so-called spiritual experience. Like a fish in a pond, swallowing everything without examination is a sure way to get caught. There are many spirits in the world and a great number of them are harmful.

Many so-called spiritual experiences are simply deceptions practiced by deceitful men. Parlor tricks and sleight of hand may pretend to be spiritual manifestations, but they are

tricks, not spirits. However, there are evil spirits and they are at work in the world. If we believe every spirit, we will be easy prey for the agents of Satan.

The proper response to any spiritual situation is to try, or test, the spirits. This test is not a test of the ability of the spirit to perform a particular deed; instead, it is a test of the origin of the spirit. If the spirit is from God, that is, if we are dealing with the Holy Spirit, we can be absolutely certain we should follow that Spirit wherever He leads us. We should never tempt God by delaying or denying what we know to be the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The reason we should try, or test, the spirits that come into our hearts is because many false prophets are in the world. Wherever the truth is preached, error will soon follow. As the court magicians of Pharaoh withstood Moses and Aaron, so false prophets, accompanied with false spirits, cloud and confuse the gospel message today.

It should be obvious to us that a counterfeit must closely resemble the real thing. No one would accept fake currency if it were printed in black and white on plain paper and had a picture of a dog on the front. A successful counterfeit must resemble the real thing as closely as possible. However, those who truly know the difference can easily spot the imitations. When we follow the Lord and grow in His love and knowledge, we can easily try, or test, the spirits, and we can spot the imitations right away.

II. The Spirit of God

I John 4:2, 3

2. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3. 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.

The best way to identify falsehood is to be completely familiar with the truth. The more we study our Bibles and have communion with the Holy Spirit, the easier it becomes to recognize the working of the evil one. Jesus readily recognized

the spirit of Satan at work in the heart of Peter in Mark 8:33. Jesus recognized the same reasoning he had heard in the wilderness when Jesus was tempted three times. Knowing the Spirit of God is the first step in dealing with falsehood.

We are then given a simple and infallible test for any spirit in any situation. Was Jesus Christ of God? If the answer is anything but affirmative, then we are not dealing with the Holy Spirit. Briefly, this involves the answers to simple questions. Was Jesus who He said He was and did Jesus do what He said He did? If He was of God then the answer is, "Yes, He did." If any man or any spirit answers differently, that man or that spirit is not from God.

Many will admit that Jesus was a good man, or a gifted teacher, or even maybe a prophet sent from God. None of this is good enough. The test is whether or not Jesus was the Christ. This is the confession that Peter made in Matthew 16:16. There Jesus asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (verse 13). They answered that some said Jesus was John the Baptist, some said He was Elijah, and some said that He was a prophet. Then He asked them, "But whom say ye that I am?" (verse 13). Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," (verse 16). Jesus then commended Peter and told him that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him. Peter learned that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his heart. This is the final and definitive test John is teaching us in the text.

Any spirit that does not confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, is the spirit of antichrist. The antichrist spirit denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. It denies the incarnation. It does not believe God took on human flesh and became a man.

The spirit of antichrist teaches that Jesus Christ was not sinless. He may have lived a good life and He may have lived close to God, but He was not sinless. Such spirits teach that Jesus Christ died but not as a substitute for our sin. He died as a great martyr, showing us how we should face death and how we should be willing to die for the great cause of righteousness. They say the resurrection of Jesus Christ did

not actually, or physically take place. It is only a picture of the spiritual idea that man can live in God's presence.

The mistake of the false teachers who deny that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is to deny that people can ever be saved beyond this world. If Jesus was not God in the flesh, then we can never know for sure that God exists or how to reach God if He does exist. The physical world cannot penetrate or cross over into the spiritual world, no matter what some may claim. If we were ever to come to know God and find eternal life, then God had to come to earth and reveal the truth to us. There is no other way. So, if we deny that God sent His Son into the world, we deny that anyone can ever be saved.

That spirit is in the world, and, as it imitates the work of Christ and clouds the minds of the uninformed, it does great harm. It makes Jesus some kind of super human but denies the essence of His being, that He was God robed in flesh and that He died, was buried and rose again the third day so that we can have spiritual life.

III. The Spirit of Truth

I John 4: 4-6

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.

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

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.

The children of God have within them the power to overcome the evil spirits that are in this physical world. They have the power to try, prove and then resist any demonic spirit that might tempt them with lies about the origin or sacrifice of Jesus. John was quick to add that the power in a child of God is greater than the power of Satan in this world.

There is no reason for a child of God to be taken in by a false spirit or by an antichrist. Every saved person is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches us in Romans 8:9, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit

of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” In Romans 5:5, we read of the result of being justified by faith, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Again, in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that enables us to overcome evil with good. This is not to minimize or underestimate the power of evil in the world. It is great and it is destructive of the innocent, but the power in a child of God is far greater than the power of the evil one.

This does not translate into worldly popularity. The spirits that are of the world will be loved by the world. The world will listen to them and follow them. In contrast, the world will hate and despise those who are of the truth. Jesus said that we are sent forth as lambs among wolves. The only safe place for a lamb in a situation like that is right next to a powerful shepherd. This is why Jesus comes to live in our hearts and to dwell in and influence our lives day by day. He is always with us; He will never forsake us, and His presence will assure us of ultimate victory.

Another test is that those who are of God will recognize and welcome the gospel message. Those who are of the world will not. This is a quick and accurate way to determine the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Those who are of the truth will welcome the truth. Those who do not know the truth and have rejected the truth will reject those who speak the truth again to them.

A FINAL WORD

Nowhere in these verses did John tell us to use our feelings as a guide to spiritual truth. Emotions are involved in most spiritual transactions, and it is not wrong to feel strongly about what you believe, but our feelings alone are never faithful guides to spiritual truth.

We may feel that many wrong things are right, and conversely we may feel that many right things are wrong. The truth is that it is never right to do wrong and it is never wrong to do right. Truth is not determined by how we feel, but by what God has taught in His Word. The Bible is our ultimate guide to right and wrong. The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible and He always works in concert with it. We can test the spirits with the Word, and we can rely on the Holy Spirit to help us understand our Bibles.

When the Holy Spirit and our knowledge of the Bible work in harmony, they will easily allow us to test, or try, any spirit that might tempt us or lead us astray. We can then know right from wrong, and we can know the spirits of antichrist from the true Spirit of the living God.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Do you believe the spirit of antichrist is at work today? How do you know?
2. What is the best way to teach our children to be discerning and detect false religion?
3. What is the ultimate test of truth and falsehood? (Hint: 1 John 4:2, 3).
4. Do you feel confident in your overcoming indweller? What can you do to increase confidence?

7

Practice Brotherly Love

Text: I John 4:7-21

Focus: I John 4:7-21

Key Verse:

“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.”

I John 4:7, 8

Sunday Devotional: Brotherly Love Is God-Taught, I Thessalonians 4:9, 10.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must practice brotherly love, kindness and forgiveness.

A FIRST LOOK

These verses continue the theme of identifying and dealing with the evil spirits that are in the world. The best way to deal with evil is to stay as close to the truth as we possibly can. By our nature we want to test the limits and try to get as close as we can to the boundaries. If the speed limit is 70 miles per hour, most people will drive 73 or 75 miles per hour. We want to see how far we can push the limit before we get a ticket. Obviously, we would be free from any penalty if we went 65 miles per hour in a 70 mile per hour zone.

This illustrates a point. The best condition for a human being is to be born again, scripturally baptized and actively serving the Lord in a New Testament church. The person who is living that life-style has nothing to fear in judgment. The problem is that many want to live as close to the edge as possible. The lost man puts off salvation

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Divine Source of Brotherly Love, Romans 5:5.
- T. — Love—Pure-hearted—Fervently! I Peter 1:22.
- W. — God Is Love, Exodus 34:6, 7.
- T. — His Love Is Great, Ephesians 2:4, 5.
- F. — Saved by His Life, Romans 5:8-10.
- S. — Forgive—For Christ's Sake, Ephesians 4:31, 32.

hoping to be saved at some indefinite time before he dies. Saved people put off baptism, thinking there will always be a tomorrow in which they can follow the Lord. Many church members really intend to get serious and involved in serving the Lord someday soon. All of these attitudes are stretching the limits, testing the boundaries, and sadly, they will lead to great harm for those who hold them.

When we deal with evil spirits, we need to be on solid spiritual ground. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it. We need to make our calling and election sure. To do this we need to know what God says to us in the verses of this lesson.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Love Confirms the New Birth

I John 4:7-11

7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

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

The first thing we need when we deal with evil is assurance that we are saved. That assurance flows from a heart that is truly loving. We have already been given a commandment to love each other. We have seen that our love for our brethren is proof that we have passed from death unto life. Now we are simply told to get on with it and actually love one another.

Note that all through this passage the term for *love* is *agape*. This is the kind of love God has for the world. It is not sentimental, it is not social and it is not sexual. This is spiritual love that can only be shed abroad out of the heart

of a saved person. John has openly told us that everyone who is born again and everyone who knows God will have this kind of love for his brethren. These are strong words and we should use them to examine our own hearts. If you truly do not love your brothers and sisters in Christ, then you have a deep-rooted spiritual problem. The problem is not that your brethren are unlovable; the problem is that you are not saved. There is no need to attempt to live a spiritual life unless you are alive spiritually. You can never skip a step in your spiritual development, and, if you are not saved, then stop right here and ask the Lord to come into your heart.

The test of love is infallible. If we are truly unable to love each other, then we simply do not know God because God is love. This is not the sappy, sentimental kind of love that approves of everything others do and includes everyone under its umbrella. We do not have to like or approve of everything that others do to love them. Jesus loved sinners, but He openly and plainly disapproved of the things they did. This kind of love is a heartfelt concern for the spiritual welfare of others. In our hearts we know whether we have it or not. If we do not love one another, then we do not know God.

The manifestation, or evidence, of this kind of love is always the same. It is manifested through our giving. God gave His Son for our sins, and, if we love God and love our brethren, we will give whatever it takes to accomplish God's will for them. This is another simple but powerful test. Does your love move you to give? If it does not, then you might be loving others only for what they can do for you. This is not the kind of love God has for the world.

Real love is not asking what others can do for us or what is in it for us. Real love is seeking the welfare of others even when the personal cost is great. We are saved because Jesus came into the world, sent by His Father in Heaven, to die for our sins. He submitted to the will of the Father that we might be saved. God loved us when we were lost, and that is the kind of love we are to have for each other. We can see that this kind of love is divine in nature. Men do not love each other naturally.

However, Christians can love like this because God has first loved us. If God has loved you and if you have received the love

of God into your heart, then you should love your brethren in exactly the same way.

II. Love Confirms the Presence of Christ in Our Hearts

I John 4:12-16

12. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

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.

We do not love God because we have personally seen Him. The only way we can express our love to God is to love each other. Our ability to love each other as God has loved us is an evidence of our salvation, but it is also evidence of the abiding presence of Jesus in our hearts. If we love each other, we confirm that the Holy Spirit is indwelling our hearts.

This may be important for others in our lives, but it will be of supreme importance to us personally. Having Jesus' life in you will make you a different person in your interactions with others in your life. It will make you easier to live with and lighten the everyday burdens of your life. It will help you in every way in your interpersonal relationships, but it will do wonders for your own spiritual peace.

God has given every believer in Jesus the presence of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is not present in your heart, then you have reason to question your relationship with God (Rom. 8:5). We know that we are living in the will of God when we are able to love others as God has loved us. The act of love does not put the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He is already there because we are saved, but the act of loving others confirms for us that God is living in us and acting through us.

We may seek to give our best to the Lord, but the truth is that our best is still not good enough. God does not want us to do our best or to try as hard as we can in our human strength. God wants us to get the flesh out of the way and allow Him to live in us. When we set aside our strength, we allow the unlimited power of God to work through us and then we can, as Paul said, do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

It is through God's strength that we can love the unlovely and help the ungrateful. This spirit is a different kind of spirit from all the other spirits in the world. It is the defining moment of Christianity, and it is lacking in all man-made religions. The best a man-made religion can be is humanity at its best. Christianity goes beyond that and manifests the nature of God not the humanly improved nature of man. God lives in the heart of every believer, and, when we allow God to work from the inside out and allow the love of God to be shown in our lives toward others, we are doing something the world simply cannot do.

The world will love those who love it first. The world will love those who can offer it some advantage. The world will love out of obligation or duty. The child of God will love simply because the spirit of love is in his heart. He will love the world exactly as God did when He sent Jesus to save it.

The Holy Spirit is in every child of God, but every child of God may not recognize that wonderful fact. When we do know it and we do believe it, our faith erupts into love.

III. Love Makes Us Bold in the Day of Judgment

I John 4:17-21

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. We love him, because he first loved us.

20. If a man say, I love 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?

21. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

The benefits of Godly love are not all that is given to those who receive His love. Those doing the loving can also expect a reward. The first thing John mentioned is that our love will be made perfect when it is actually expressed. Imperfect love is the many good intentions that were never realized. It is all the times we wanted to say an encouraging word or offer a helping hand but were too busy or distracted to do so. Love is complete, or perfect, when it is actually given and our love moves us to action. Godly love is never a mere declaration.

When we have loved in word and deed, we can be bold at the judgment. Those who truly follow Jesus have nothing to fear when they stand before the Lord in judgment. Only those who have tried to live close to the edge and perhaps have gone over it need to be afraid.

Another wonderful benefit of love is that it eliminates fear from our hearts. If we are honest in loving others, we need never fear that God will not approve of us or not honor what we are doing. We are sinners, and we will always make mistakes, but these can be easily remedied when brethren truly love each other. If we are fearful of others, then we are simply not loving them. Love puts you on God's side, and, if God is for us, who can be against us. We can see how love casts out fear.

Love confirms our spiritual identity. We love our brethren we can see, and, in that way, we express our love toward God whom we cannot see. Every Christian should realize that in Heaven there is only perfect love. There we will love each other as God has first loved us. If we are wise, we will begin here and now to know that love in our own hearts and to express that love toward our brethren.

A FINAL WORD

Have you ever been loved too much? Have you ever had to tell someone, anyone, just stop loving me so much? I do not think so. Love cannot be overdone. The benefits of loving each other as God loves us are eternal, and there is literally no

downside to such love. We cannot overdo it and it cannot harm us in anyway.

Our love may be misunderstood and rejected, and, for a while that will hurt, but, eventually, we will be glad that we loved even when our love was not returned. Jesus did not live an easy life. He was despised and rejected of men; yet, today He is at the right hand of the Father in glory. The ruler of the earth who served mankind has become the servant of God who rules for eternity.

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by serving God and loving our brethren. Love will help us right now. If you do not want to be around a selfish grouch all the time, do not be one yourself. If the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, let the love that is inside you show to others. Give and it will be given to you. Keep it for yourself and you will lose it all. I did not say that; Jesus did in Mark 8:35.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What does God's Word say about professed Christians who do not love one another?
2. Why is brotherly love so essential in each church today?
3. What are some of the greatest hindrances to church unity and fellowship?
4. Discuss how mature love casts out fear. What are some ways we can increase brotherly love?

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Confirm Personal Salvation

Text: 1 John 5:1-12

Focus: 1 John 5:1-12

Key Verse:

“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.”

1 John 5:11, 12

Sunday Devotional: What It Means To Be Born of God, John 1:12, 13.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must know Christ and know that we know Him.

A FIRST LOOK

The two most important questions that face humanity are, “How can I be saved, that is, how can I prepare my soul for eternity?” and “How can I know that I am saved and ready to die?” No matter what else you have or do, if you do not have the right answers to these questions, your life will be a loss. You may indeed gain the whole world, but it will not profit you because you will lose your eternal soul.

Satan twists and distorts the simple plan of salvation, and he clouds the minds of those who are saved into confusion about what has happened to them.

Men seek security in experience. There are those who believe that, to know that you are saved, you must have some memorable experience. The experiences and emotions that accompany salvation are varied, but the plan of salvation is consistent. We will not know that we are saved because we have had

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Loving God—Loving Brethren, 1 Peter 1:22, 23.
- T. — Keeping Christ’s Commandments, John 14:21-24.
- W. — The Work of the Word, Psalm 19:7-11.
- T. — More Than Conquerors, Romans 8:35-37.
- F. — Victory Through Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:57.
- S. — Victory by the Blood, Revelation 12:11.

some special memorable experience but because we know and trust the Word of God and the witness of the Holy Spirit in our own hearts.

What John has set before us here are literally the birthmarks and family traits of God's children. We can examine our own hearts and see whether these things are present and if they are we can be assured from the Word of God that we are the children of God. God does not ask us to guess about our eternal destiny. We can know whom we have believed, and we can be persuaded that the things we have committed to Jesus are secure.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Overcoming the World

I John 5:1-4

1. 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.

2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

3. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

4. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

John began with the new birth. Understanding this is absolutely necessary to our security. Salvation is not a new attitude or a new way of life although it does lead to both. Salvation is the imparting of spiritual life where there was no life before. As we are once born physically, we are once born spiritually. Jesus explained this to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, and at first Nicodemus got the physical and spiritual confused. The new birth is not a second physical birth; it is the birth of our souls.

When we are born physically, eternal relationships are established. One man and one woman will forever be your earthly parents. Nothing can change that. When we are born

again, God becomes our Heavenly Father and nothing will ever change that relationship. We may or may not be honorable children of God, but we are forever His children.

Note that this relationship comes through belief in Jesus Christ, not by baptism, good works or church membership. All those things are important, but they do not save our souls. We are saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus.

The first evidence of our salvation is that a new love is put into our hearts. We love God and we love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We know that we have passed from death into life because we love our brethren. We may not always like the things they do, but underneath there will be a divine love for the people of God in the heart of every saved person.

The test of love is not emotion; it is a changed attitude toward obeying Jesus. We know we love God when we truly want to do what Jesus said. Real love always brings obedience and obedience always leads to giving. One wise man told his teenage daughter to tell her boyfriends, "If you love me, mow my grass." It is easy to profess love, but, if the love is real, service will soon follow. If we love God, we will do our best to find out what Jesus wants us to do, and we will gladly follow Him.

John quickly added that the commandments of Jesus are not grievous, or heavy. Jesus Himself declared this in Matthew 11:28-30. It is a blessing to live the life of a child of God. If you are struggling through life and your service to God is a heavy load you can hardly bear, something is wrong. The commandments that men impose on each other are awful (Luke 11:46), but God frees us from them and His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

The reason is simple. Saved people do not operate from their own power but from the power that God gives them. Jesus lived this way. He depended on His Father in every situation and the power of Heaven was there to help Him do whatever He needed to do. God's children still operate this way. Of ourselves we can do nothing, but we can do all things through Jesus who gives us strength.

This victory over the world is through our faith. The *world* here means "the cosmos, the world of organizations,

governments, selfishness, sorrow, sickness and sin.” By believing in Jesus and placing our lives at His disposal we overcome all of these things.

II. A Record in Heaven and in Earth

I John 5:5-8

5. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

6. 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.

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

8. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Without faith it is impossible to please God, but God always asks us to base our faith on facts. Christianity is not the product of some man's dreams or visions. Christian faith is based firmly on historical facts. There was a man named Jesus, He was born of a virgin. He lived in Nazareth and He was baptized by John in the Jordan River. After a public ministry He was crucified, buried and He rose again. He ascended back to Heaven from the Mount of Olives. This is history; with well accepted and time proven facts, established by many witnesses who were there at the time. More than five hundred brethren saw the resurrected Jesus at one time.

The point is that our faith is not tenuous. It is not based on the wisps of human memory and experience. John pointed out that the historical events of the life of Jesus are proof that He is indeed who He said He was and that He did what He said He did. The first witness is the water. This probably refers to the baptism of Jesus when the heavens opened and God spoke from Heaven, declaring that Jesus was His Son. God spoke from Heaven three times during the ministry of Jesus and this was ample proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

The second witness is the shed blood of Jesus. As the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus shed His blood so that our sins could be forgiven. He died in obedience to His Father so that we could

live forever. The events of the cross were so compelling to those who were there that even those who were watching had to declare, truly this was the Son of God. The cross was predicted in the Old Testament and Jesus fulfilled that promise when He died on Calvary.

The third witness is the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who are saved. We did not witness the baptism of Jesus or His death on the cross, but we have the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This is so sure a testimony that if it is lacking, we should question whether or not we have truly believed (Rom. 8:9). It is impossible for the Holy Spirit to lie and His witness is true. If the Spirit of God bears witness in your heart that you are the child of God, then you will need no further confirmation.

The record of our salvation is not only on earth and in our individual hearts; it is also in Heaven. In the scenes of judgment we find in Revelation 20:11-15, we read that a book is opened that contains the names of all those who saved. This is a wonderful event that offers us many lessons, but focus now on the simple fact that God has a record of your salvation that is kept in Heaven and is secure for the ages. Even if you doubt your salvation and even if others doubt it, God will never forget it. You are not saved because you think you are or because someone else tells you that you are; you are saved because God's Word declares that you are and because your name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

III. The Witness of God

I John 5:9-12

9. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

10. 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.

11. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

We live our lives by faith. We believe in strangers and well-meaning acquaintances. We believe in the people who tighten the nuts that hold the wheels to our automobiles. We believe in the pharmacist who fills our prescriptions. We believe in physicians enough to let them invade our bodies to help heal our diseases. The point is that we trust the witness of men every day. We could not live if we did not.

However, there is a far more trustworthy witness and that is the witness of God. We trust each other and it is good that we do, but no man is as reliable and steadfast as God in Heaven. God has given us ample testimony that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be. God has preserved this testimony down through the ages and it still lives in our hearts today.

This leaves us only two choices in the matter of salvation and security. We can believe God, accept the Bible and the witness of the Holy Spirit, or we can declare God a liar and refuse to accept what He has told us in His Word and in our hearts. These are strong words, but John pointed out that anyone who does not believe the divine record that God gave of His Son is in effect stating that God is a liar.

The ultimate resolution is stated simply. Those who have the Son, that is, the people who repent of their sins and place their personal faith in Jesus Christ, have life. They have eternal and everlasting spiritual life. They will never come into condemnation and are passed from death into life. They are born again. Those who do not believe in Jesus are still under the penalty of their sins, and they do not have eternal life.

A FINAL WORD

What question could we possibly face that would be more important than the question of the Philippian jailor, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). John was inspired to write these wonderful words so we could know how to be saved and so we could be secure in our salvation. So much of what we do for Jesus depends on our acting out of certainty and not out of doubt.

If we doubt our salvation, we will see little need to serve the Lord. After all, if there is no life after death, and, if Heaven is not in our future, what difference does it make? But when we know that Jesus lives in our hearts and that He has a plan for each of His children, and we know that we can live out that plan every day, we operate on an entirely different basis.

God wants us to be secure in our relationship with Him, and He wants us to allow His power to enable us to serve Him until we die or until He comes again for us. The more we know about Jesus, the more we love Him and the more we love Him, the more we become like Him and the more we become like Him, the greater we understand the new nature that has been born in our hearts.

This is a wonderful way to live. God's love is perfected in us and that love casts out our fear. We can be honest with ourselves and with others and we can obey Jesus, not out of fear of what will happen if we do not, but out of love for Him in an atmosphere of love, obedience and joyful honesty. This is the victory that overcomes a sad, sinful world.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Discuss things that cause Christians to doubt their salvation.
2. Discuss the reasons for full assurance in Christ.
3. What should a Christian do if he begins to doubt his salvation?
4. Take a few minutes of class time for students to share their favorite verses that bring assurance.

Obey the Word

Text: 1 John 5:13-21

Focus: 1 John 5:13-21

Key Verse:

“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.”

1 John 5:20

Sunday Devotional: The Keeping Power of Christ, John 17:12-15.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must walk in submission to the Word of God.

A FIRST LOOK

The word *know* is used seven times in this brief passage. The implication is obvious. God wants us to know that we are saved and He wants us to do something with that knowledge. Like all spiritual virtues, our ability to be secure in our salvation has many results and ramifications. Of course, God wants us to benefit personally from our security. The greatest benefit of any spiritual transaction goes to the one making it. Saved people rejoice when others find Jesus. But the individuals who are saved gain the most from the experience.

We are saved for a purpose. God has a plan for every life that includes salvation, but God does not stop there. We are God’s workmanship and we are created in Christ so we can serve Him. Here is where our security is a part of the plan. Unless we are secure in our own salvation, we will not advance in the service of our Lord. An insecure, unprepared, ashamed work-

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Witness of the Spirit, Romans 8:15-17.
- T. — God’s Promise About Prayer, Jeremiah 33:3.
- W. — God Hears Prayer, Psalm 34:15-17.
- T. — Delivering to Satan, 1 Corinthians 5:5-7.
- F. — Righteousness Tendeth To Life, Proverbs 11:19.
- S. — Sinning Unto Death, Acts 5:1-11.

man will soon find himself unable to proceed. When we actually use our talents and abilities acting out of a sure knowledge of the presence of God in our hearts, we will grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, and we will be a blessing to ourselves and to others.

As long as our faith is speculative or experimental, we will do little with it. When faith becomes certainty, we learn that the spiritual world is the real world, and we will move with assurance into a life of service to our Heavenly Father.

A wise man once said, Always remember who you are. When we know who we are, we can serve the Lord as Jesus served His Father.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Knowledge and Confidence

I John 5:13-15

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.

14. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

John gave us the purpose of this book. He was inspired to write so that we can know we have eternal life and that our initial belief in Jesus will encourage us to further trust Him and to employ the great power that is available through His name. The name of the Son of God is not some magic word or phrase we occasionally use. This refers to the fact that we act in the authority of another. Jesus acted in the authority given to Him by His Father and we act through the power and authority Jesus gave us.

If we act in our own strength, we will fail and we will lose the confidence to act at all. Many can testify that this has happened. However, if we allow the power of God to act

through us, we will grow in confidence. One way we can see this in action is through prayer.

Prayer is not some kind of psychological reinforcement. It is not mental assent to what we desire. Prayer is the sincere desire of our hearts communicated to Heaven. Prayer is not about getting God to do what we want; prayer is about getting us to do what God wants. It is not about getting our will done in Heaven; it is about getting God's will done on earth. Prayer must always be according to the will of God.

How can we know the will of God? First, we can simply ask Him. Note the prayer of Saul on the road to Damascus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). This is a prayer that God will answer. Then, we can search the Bible, and, when we do, we will find the plain will of God for everyone. We see here a twofold method for determining the will of God. First, we search the Scriptures and find the revealed will of God for every person. Then, we personally go to God in prayer and find individual leadership for our own hearts. These will never conflict one with the other. In fact, if our feelings ever conflict with the Word of God, we can be sure that our feelings are wrong. God never leads contrary to the Bible.

We can be confident that God will answer our prayers when we pray in His power and within His will for us. That answer may or may not suit our expectations, but the answer will be there. Beyond this we can be confident God will consider every prayer we pray or whatsoever we ask. According to Romans 8:26, 27, God interprets our prayers as we pray them and grants us the real needs of our hearts.

When we get to Heaven, we will see that God heard and answered every prayer we ever prayed in exactly the best way possible. Here on earth we may not always agree with the answers God sends us, but, eventually, we will see that God's will was the best for all concerned.

II. Knowledge and Sinful Brethren

I John 5 16-18

16. 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.

17. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

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 we gain confidence from answered prayer, we will be able to move into areas of service that involve others. Please note that we must take each step in order. Unless we have an active and productive prayer life, we should not try to influence our brethren. As Jesus taught, we must learn how to get the beam out of our own eye before we can see to get the splinter out of the eye of our brother (Matt. 7:2-5).

John gave us two situations that call for the power of intercessory prayer. The first situation concerned a sin that is not unto death. This is a sin that might result in discipline for the one who committed it but would not result in that person being called home to Heaven. These are sobering words, but they remind us of a simple scriptural truth in James 1:15, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The world either ignores or minimizes sin. We treat sin as a small inconvenience that might make our lives unpleasant but is really not that dangerous. This is a lie. Sin is a powerful enemy, and, if unchecked and unforgiven, it will kill us. Sin is deadly and we should treat it that way.

But, not every sin carries a death penalty and we should realize this. As we read in Galatians 6:1, a man can be overtaken in sin, and, when that happens, those who are spiritual should seek to restore their brother in every way possible, considering themselves so that they are not also tempted.

These verses teach us that, when we observe sin in the lives of others, our first response should be to realize the great and grave danger that sin represents and to pray earnestly for the sinner. Sadly, this is often not our first response. We might see our brethren sin and just regret that they have done it. We may even take secret delight, knowing our brother was weaker than we think we are. These attitudes are wrong. We should earnestly pray for sinners, and, if we do, God will answer our prayers. God will work things out in the life of

the sinful brother so the brother repents of his sin and finds forgiveness.

However, there is a sin that will result in death. This is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30. Many in Corinth were asleep, or dead, because of the irregularities concerning the Lord's Supper. We may not take the commandments of God seriously, but, God does, and He had called some of the Corinthian Christians home because of their evil actions. John simply declared that we should not pray for those who commit such sins. How do we tell the difference? We must study the Bible and use an enlightened and sanctified mind to do our best to recognize these situations. First John 5:17 plainly declares that we are to use our minds and hearts and know that all unrighteousness is sin and that there are sins that are not unto death.

Underneath it all we know that these sins involve the physical lives and not the souls of our brethren. The part of us that is born of God, the soul inside us, does not sin and it will not die. The wicked one may touch our physical lives and a child of God can sin in his physical life, but the wicked one cannot touch the eternally secure soul of a saved person.

III. Knowledge and Real Life

I John 5:19-21

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

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.

21. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Here are three more things that we know because of our security in Jesus. We know the truth about the world in which we live. We know the whole world lies in darkness. The physical world and all that is in it is already condemned and doomed. It is reserved to a fiery judgment that will literally devour the adversaries of Jesus. Nothing we do can change

the appointment God has made for the death of this physical universe.

The real world is not the things we touch, handle and taste. The real world is the world of the spirit that we contact through the ministry of the Holy Spirit within our hearts. What we know and do concerning this spiritual kingdom will last forever. We cannot keep the physical, and a saved person cannot lose the spiritual. We are wise when we give the spiritual part of our lives the greatest emphasis.

We know that Jesus is the Son of God and He has come into this world. We know that He has given us understanding. This is the promise Jesus gave to His disciples as He prepared them for His departure from the earth. He said in John 16:12-16 that He would send them the Comforter, or Holy Spirit, and, when He was come, He would teach them all things they needed to know. God gives us wisdom (James 1:5), and He gives us understanding so that we may know the truth and act on that truth. Satan is a liar and can never be trusted. Jesus is Truth and we can always know that, when the lies and deceit of Satan are stripped away, the truth of the gospel will remain a bright and shining monument to our faith.

We know Him. Salvation is not about knowing a theory or a philosophy. It is about knowing a person. That person is Jesus and we can know Him and we can know that He also knows us.

Finally, John gave us the great contrast between the true God and man-made gods or idols. Men will worship something. The great question remains; if you do not believe the truth, what is it that you do believe? When we take away the truth, the only thing left to believe is a lie.

A FINAL WORD

This book closes with this warning, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Do not give anything else but God your attention, your interest, your time, your energy and your money. Ultimately, your god is what you live

for, what you get excited about and what motivates you. Is it Jesus Christ, or is it something else?

All over the ancient world there are idolatrous temples. These temples are in ruins, but in every place a certain god was worshiped there. Although these temples have been abandoned, the worship of the gods in them has not ceased. We still have the same gods. We have changed the names, but the idolatrous gods are exactly the same.

There was worship of Narcissus, the god who fell in love with himself. This may be the supreme god of lost humanity, the worship of self, the worship of man, the exaltation of humanity itself. It is amazing how we worship ourselves. We have the worship of Bacchus, the god of pleasure; the worship of Venus, the goddess of love; Apollo, the god of physical beauty; and Minerva, the goddess of science.

John told us that these will rob us and destroy us. Do not let these things become important in your life because God has set you free so you can live as God intended for you to live. A child of God can no longer agree with the world and its ways. There must be a change. We must be in the world, and we can love worldly people. We can be friends with them, but we cannot think like the world. We cannot have the world's values, standards and goals. There is a difference because we are of God. We have been delivered from the power of darkness and we should live like it.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. How important is it to have full assurance of salvation?
 2. How can we develop more confidence when we pray?
 3. Discuss ways to improve our prayer lives.
 4. How important is it to restore repenting, fallen brethren?
- Is this a practice in your church? Why or why not?

Live in Truth

Text: 2 John 1-13

Focus: 2 John 1-13

Key Verse:

“I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.”

2 John 4

Sunday Devotional: If You Love Jesus—Obey Him! John 14:15.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must live the truth in practical ways.

A FIRST LOOK

This letter is a kind of living metaphor. As Jesus used parables to convey eternal truths, Mark 4:33, 34, God inspired John to write this letter in word pictures to vividly emphasize the spiritual necessities of the last part of the first century and the ensuing church age.

The first century can be roughly divided into three parts. The first thirty years were the life and ministry of Jesus. The next thirty years, until about AD 60, were about the growth of churches and the spread of the gospel through the great missionary work of the apostles. The final thirty years concerned the growing opposition of Satan to the Lord's churches and the persecution and death of the apostles. At the time of this writing, only John was left alive and he was an old man, perhaps more than ninety years old.

John expressed great and vital truths to us using the metaphor of an elect lady and her family to represent the Lord's churches. He

Daily Devotionals

- M. — God's Word Is Truth, John 17:17.
- T. — Love's Priority, 1 Peter 4:8.
- W. — Love's Obligation, Romans 13:8, 9.
- T. — There Is No Other Gospel! Galatians 1:6-9.
- F. — Avoid the Divisive, Romans 16:17.
- S. — Beware Itching Ears! 2 Timothy 4:3, 4.

used the metaphor of walking to teach us about our daily conduct. He treated joy as if it were a container that could be emptied or filled. And he used a metaphor of a divine sister to show us that a church is a local body. As the parables of Jesus both revealed and concealed the truth (Matt. 13:10, 11), so these words do the same. Study them with an enlightened and Spirit-led heart, and you will find a wealth of rich food for your soul.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Walking in Truth

2 John 1-4

1. The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

2. For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

3. Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

4. I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

John began with a reference to himself and the elect lady to whom this letter was addressed. Notice He did not use his name, but referred to himself as “the elder” (verse 1). We can speculate that the persecution that was growing at this time made specific personal references unwise. No doubt this letter was sent to one particular church, perhaps an individual in that church. Certainly, it was from one man, John, but neither is mentioned by name.

Five times in these four verses John mentioned the truth. This was an important theme of this letter. God is the ultimate realist. In fact, Jesus plainly stated He was the truth (John 14:6). We live in a fairy tale world of smoke and mirrors where Satan is constantly telling us lies and men are adding to them. Lies like money is everything. Power and beauty are

ultimate goals. Get what you want and do not think of anyone but yourself. Most of the world lives like this, but those who do are basing their philosophy of life on a lie. Sincere effort will never allow us to recover from a failed philosophy.

In contrast, God tells us the absolute truth. We are mortal. We will die. There is life after death and we can and must be prepared for it. We can be saved, and we can know the truth, and we can lay up eternal rewards in Heaven by the deeds we do on earth. All this is available to us through the work of Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. John knew this truth, and he had preached it to faithful men who had believed the truth and were living according to it.

This was not academic theory that was examined, probed and admitted. Rather, it was life changing truth that had resulted in changed behavior in the lives of those who had received it. There are no experimental spiritual transactions. We cannot try faith to see whether it works. True belief in Jesus requires total commitment. Think of it like jumping out of an airplane with a parachute. If you do it, you do it. You cannot do it just a little and see whether you want to go all the way. Once you step out of the plane you are committed. Life changing faith is like that, and these folks were literally walking in the truth.

Walking is an interesting metaphor. When we walk, we take two steps in turn and repeat the process until we get to our destination. As we read in Ephesians 4:17-24, for the Christian these two steps are putting off the old man and putting on the new man. We do this constantly, and, as we do, we walk in the truth.

Also note the progress revealed in these verses. There are steps here. The first step is knowing the truth. Then, the truth dwells, or lives, in us. When we know the truth and dwell in the truth, the truth bears fruits of that knowledge. Those fruits are grace, mercy and peace. All this is made possible by Jesus at work in our hearts. Then and only then, we can walk in the truth. We cannot skip a step here. If we do not know the truth, we can never walk in the truth. Finally, we can come to the place where the elder John was; we can grow to love the truth and love others who walk in the truth.

Many seem to think Christianity is a sour, dull life devoid of any real pleasure. This is another of the devil's lies. John was rejoicing that others had believed the truth and were walking in it. There is no greater reward than to know that you have been an eternal influence in the life of another person for good.

II. Walking After Christ's Commandments

2 John 5-8

5. 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.

6. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

7. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

Walking in the truth will mandate keeping the commandments of Jesus. The question Jesus asked in Luke 6:46 echoes through the ages. Why do you call me Lord and then not do the things I say? If Jesus is indeed our Lord, we will gladly keep His commandments. Keeping the commandments of Jesus is not some heavy burden we must bear. The yoke of Jesus is easy and His burden is light. We may indeed burden ourselves and each other with impossible troubles, but Jesus does not do this to those who walk in the truth.

This is not to say that there are not sacrifices to Christian service, but with every sacrifice, God provides a resource. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us bear our burdens. No matter what happens, it is always possible for a child of God to keep the commandments of Jesus.

John was not writing a new thing in this letter. Instead, he was beseeching that an old commandment be kept. This commandment was that we love one another. In a way, this kind of love is either easy or impossible. It is easy for those

who are truly saved to love their brethren. In fact, this kind of love is a sure indication that we have passed from death into life. But for the lost world, this kind of love is impossible. A lost world can love those who love it back, but it does not understand the kind of love God puts in the hearts of His children.

The love of God is a great motivating force in the life of a child of God. When we know that God has loved us and we in turn extend that love to others, we are walking in love. Here is the metaphor once more of taking two steps and repeating them over and over. We realize we are loved by God and we love others as He has first loved us. These are the two steps to walking in love and every Christian should repeat them over and over.

This is not only a matter of our service to God, but it is also a matter of our personal security. There are many deceivers in the world. Satan is a liar, and those who serve him will not hesitate to join him in deception. John repeated the previously given formula for identifying the spirit of antichrist. The simple question is, "Was Jesus the Christ who came in the flesh?" The answer to that simple question reveals what is truly in our hearts. All those who answer that Jesus is not the Christ, that He is not God come in the flesh, are deceivers and antichrists. These are strong words, but they are not my words or your words; they are from the Word of God, and we should pay close attention to them.

John used a plural number in verse 8. This indicates that he was now speaking directly to a group of people and that his reference to a single lady and her children was indeed a figure of speech. The message is clear. We need self-awareness. We need to make our calling and election sure. We need to know whom we have believed and we need to be persuaded that He is able to keep the things we have committed to Him. We need to be sure the things we do in our lives are laying up eternal rewards for us in glory.

How sad it is to think that men may think they are earning eternal rewards, only to find out they have wasted their lives. We should strive to make every moment of every day count for the Lord so we get as much as we possibly can out of our

time on earth. How much could we do for the Lord if we really put our souls (whole beings) into His work? Only eternity will reveal the answer to that question and many will be disappointed when they hear it.

III. Abiding in Christ's Doctrine

2 John 9-13

9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

12. Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

13. The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.

So we can know our own souls and make an accurate decision about others, John gave us this simple test. Those who are truly born again will abide, or live, in the doctrines of Jesus. They will know what Jesus said, and they will happily follow where Jesus leads.

Then this stern warning was given. When those come to us who do not believe in and practice the things Jesus taught we are not to receive them or bid them God's speed. This does not mean that we are to be rude or abusive to anyone. We are simply not supposed to help the devil spread lies. We are not asked to harm anyone and every human being has the God given liberty to determine for himself what to believe, but when we see someone blatantly and obviously deny the things Jesus taught, we are to leave them alone and not help them.

John had many other things to say that could not be conveyed through the written Word of God. Every writer knows the limitations of his craft. There is no interaction in writing and often we need to interact one with another to understand each other. John wanted to speak face to face with the Lord's people that both could have full joy.

A FINAL WORD

This letter is surely not the longest book in the Bible. It is not complicated or difficult to understand. It was written in troubling times and in figures of speech. But it contains wonderful and eternal truths expressed from the heart of God to the hearts of men through the great man we know as the apostle John.

John was well into his nineties when he wrote these words, and this book is lasting proof that God can use us as long as we will make ourselves available to Him. John could no longer endure the rigors of the work of a missionary. The other apostles were gone on to be with the Lord. No doubt his opportunities to preach were few. But, God could and did use him to give us these wonderful truths.

As long as we will allow God to lead us, He will lead us. He will use us as long as we are here on earth. This is a wonderful example of the desire of Paul when he said that for him to die was gain but for him to live was Christ (Phil. 1:21).

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe a person who is living in the truth? What does that mean?
2. Why does John seem to emphasize the overwhelming need of love among God's people?
3. What vital doctrine is ultimately rejected by all deceivers and antichrists?
4. Though salvation is secure in Christ, what can believers love by disobedience or disbelief?

Be Hospitable

Text: 3 John 1-14

Focus: 3 John 1-14

Key Verse:

“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.”

3 John 5, 6

Sunday Devotional: Sharing Our Resources, 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must be hospitable toward brethren and kind toward all.

A FIRST LOOK

What we do speaks so loudly that some may never hear what we say. When our actions contradict our words, we will always be judged by our actions. No amount of explanation or rationalization can ever excuse bad behavior. On the other hand, when we live and love as Jesus taught, we present a witness that can never be silenced.

This is what Jesus was teaching when He told His disciples to love each other. When Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other, He added a remarkable result. He said in John 13:35, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Consider the remarkable reach of that statement. If we want the world to know that we are the disciples of Jesus, we should love each other. Later, John was inspired to add to this idea when he wrote, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Refreshing the Saints, Philemon 5-7.
- T. — Collaborers in Truth,
1 Corinthians 3:5-9.
- W. — Share Bonds and Blessings,
Hebrews 13:1-3.
- T. — Chiefs Are Servants, Luke 22:24-27.
- F. — No Self-Promotion, Matthew 23:4-8.
- S. — No Vain Glory, Philipians 2:3-8.

his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

Not only is our mutual love a powerful witness to a lost world, it is also convincing proof of a heart that is right with God. But, when we profess our love for God and refuse to help our brethren, we are in essence denying that we have a real love for God at all.

In the lesson today these great ideas are put into practice. The people we read about in the Bible were real people, like we are. In this brief letter we meet three men. Two of them are good examples that we should follow, and one is an example whose behavior we should avoid.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Gaius, the Well-beloved

3 John 1-8

1. The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

2. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

3. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

5. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

6. Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

7. Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

8. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.

No doubt John knew Gaius personally and loved him dearly. Not everyone is easy to know and many are not easy to love, but there was a bond between these men. When we read about

the character of Gaius, we can see how easy it would be to love such a man.

Note first that Gaius had grown greatly in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. The interesting statement in verse 2 should make us all stop and think. What would your life be like if you were only as healthy physically as you are spiritually? We do not know anything about the kind of life Gaius lived. He may have been poor or he may have been rich, but we do know that his heart was right with God, and that is what really matters.

Gaius did not brag on himself. Others had come to John and told him about the character of Gaius. Their testimony was that Gaius walked in the truth. Here is the metaphor of walking used once more. Gaius was not a Sunday morning only kind of Christian. He put his faith into practice every day of his life and was living out the faith that he had in his heart toward Jesus.

The evidence of this kind of life change brought great encouragement to John. John was an old man when this was written. Many of life's pleasures had faded for him, but he still rejoiced in the life changing power of the gospel of Jesus. Gaius was not a good man because he was able to look inside himself and find an inner resolve to help others. He was not a good man because he lived in good circumstances and never faced evil. Gaius was a good man because he walked in the truth.

God is the ultimate realist. What He says in His Word is true and it will still be true when Heaven and earth have passed away. Gaius looked to Jesus the author and finisher of his faith and his behavior reflected his beliefs. There is a philosophy behind every action. When Jesus changes your heart, your philosophy and your actions will change.

The faith Gaius had in Jesus was expressed in his loving hospitality toward everyone he met. Gaius extended his love to his brethren as well as to strangers. Often we will treat total strangers with more respect than we offer those we profess to love the most. It is not easy to be even handed in our behavior toward others because we tend to like some people more than others. But the love of God is without respect of

persons. Gaius showed this kind of love in his daily behavior, and John commended him for it.

John also gave us another metaphor in suggesting that life is like a journey. Wherever you go, you must begin where you are. We are admonished to help each other as we journey through our lives. Life is a one-way trip; we pass each day only one time, and we must never put off the opportunities we have to love and aid each other. When God places an opportunity to serve others in your path, take it. Gaius had helped his brethren and strangers alike. He had helped his brethren in the desire to serve the Lord, and he had helped strangers in their desire to know the Lord. In this way he became a fellow-helper to the truth itself.

II. Diotrephes, the Lover of Preeminence

3 John 9-11

9. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church.

11. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

Gaius had gladly received and obeyed the message John preached through his writing, but another man, named Diotrephes, had not. This was not due to the nature of the ministry or message of John; it was due to the character of Diotrephes. As Jesus taught, the nature of the soil determines the condition of the crop, and Diotrephes' heart was focused on himself, not on others. Diotrephes was selfish. He wanted preeminence. This interesting word means that this man wanted for himself the same kind of recognition reserved for Jesus. This word is used in Colossians 1:18 to refer to Jesus. The mirror opposite of love is not hatred; it is selfishness. When we are totally absorbed with ourselves, we have no time

for the needs of others. Note the list of the offenses this man had committed.

First, he had refused to receive the ministry and message of John and his helpers. How sad to reject the apostle Jesus loved. What blessings we miss when we close our hearts to our fellow servants in God's kingdom. We might think that Diotrephes had a right to his own opinion about John, but he went further than just not receiving John. Diotrephes took direct action to harm others.

Most selfish people, including Diotrephes, use words as weapons. Diotrephes spoke evil and malicious things against those who were preaching the gospel and those who were being changed by it. If you cannot accept the gospel and you refuse to let Jesus change your heart, at least get out of the way of those who are willing to receive the Lord. Evidently, the prating words of Diotrephes did not have the effect he desired, so he then took action. He not only refused to help others with his own means; he would not allow others to help them either.

Diotrephes was only concerned that he got the credit and was preeminent. He did not care at all about those who were in need or those who were helping them. He did his best to interrupt the process of hospitality, even going so far as to try to get those who expressed hospitality thrown out of the church. Diotrephes had a position of some authority, and he used it to forbid others and to even cast them out of the church. Once again, his weapons were words. Words can be powerful tools, and God is careful to instruct us to use them wisely. We must never gossip (Eph. 4:31). We must not bear false witness, or lie (Col. 3:9). As you read your Bible, you will find many instances where much evil came because of the misuse of our God-given ability to communicate in words.

On the other hand, many great blessings come through words. The gospel is preached in words and it is a life giving and life changing message. We use our words to encourage and help each other. We even pray in words in communication with our Heavenly Father. But, this evil man used words to hurt others. This was not an accidental slip of the tongue.

Diotrephes knew what he was doing and he meant to do it. Diotrephes refused the message in the letter John wrote and brought trouble into his own life and into the lives of others.

III. Demetrius, the Man with a Good Report

3 John 12-14

12. Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

13. I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:

14. But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

As the evil actions of Diotrephes brought condemnation from John, the good report of Demetrius brought praise. At the heart of every matter is a matter of the heart. Diotrephes had an evil heart and Demetrius had a good one.

Demetrius believed the truth and acted on what he believed. He was a practicing servant of the Lord, and John praised him for the record of his accomplishments. Here is a situation where the deeds of a man were a more powerful and clearer witness than the words he might have spoken. This good man earned not only a good report from John but also the wonderful accomplishment of having his name engraved in the eternal Word of God. Through his honorable actions, Demetrius actually got the things that Diotrephes was seeking. Here we see the truth of the message of Jesus is that the way to honor is not to be served by others but to have a servant's heart. Diotrephes longed for others to praise him. Demetrius was looking for a way to help others.

The wonderful thing about truth is that it is always true. The true record of the good attitude and good deeds of Demetrius will stand through the ages.

Note that there are three witnesses to the good deeds of Demetrius. This fulfills the legal requirement that everything be established or confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses. Legally, as well as morally, Demetrius was a man of good report and faithful character.

A FINAL WORD

John ended this letter with a wonderful salutation. “Peace be to thee” (3 John 14). Peace to the beloved Gaius who was hospitable to everyone, peace to Diotrephes, even though he was pursuing a goal he would never attain and peace to Demetrius who already had a good report from within and without.

John encouraged those who received the letter to greet these brethren by name. They were to go, call their names and then tell them that John had written and John was coming to see them soon. These greetings were to encourage and strengthen these brethren.

We need to know that others care about us. We need the encouragement of a word of praise as well as the correction of a word of brotherly caution. Too often we see others do something good, and we pass up the opportunity to offer them an encouraging word. Likewise, we may see a brother on a disastrous path and let his actions pass because we do not want to get involved.

We are involved in the lives of our brethren whether we want to be or not. We are bound together in Christ for all eternity, and we should never hesitate to help correct our brethren when they take the wrong path, and we should ever be ready to praise them for the good they are doing. True hospitality is based on honest concern for the welfare of others. It begins in our hearts and then flows out through our lives into the lives of others. Down through the ages, it remains a powerful witness to a transformed life in Jesus Christ.

A CLOSER LOOK

1. If you were in the same physical health as your spiritual health, what would it be like?

2. John emphasizes love and truth. How do you fare loving others and walking in truth?

3. Do you practice hospitality as your forefathers did? Why or why not?

4. Discuss ways individuals and churches can increase their Christian hospitality.

12

Beware of False Teachers

Text: Jude 1-16

Focus: Jude 3-16

Key Verse:

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort **you** that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

Jude 3

Sunday Devotional: Reward for Keeping the Faith, 2 Timothy 4:7, 8.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must stand for the truth and earnestly contend for the faith.

A FIRST LOOK

Jude, also translated *Judas*, was the brother of James and the half brother of Jesus. He was the son of Joseph and Mary. Joseph and Mary had four sons and other daughters after Jesus was born. We read in John 7:5 and Acts 1:14 that the brothers of Jesus did not believe in Him until after the resurrection. Jude was saved and went on to be used of God to write the book that bears his name. Jude does not mention his earthly relationship with Jesus. This teaches us that our spiritual relationships should dominate our lives. Jude simply refers to himself as the brother of James and the servant of Jesus Christ.

There are many similarities between this brief letter and 2 Peter. Both warned of apostasy and gave assurance that the children of God would overcome this evil. One key thought in Jude is expressed in the Greek

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Stephen Contended for the Faith, Acts 6:7-15.
- T. — Saul Contended for the Faith, Acts 9:22-29.
- W. — Strive Together for the Faith,
Philippians 1:27.
- T. — Be Bold with the Gospel,
1 Thessalonians 2:2.
- F. — Hold Fast the Faith, 2 Timothy 1:13.
- S. — Keep the Profession of Your Faith,
Hebrews 4:14-16.

word translated *preserved, keep or kept*. Jude used this term four times, and it refers to the security that God's children find in their relationship with Jesus. When things change and a falling away comes, it can make us question our beliefs. Jude assured us that truth is always true and that God's children will prevail through the keeping power of the Holy Spirit. Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.

Apostasy may seem frightening, but it should only make the sheep want to gather closer around their Great Shepherd. In His presence nothing can harm us.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Earnestly Contend for the Faith

Jude 3, 4

3. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude told us that his original desire was to write about the common salvation. He wanted to write a letter rejoicing in the great spiritual transaction that had taken place in his heart and in the hearts of his brethren. Often the preacher would like to emphasize good news, but the Holy Spirit states otherwise. Jude took a look around, listened to God and realized he needed to sound a trumpet of alarm, not play the piano of praise. His message was an exhortation. This word gives us the sense of calling someone alongside, or walking up beside another to help and encourage him. Jude was asking his brethren to stand with Him and the Lord in contending for the faith.

The term *faith*, as it is used here, does not refer to our personal belief, but the whole belief system of doctrines and teachings that was delivered to us through the ministry of the apostles. These men were used by God to write much of the New Testament, and, in doing so, they preserved the doctrines and teachings of Jesus. It was this faith that was under attack when Jude wrote these words. All down through the church age Satan has continued to attack the faith and he is still doing so today.

The term *contend* contains the root from which we get the English word *agonize*. It suggests that we are like soldiers in a battle, and we should put our best effort into what we are doing because great matters are at stake. A soldier fights for himself, but he also fights so that his children can be free, and we should contend for the faith not only for ourselves, but also for those generations that come after us. Others, who have gone on to be with the Lord, have fought, suffered and died, shedding their righteous blood so that we can have the truth, and we should accept the challenge to see to it that the truth is passed to future generations.

The need is specific. Certain men have crept in without our being aware of it and have twisted the words of Jesus and sown doubt about the authenticity of Jesus. Satan sings the same song over and over. He causes men to question that Jesus was who He claimed to be and that Jesus did what He claimed to do.

By definition, a *deceiver* does not advertise his true intentions. Deceit is not deceit if we know about it. False teachers have a secret agenda. They will never tell it publicly, but inside they desire to tear down and destroy what God has built up. They substitute fleshly sins for the grace of God and deny that Jesus is the Christ. John gave us the sure test of false doctrine (1 John 4:3).

Sadly, those who preach lies need the truth as much as anyone else. Their souls are lost and their lives are empty, but they can only bring themselves to hurt and destroy others, not to repent of their own sins and place their personal faith in Jesus. As Jesus so aptly said, we must get the beam out of our own eye to remove the splinter from the eye of another.

II. Examples of Apostasy

Jude 5-11

5. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

6. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

8. Likewise also these *filthy* dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

9. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

10. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

11. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

This behavior was nothing new. Anyone who was familiar with the Old Testament could see that this had happened many times before. Jude gave some specific and instructive examples of the work of false teachers in the past. The first example he gave concerned those who came out of Egypt in the Exodus. We read that six hundred thousand (Ex. 12:37) men left Egypt; yet, only two of them, Joshua and Caleb, actually entered the Promised Land. As we read in Hebrews, the reason was simple; these people failed to believe in God and trust in His promises, even though God demonstrated His power to them daily. No amount of physical blessing will compel our belief. Like the people of Israel of old, we can always find many ways to doubt.

Jude then mentions the entrance of sin into the world. We read in Isaiah 14:12-15 and also in Luke 10:18 that there was a great rebellion in Heaven when Lucifer and his angels usurped their position and rebelled against the will of God. This led to Satan being cast out of Heaven and sin coming into the world. This is to teach us that no amount of privilege or power will prevent rebellion. God was good to Lucifer. He gave him great authority; yet, that evil heart longed for even more. Eventually, God will judge these unholy angels and cast them into the lake of fire. This is not a picture or a figure, this is a literal place and an actual event.

The third example is the twin cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed these cities in a cataclysm, saving only Lot and part of his family from the destruction. This was an example of perversion. These people took things that were holy and good and turned them into vile sins to satisfy the lusts of their flesh. This destruction is to teach us there is an end to God's patience. God was patient with Sodom and Gomorrah, but eventually there came a day of judgment and destruction. Evil will not prevail forever. There is a great day coming when truth and justice will be done for everyone who has ever lived. Jude was encouraging us to realize that we are in a battle that we cannot lose.

The fight might be difficult and the battle may be long. Our enemies may be great and the way might be difficult, but victory is absolutely assured. In the end, God will not lose, and the forces of evil will not prevail. History shows this and Jude reminds us of it.

These false teachers were speaking evil of things they did not understand. They despised dominion, that is, they would not yield themselves to God or anyone else. They were proud, boastful, selfish and wrong. They were behaving like beasts and not like men. They had given way to an animalistic selfishness that made them immune to reason. Jude gave us three more examples from the Old Testament.

They are Cain, Balaam and Korah. In selfishness and animal hatred, Cain killed his innocent brother. Balaam, a priest who should have known better, profaned his duties and put his

ministry up for sale. Korah led a rebellion against Moses. His movement was based on lies, and God literally opened the earth and swallowed him up. The point Jude made was that these are eternal examples of failure. These three men are monuments to the misuse of power and authority by men who should have known better. In a like manner apostate teachers deny the leadership of God and give way to their Adamic nature.

III. Characteristics of False Teachers

Jude 12-16

12. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13. Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

14. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,

15. To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

16. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

In a series of wonderful metaphors, Jude described the influence of false teaching. It is like a dish of spoiled food at a feast. It is like clouds that promise refreshing rains but the rains never come. It is like fruit trees that bear only dead and withered fruit. It is like raging waves demonstrating vast, but mostly useless power foaming forth their own shame.

Enoch had prophesied about this many years ago. Jude knew about the ministry of the seventh man from Adam and the things he had preached. Enoch had told of a time of coming judgment when the righteous would shine forth and

the evildoers would be exposed and judged. The Bible is its own best commentary and here we learn what we are not told in Genesis about Enoch. Jude mentions both the deeds and the words of false teachers as being worthy of judgment. What we say is often merely a prelude to what we would like to do.

Jude finally described these apostate teachers. They were murmurers and complainers. Many false doctrines are born out of compliant. It is easy for most of us to complain, but consider what we say when we do. All that evil apostate hearts want to do is complain not solve problems. Their complaints are only blankets used to cover their lust.

The false teachers promise great things, but they are really only interested in the praises of men. They did what they did to get an advantage over others, not to serve the Lord.

A FINAL WORD

God does not want us to be ignorant and unprepared. God is the ultimate realist. He deals with the world as it actually is and with those in it as He finds them. There are those in this world who are wrong and there are those in this world who will do you wrong. You cannot avoid them or their evil teachings.

However, you can be prepared and you can successfully contend for the faith. Earnestly contending for the faith is not difficult if we truly believe the things we say. First, we must have real faith in our hearts. For instance, if you know the truth about salvation, you will not listen to those who preach falsehood. If you know what the Bible teaches about the local church and about the second coming and about our relationships with each other in the kingdom of God, you will readily recognize false teaching when you hear it.

Know what you believe and know the difference between right and wrong. Ask God to guide you as you study your Bible. Then, put what you learn into practice in your life every day. In spiritual matters the best defense is to live every day in the center of God's will.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What is involved in contending for the faith?
2. What can be done to better ground people in the truth of Scripture?
3. Have you known people who turned from truth to error? Discuss how and why you think that happened.
4. What are good steps that could be taken to prevent the rise of false teachers in your church?

13

Avoid False Teaching

Text: Jude 17-25

Focus: Jude 17-25

Key Verse:

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

Jude 20, 21

Sunday Devotional: Watch for Wolves! Acts 20:28-31.

Application: To have fullness of joy we must learn, know and live by the faith.

A FIRST LOOK

We should believe our beliefs and doubt our doubts. We get into trouble when we start doubting our beliefs and believing our doubts. Of course, we must first know the difference. Many people simply do not have a well developed belief system at all. They go through life bouncing for one philosophy to another without much thought to their eternal destiny. Such folks are fertile ground for all kinds of foolish heresies.

Many people believe only in the satisfaction of their own lusts or desires. They want to get what they want, and they will go along with anyone who promises to deliver what they demand. This animalistic behavior is a broad way that leads only to destruction. Sadly, when those who think like this get what they say they want, they are still not happy. All around us we see people living lives of almost unbelievable wealth and privilege, and, yet, abusing themselves and others and wasting their lives in pursuit of a thrill.

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Perilous Times, 2 Timothy 3:1-5.
- T. — Last Day Scoffers, 2 Peter 3:2-4.
- W. — The Word Builds You Up, Acts 20:32.
- T. — In Everything Give Thanks,
1 Thessalonians 5:18.
- F. — Be Grounded in the Word!
2 Timothy 2:15.
- S. — Praying Always, Ephesians 6:18.

There is another way. As Jesus taught, we can know the truth and the truth will make us free and keep us free. Real liberty is knowing the truth and acting out of an unshakeable confidence that, through the power of God, you will ultimately be rewarded as a good and faithful servant.

Like a predatory animal, Satan will attack the straggler, the weak or wounded sheep who wanders away from the safety of the presence of the shepherd. The weaker we feel and the greater our need, the closer we should be drawn to our Great Shepherd. There is safety and security in the presence of our living Lord.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Remember What You Know

Jude 17-19

17. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18. How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

Although Jude gave a stern warning about false teachers, he also spoke the truth in love. Jude truly loved the people to whom he wrote this letter and he told them so. The term *beloved* is not a polite formality; it is the expression of the heart of the writer. Jude then offered a remedy to false teaching. The first thing we should do when confronted with questionable doctrine is to use our memories constructively. We should remember those who have taught us, and we should remember what they said to us.

There were many disciples but only a few apostles. An apostle is literally one sent on a mission, or given a specific responsibility. Jesus chose a few men to preserve and deliver His message for all ages. Jesus specifically said that His Word would not pass away even though Heaven and earth did pass away. His Word was preserved through the teachings and

writings of the apostles. When other doctrines arise, we are to first consider the source. Every so-called new revelation should be tested by the proven record of the message of the apostles. We have that record in the New Testament and every new idea should be tested by comparison with New Testament doctrine.

Then, we should consider what we have been taught. Hearing a great preacher is meaningless unless we absorb the lessons he has taught us. The apostles had specifically warned about the mockers who would come. I believe the phrase *last times* refers to the entire time period between the day of Pentecost and the second coming of Jesus. There have been many ages in the past and one always gave way to another. At the end of the church age and the return of Jesus, the kingdoms of this earth will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. All things will come to their fruition in Jesus Christ and His coming and the ensuing Millennium will mark the end of time as we now understand it.

This last time would be marked by three kinds of false preachers. There would be the scoffers. Peter also warned about this. A scoffer is one who puts his ability to doubt above the testimony of others who have believed. The apostles were eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus. They saw what He did and testified of it. The scoffers found ways to question and doubt. Remember, even though it has not happened to you, it does not mean that it has not happened.

Then, there were those who walked after their own lusts. As we noted earlier, false teachers have a hidden agenda. They are not primarily interested in spreading the truth because they are telling lies. They are interested in promoting their cause so that they can satisfy their own lusts. There is a sinful undercurrent to all false religion. It is often ignored by those taken in by false doctrine, but it is there, and, when we see it, we should reject those who practice sin in the name of God.

Finally, false religion is marked by separatism. False preachers always insist they alone have the truth. They claim to have special revelation that the unenlightened will never

understand. This is in sharp contrast with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus preached to everyone and He never excluded anyone from believing in Him or following Him. Separatism usually involves some appeal to our senses. Feelings and emotions take first place. Now, we are indeed emotional creatures, and there is nothing wrong with having strong feelings about what you believe. However, the truth must come first and then the feelings. Our feelings must be based on our faith, never the other way around. How we feel is never a valid test of truth.

Although false teachers often make great swelling claims about their spirituality, in truth they know nothing about the real ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will lead us into truth and magnify Jesus in the process. He will never testify about Himself. There is no true spiritual experience for its own sake. The true work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal more about Jesus.

II. Practice What You Know

Jude 20-23

20. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22. And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23. And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

What we know is of little use unless we put it into practice. When we learn about Jesus and then practice our faith every day, we inoculate ourselves from the virus of false doctrine. When we sit around idle studying things we never practice, we invite heresy into our hearts.

Jude challenged us to build our faith. We do this first through prayer. Prayer is our vital link with Heaven. We should pray about all matters and especially when we are confronted by confusing doctrines. Pray and study your Bible. This is the best response to any idea we do not understand. Then, we should keep ourselves in the love of God. The foundation of the

Christian life is our faith. The power to operate is available through prayer and the expression of what we believe is through our love for a lost world. The love of God is not a come and go sentiment that occasionally passes through our minds. True love is a lifelong and exclusive commitment to one person or one way of life. Married people should stop dating. Their commitment to and love for each other will prevent them from even considering another mate. In a like manner truly committed Christians should stop flirting with false doctrine. This is a matter of love and faithfulness.

Instead of constantly being on the lookout for a new and better doctrine, we should be looking for the mercy of our Lord and for eternal life. It is through the mercy of God that we live each day. Every human being lives one breath away from death. It is the mercy of God that allows us to enjoy our lives and serve the Lord. It is easy to take life for granted and forget that at any minute we can be called home. We should also keep in mind that we have eternal life through our faith in Jesus Christ. What Jesus gives us is not the temporary thrill of something new that we discover; it is the permanent change of soul that comes when we repent of our sins and place our faith in Him.

The eternal life that God has given us should cause us to be busy in God's service. We should allow God to talk to us through His Word; we should talk to Him every day as we pray, and we should talk to others about Jesus. Jude recognized that we will not like everyone we encounter. Some will appeal to us for various reasons and some will not. It is easy to recognize an intelligent person; they will agree with you in every way. When we meet someone who is agreeable and easy to love, we should witness to them and share with them the great blessing we have of knowing Jesus as our Savior.

When we meet others who are not so agreeable and who might be wearing the garments spotted by the flesh, we should witness to them as well. Even those who want to harm us need to hear the gospel. We are not asked to approve of evil actions, but we are asked to love lost souls.

Putting our faith into practice every day is one of the best and most practical steps we can take to protect ourselves from false doctrine and those who preach it.

III. Trust What You Know

Jude 24, 25

24. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

We have not placed our faith in cunning fables or the flights of imagination of evil men. We have believed in Jesus Christ and we are secure in Him. The closer we stay to Jesus, the more we are protected from falsehood. Jesus is able to help us and He is able to keep us from harm.

Jesus will keep us from falling. We cannot keep ourselves and we do not need to try. The security of our souls does not rest in our hands; it rests in the hands of God. No one will pluck the sheep of God out of the hand of God. Security and protection are the job of the shepherd, not the responsibility of the sheep.

God is at work in our lives. When He is through with us, all our faults will be purged and our sins will be forgiven. The dross of life will be taken away, and what is left will be the saved souls that will shine for Jesus through the ages. There is no false teaching in Heaven. There, we will only find glory and great joy.

Eventually, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. The wise will not only recognize that Jesus has dominion in the future, they will know He has it right now. Knowing this will make us want to stay as close to Jesus as we can, and staying close to Jesus is the best protection we can have from error of any kind.

A FINAL WORD

The warning of Jude is that the enemy is subtle, and the danger is great. But the resources of the most humble child of God are even greater. We do not have to stumble and

stagger at the promises of God. The resources God gives us are completely adequate for the task that is before us.

We must remember the Word of God. We cannot do that until we learn it. The hours we spend in study of the Bible are not wasted. When we learn the Word, we are laying up spiritual capital we can use when the demands of life come on us. We must study so we will be workmen that never need to be ashamed because we do not know what they need to know.

We must practice what we learn. It is easy to remember a lesson when you use what you learn every day. It is almost impossible to remember what we learn if we do not use it. What we learn that we do not use will soon evaporate from our minds and we will have to learn it again. Make your decisions and commitments. Keep your word and honor your promises. We expect this of each other and God expects it of all of us. When we do, we keep our minds and lives close to Jesus.

When we exercise spiritual discernment, Jesus adds His keeping power to us, and we will be safe from false teaching of every kind. Always remember that Jesus is working a great work in every one of His children and one day He will present us to God, holy and without blemish.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. One way to avoid false teaching is to remember the words spoken by Christ and the apostles. Be sure there is a scriptural basis for doctrinal truth. How can we remember better?

2. Does personal holiness and morality have an effect on one's teaching? Why or why not?

3. Is it surprising that moral failure and false teaching go together? Why or why not?

4. How can you "build up yourselves on your most holy faith" (verse 20)? What steps can you take?