

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN			
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Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 1

HAVING FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND WITH THE SON

Conservative scholars are agreed that the Apostle John wrote five books of the New Testament: namely, the Gospel of John; the Epistles, I John, II John, and III John; and the Book of Revelation. It is usually supposed that the Gospel of John was written between 85 and 90 A.D. Also the Epistles were written about the same time. There are different views as to the date of the Book of Revelation. Many think that it was written around 95 or 96 A.D. It is not however, necessary for us to know the exact date. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Gospel of John was written first and that the First Epistle was written as a supplement to the Gospel. Others are of the profound conviction that I John was kind of a prologue—an introduction to the Gospel. Either view is possible. The same general teaching pervades both the Gospel and the First Epistle. In fact, the first four verses of the First Epistle could be considered as a summary of the prologue of the Gospel, John 1:1-18.

The Apostle John, the writer of the Books mentioned above, assumed the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which is the basic teaching of the Scriptures. Moses declared the doctrine of the Trinity in Deuteronomy 6:4, which reads, when properly translated, “Hear O Israel, Jehovah our Gods is Jehovah a unity.” Originally in the Hebrew language, nouns were singular, dual, or plural—the smallest plural being three. The word translated “our Gods” in this verse is a plural noun with the pronominal suffix *our* added. There is, therefore, echoed in this passage the doctrine of three personalities constituting the one, true, and living God. Those who do not recognize the doctrine of the Holy Trinity cannot possibly see aright scores and scores of passages of the Scriptures.

In First Samuel, chapter three, we have a record of God’s calling Samuel into lifetime service. “Samuel grew, and Jehovah was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of Jehovah” (I Sam. 3:19,20). In the next verse we are told: “And Jehovah appeared again in Shiloh; for Jehovah revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of Jehovah.” The adverb “again” in this quotation points back to the time that God appeared to Samuel in Shiloh when He gave him his original call to service, as we read in this chapter. The Lord’s appearing to Samuel on this latter occasion is classified with the revelations that He had made to him in his early life. Concerning his call to service, we are told: “And Jehovah came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel” (I Sam. 3:10). Jehovah Himself appeared to Samuel and gave him his call. Since this last statement (I Sam. 3:21), referring to the revealing of Himself to Samuel at a later date, speaks of Jehovah’s revealing Himself by the Word of Jehovah, the former revelations were also the revelations of Jehovah by the Word of Jehovah. But, we are told that it was Jehovah Himself who appeared to Samuel and gave him his call. In one passage, the one appearing to Samuel is called Jehovah; in the other passage, the one appearing to Samuel is called the Word of Jehovah. When these facts are taken into consideration and read in the light of the New Testament, we are driven to the conclusion that Jehovah who at first appeared to Samuel in Shiloh is here called the Word of Jehovah. This statement in I Samuel 3:21 is, therefore, in anticipation of the doctrine of the revealing of the Second Person of the Trinity to man as seen in John 1:1-18—by the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us; namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah, we have an impersonation of Messiah by the prophet who plays the role of King Messiah when He appears upon earth the first time. This impersonation is found in Isaiah 48:1-16. Upon an examination of these verses, it is clear that the prophet was impersonating God, the Messiah, the Creator of the universe. He concludes this prediction with the following statement: "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; from the beginning I have not spoken in secret; From the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord Jehovah hath sent me, and his Spirit" (Isaiah 48:16). Here, the Creator of the universe (Isa. 48:13) speaks of Jehovah, the Father, as having sent Him, Jehovah the Son, and also of His having sent Jehovah the Holy Spirit. Thus the three divine personalities constituting the one true and living God are clearly set forth in this verse.

In the world-wide commission, recorded in Mathew 28:19,20, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity appears in all its clarity. According to this passage Jesus said to His disciples, to whom He appeared on a certain occasion, that all authority in heaven and upon earth had been given unto Him—to Him the God-man, the glorified God-man. They were, therefore, to go and make disciples of all the nations "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The disciples are here commanded to baptize people into the name [a noun, in the singular number] of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The three divine personalities appearing in this passage are co-eternal and co-equal.

In the passage under consideration, I John 1:1-4, two persons of the Holy Trinity appear—the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Though only two persons of the Holy Trinity are mentioned in these verses, the third person is mentioned in I John 3:24: "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us."

A comparison of I John 1:1-4 with John 1:1-18 shows that the writer in both passages has the same person in mind, namely, the Eternal Son of God who laid aside the glory that He had with the Father from all eternity and entered the world by miraculous conception and virgin birth. In the Gospel record, John declares that "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." In the First Epistle the same writer states, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life. ..." The neuter relative pronoun translated "that which" and occurring four times in verse one is not used personally, but is employed by John to embrace the divine nature of the Son and His human nature. That which was from the beginning—the Eternal Son of God—combined with the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ when He entered the world by virgin birth. In the Gospel of John the writer asserts that the Word was in the beginning with God and that life was in Him. Hence, He was and is the Word of Life. In this Epistle, John speaks of the Apostles' handling "that which" was from the beginning and of His being the Word of Life. In the Gospel, John declares that the Word was in the beginning, was God, and is God, and that this Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14). In view of these facts, it is quite evident that John in the Gospel is speaking in terms similar to those employed in the First Epistle and that he is speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle in the Gospel asserts that the Word, the Eternal Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. It is clear by comparing this passage with others that John was talking about the incarnation, which was

accomplished by miraculous conception and virgin birth. When the Eternal Word became flesh, He dwelt among men. For the first years of the earthly sojourn of Jesus, He lived a quiet life in Nazareth of Galilee. When He was about thirty, He stepped out on the stage of public activity and began His life's work in earnest. The initial step of His public activity was submitting to baptism by John, at which time the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and rested upon Jesus. By this visible demonstration, Jesus was identified as the coming Messiah of Israel (John 1:29-34). After submitting to temptations by the Devil for forty days and winning a signal victory on every point, Jesus began to call His disciples. The first to receive the call were Andrew and Peter, his brother, and Philip and Nathanael. From time to time, Jesus called others of His disciples. He finally chose from His many disciples the twelve Apostles to be His representatives to the people.

For approximately three and a fraction years, Jesus gave special training to the Apostles, His ambassadors to the nations. The twelve Apostles were daily associated with Christ in a personal way in order that they might know thoroughly and understand His teaching and have the same attitude toward the world that He held. They walked with him, they talked with Him, they ate and drank with him, and were associated with Him under various and sundry conditions; and they, figuratively speaking, felt His pulse on all occasions. Thus, John could say, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, and that which we have heard and our hands handled concerning the Word of Life. ..." These statements applied to the relationship and association that the Apostles had with Christ during His earthly ministry. They, therefore, had the testimony of their various senses—of seeing, of touching, and of hearing, three of the five physical senses. To this statement we may add that they had a sixth sense by which they perceived Him. They felt in their very souls His holy and divine spiritual life and being. Everyone whom we meet has an effect upon our spirit, and we react to his personality. So the Apostles reacted to the spirit of Jesus as they did to no one else, because there is no one who is equal to Him. The Apostles, therefore, were absolutely certain with reference to the Lord Jesus and His being what they claimed He was.

But when He was crucified and slain, He was buried, and with Him were buried the hopes of the disciples (Luke 24:13-35). They had thought that He was the One who would redeem Israel; but, by His tragic death, He was cut off out of the land of the living. The Apostles, in despair, gave up all hope of His being the Messiah and Saviour of the world. But, when He was raised from the dead, they were begotten, as the Apostle Peter said, unto a living hope by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (I Pet. 1:3-5).

After He was raised from the dead, He appeared at various times to the Apostles and to other disciples—on one occasion to above five hundred brethren at once. They were invited on one occasion to handle his body and see that He was not a spirit—that He was not a phantom, but a living person. The sixth sense, mentioned above, the contact of one spirit with another, confirmed to the Apostles that Jesus was the same One with whom they had been associated for three and a fraction years. They handled His body with their hands, they heard Him speak, and they examined Him critically and were convinced by the testimony of these various senses that He who appeared to them was none other than the One with whom they had been associated during His personal ministry, who had been crucified, but who had been raised from the dead, bringing life and immortality to life through the Gospel. In the bodily post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, there was present a new element, that of His glorified human nature added to His natural being. Thus the association with the glorified Jesus was a new hope and a

richer experience than that which Apostles had enjoyed with Him prior to His glorification. The apostle had fellowship with the glorified Christ.

John, therefore, wrote his letter to all disciples, showing them the joys and the spiritual riches of the fellowship that they may enjoy with Christ. He wanted the believers to have the same spiritual experiences daily. For this purpose, the Apostle wrote this Epistle.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 2

ENJOYING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

“5 And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7 but if we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus 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 righteous 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.”

I. Purpose of the First Epistle of John

Before delving into the rich treasures of the First Epistle of John, one should have clearly in mind the Apostle’s purpose in writing it: “These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, *even* unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God” (I John 5:13). In making known this glorious truth of eternal life for the born-again believer, John makes plain how one who believes on the name of the Son of God may be assured, without doubt, of his salvation. At the same time he offers to the believer a mirror wherein he can see his imperfections and correct them.

II. The Gnostic Heresy

To understand this Epistle, one should also know the main principles of Gnosticism, a mystical religion and philosophy prevalent in the Second Century, to combat which John wrote this first Epistle, as well as his Gospel.

1. Two Schools of Thought of Gnosticism

Of the different schools of thought of Gnosticism, or closely allied with it, two, in particular are pertinent to a study of the First Epistle. The adherents to Docetism, called the Docetae (from the Greek word *dokein*, meaning “to appear”), denied that Jesus had an actual physical body. Instead, they said, He only appeared to have a body. If it had any reality, its substance was celestial, not physical. Thus they theorized away the suffering of Christ, as well as His Resurrection and Ascension. The Cerintheans, the followers of Cerinthus, maintained that Jesus was wholly man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and that the Christ nature descended upon Him, investing Him with power, at His baptism and left Him at the Crucifixion. They also averred that, on the Cross, He cried out, not “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,” but “My power, my power is leaving me.”

From the very beginning of the First Epistle, John declares that reality of the physical body of Jesus and His divinity, in refutation of the Docetae and of the Cerintheans.

2. Three Degrees of Gnosticism

The followers of Gnosticism passed through three stages of development. To the initiates, Gnosticism was a way of life, a moral code. The psychic advanced from this initial stage into the intellectual realm, into a study of the psyche or the mind. Those who attained the third and ultimate stage, the pneumatikos (from the Greek word *pneuma*, meaning “soul, spirit”), claimed to have had all the dross of their old nature burned out; in other words, they maintained that they had attained sinless perfection. In the First Epistle, therefore, John very assiduously deals with the subject of sin.

III. The Message of the First Epistle: God is Light

Immediately after the introduction to the First Epistle, John declares : “And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (v. 5). Long before, the Psalmist David had proclaimed this same vital message.

“Jehovah is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
Jehovah is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid? (Ps. 27:1)

“For with thee is the fountain of life:
In thy light shall we see light” (Ps. 36:9)

“For Jehovah God is a sun and a shield:
Jehovah will give grace and glory;
No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11).

John himself, in the Prologue to his Gospel, affirms:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4).

In talking with Nicodemus, Jesus stated: “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

On a later occasion, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Then, in His last public discourse, He again declared, “Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. 36 While ye have the light, believe the light, that ye may become sons of light” (John 12:35,36).

IV. The Two Walks of Life

1. The Negative Walk

Following the message of light, John sets forth the two walks of life, the negative and the positive. The negative appears in verse 6: "If we say that we have fellowship with him [God] and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ..." The walk in darkness is negative, like walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of scoffers, of which the Psalmist speaks in Psalm 1. Paul sets forth the negative walk as fulfilling the lust of the flesh:

"16 But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may do the things that ye would. 18 But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, 21 envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal.5:16-21).

2. The Positive Walk

In sharp contrast with the negative walk is the positive, which John sets forth in verse 7 of the first Epistle: "... but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The walk in the light is positive, the walk by the Spirit, of which Paul wrote:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 meekness, self-control; against such there is no law. 24 And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.

"25 If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us walk. 26 Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal.5:22-26).

Paul further describes the positive walk as the one whereby the born-again believer attains unto "the stature of the fulness of Christ":

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called. 2 with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. 7 But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith,

When he ascended on high,
he led captivity captive,
And gave gifts unto men.

9 (Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave some *to be* apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: 13 till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men in craftiness, after the wiles of error; 15 but speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, *even Christ...*" (Ephesians 4:1-15).

By the positive walk, by the walk in the light, one has fellowship with God. How greatly this fellowship is desired is reflected in Psalms 42 and 43, which are practically one in refrain and thought, the great longing for God in a time of trouble. Likewise David, at a time of affliction, sought refuge in the fellowship of God:

"My soul waiteth in silence for God only:
From him cometh my salvation [deliverance]" (Ps. 62:1).
"O God, thou art my God;
Earnestly will I seek thee:

My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee,
In a dry and wary land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1).

V. Sin in the Flesh

Verse 8 of the First Epistle of John is of prime importance, because it is a refutation of Cerinthean doctrine of sinless perfection: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Unfortunately this English translation is not the best. A better reading is "If we say that we do not have sin, we lead ourselves astray, and the truth is not in us." In English having the negative adjective *no* modifying the noun *sin* gives the same meaning as having the negative adverb *not* modifying the verb *do have*, but in Greek the adjectival negative here has a different shade of meaning from that of the adverbial. John expressly uses the latter expression and, by so doing, is saying that, if we claim that we have not sin, we deny the principle of sin and are claiming freedom from sin in the flesh, and, therefore, "we lead ourselves astray, and the truth is not in us." John is refuting the claim of the Cerinthean pneumatikos to sinless perfection.

Paul gives eloquent testimony of the existence of sin in the flesh in his Epistle to the Romans, chapter 7. This important passage is often misunderstood to be a personal experience of Paul, whereas he actually identifies himself with mankind and relates a universal experience. It has no personal application to Paul apart from that which it has to any other human being. The entire chapter is of great significance; but, for brevity, only part of it is here quoted: "18 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good *is* not. 19 For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise. 20 But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. 21 I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present. 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23 but I see a different law in my members, waring against the law of my mind, bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in

my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I of myself with the mind, indeed, serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:17-25).

The Scriptures do, indeed, teach that, by allowing Christ to dwell in us until we become, as Paul says, "crucified with Christ," so that it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20), we can live a sinless life. But nowhere do the Scriptures teach that we can divest ourselves of our sinful nature and thereby attain sinless perfection, as the Cerinthian pneumatikos claimed to do.

Having attacked this heresy in verse 8 of the First Epistle, John continues: "9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. There is a vast difference between the theory that we can free ourselves of our sinful nature and the truth here stated that, by confessing our sins, we can through the Lord Jesus Christ be cleansed from all unrighteousness.

In Proverbs 20:9, Solomon declares: "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" Then, in Proverbs 28:13, he states:

"He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper;
But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy."

Likewise John writes in Revelation 1:5b-7: "Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; 6 and he made us *to be* a kingdom, *to be* priests unto his God and father; to him *be* the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen."

John continues in the First Epistle, in regard to sin, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (v. 10). Whereas in verse 8 John points out the error of claiming sinless perfection, he here shows the error of claiming that we have committed no specific act of sin. As Paul says, "... All sinned, and are falling short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, literal translation).

Also to be noted is the consequences of believing these two false theories concerning sin. If we claim sinless perfection, we fool ourselves, but not necessarily others. If we claim that we have not sinned, we commit the far more serious error of making God a liar. We put at nought the promise of God to forgive sin and render needless His whole plan of salvation.

As stated at the beginning of this study, John wrote the First Epistle to counteract the false teachings of the Gnostics, in particular that of the Docetae and the Cerinthians. In it he shows clearly the sinful nature of man and his committing sin. He holds up a mirror wherein one can see himself as he is. Yet, as later studies will reveal, John shows how one who believes on the name of the Son of God may, not only be assured of his salvation, but also live without sinning.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 3

VICTORIOUS LIFE IN CHRIST

“My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. 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 ours only, but also for the whole world. 3 And hereby we 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 hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him: 6 he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked” (I John 2:1-6).

As we have already seen, John in this Epistle is showing the believers their fellowship with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ. Since we have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light, we should walk in close fellowship with Him day by day. The one who claims to be a child of God should walk in the light. His doing so is proof of his being a child of God.

My Little Children

The Apostle John was an old man when he wrote this epistle and looked upon the believers to whom he wrote as little children, as his little children. He, of course, was writing this letter to believers of a certain community with whom he was very well acquainted; hence he could say, “My little children.” It is quite possible that John’s use of the term “my little children” harks back to the object lesson which Jesus taught His disciples, and which is recorded in Matthew, chapter 18. His disciples had a controversy concerning who was the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. In order to teach the true attitude and outlook of the believer, the Lord Jesus called a little child and put him in the midst of the company and declared that except one becomes as a little child he can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. When believers are spoken of as “little children,” we can see the connection between the lesson which Jesus taught the Apostles and John’s views of this term. The Apostle Paul likewise thought of his converts as his children. “I write not these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet *have ye* not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel. 16 I beseech you therefore, be ye imitators of me. 17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church” (I Cor. 4:14-17).

That Ye May Not Sin

“My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin.” The Greek text shows that the word which is translated “sin” is in the aorist tense, which form indicates a single act. By the use of this tense John shows the Christians how they may live above and without sin. Note especially that he is not showing or implying that people can have their sinful nature purged out of their being and can reach a state where it is impossible for them to sin. Throughout the epistle John refutes that idea. Here he shows how believers

can live in close touch and fellowship with the Lord day by day, hour by hour, and moment by moment, so that they may not commit sin. Such a life is the normal one that is held up before the Christians of the New Testament period. Notwithstanding this fact we hear very little of the victorious life in Christ taught in these days of spiritual lethargy. The doctrine of the victory in Christ is such an important one that I wish to devote some time to it and to examine several Scriptures which present this glorious teaching.

The Apostle Paul told the church at Rome that they should not be fashioned according to the world, “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Note the fact that this passage shows that it is possible for people to live so very close to God and be renewed in their minds that they can prove or demonstrate what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. What kind of life is this which is set forth and which is possible? It is one that shows the perfect will of God. Such is evidently a life of victory in Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote the Roman letter and the one to the Galatians at the same time. In the latter book, he declares: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, *the faith* which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). Paul claimed that Christ was living His life in him, but that he himself was not living this life in his own strength. On the contrary, the Son of God was living in him this perfect life. With this sober fact in mind I would have the reader turn to Ephesians 5:22-33 and carefully read the entire passage. Then I would urge him to study verses 25-27 of this passage: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; 26 that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word.” In these verses, the Apostle declares Christ cleansed and washed the church, “that He might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). What kind of life is this that God has in view for those who constitute His church? There is but one answer, that is the victorious life in Christ. To the Philippian Church Paul wrote: “Do all things without murmurings and questionings; that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, 16 holding forth the word of life; that I may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain neither labor in vain” (Phil. 2:14-16). Here again the Apostle shows that it is possible for the born-again believer to live the victorious life in Christ. In this connection, one should turn to Colossians 3:1-11 and not only read, but meditate seriously upon each statement and each admonition. In this passage, the Christians are urged to put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of God who created him. To the Church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul showed that he and his co-laborers were living the victorious life in Christ. “Ye are witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe: 11 as ye know how we *dealt with* each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging *you*, and testifying, 12 to the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:10-12). Now, read the following: “Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; 3 knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. 4 And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4). Note especially the statement of verse 4. “And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.” If the people of God would only follow the instructions given in all these verses, they would be “perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.”

There is a final passage at which we should look on this point. “Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; in *your* virtue knowledge; 6 and in *your* knowledge self-control and in *your* self-control patience; and *your* patience godliness; 7 and in *your* godliness brotherly kindness; and in *your* brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins. 10 Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: 11 for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:5-11). In this passage, the Apostle Peter urges Christians to supply in their faith the seven Christian graces. He concludes his exhortation by saying: “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble ...” (vs. 10). According to this passage, if one will supply the Christian graces mentioned in the passage, in his faith, he will be brought to the point that he will never stumble. Of course, the stumbling of which he is speaking is spiritual and moral. This passage most emphatically teaches that it is possible to live the victorious life in Christ.

Jesus Christ Our Advocate

“We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (I John 2:1). The late Dr. A. T. Robertson tersely declared: “The Holy Spirit is God’s Advocate on earth with men, for Christ is man’s Advocate with the Father (as seen in such passages as John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).” As Dr. Robertson has pointed out, Christ is our Advocate before God. Romans 8:31-39, here quoted in part, so declares: “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who is against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth; 34 who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:31-34). He is also presented in the same capacity in Hebrews 7:25, which reads as follows: “Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” He is our Helper, Advocate or Lawyer, pleading our cause with the Father. He has been touched with the feeling of our infirmities and is, therefore, a faithful and merciful high priest presenting our cases in the presence of God.

John called Jesus our high priest, the righteous One. He is righteous in that He was sinless and spotless. Though He was in the form of man, He did not partake of man’s fallen nature, being pure, holy, and divine. He was altogether righteous. He is, therefore, the propitiation for our sins and for those of the entire world. By His blood atonement, He made satisfaction for all of our sin—past, present, and future. Not only did he make propitiation for the sins of believers, but He also made propitiation for the sins of all the world. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus tasted death for every man. “But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, *even* Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every *man*” (Heb. 2:9). Paul in 1 Timothy 2:5, 6, declares that Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. Thus by the Atonement of Christ, satisfaction was made for the sins of all men.

Discipleship

“And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments: (I John 2:3). Throughout the epistle, John gives several tests whereby the believer can ascertain whether or not he is in real fellowship with God, and with His Son, Jesus Christ. According to this statement, a person may claim that he knows Jesus Christ in a personal manner; but, if he does not keep His commandments, that fact is proof that he does not know Christ in a real, spiritual sense. “He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him...” (I John 2:4). The general walk of a person is the telltale whether or not his profession of Christ is genuine. One who claims that he knows Christ and is ignoring and violating the commandments of Christ, such a one is a liar, and the truth of God is not in his heart. On the other hand, “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected” (I John 2:5). Keeping the commandments of Christ does not make one a child of God or keep him in that relationship. But the keeping of the commandments is proof that the one who is claiming to know Christ is genuine and has been born again. His failing to keep the commandments of Christ, to walk as He did, is proof that there has been no regeneration, and that the one thus claiming to know Christ is false.

Abiding and Walking in Christ

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked” (I John 2:6). If one is genuinely saved and is abiding in Christ, his walk will correspond to his profession. By the power of Christ, one can walk as He walked. Without divine assistance one cannot abide in Him and walk as He walked.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 4

LIVING IN VICTORY IN CHRIST

The passage which we have for this month's meditation is I John 2:7-17, which begins with the word "beloved." John thinks of believers as the "beloved ones" because they love God and Jesus Christ and because the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts. They have been brought into a very close fellowship with Christ and with one another. As we have already seen in I John 2:1, the Apostle speaks of the believers as his "little children." This thought again appears in I John 2:12.

A New Commandment to Believers

John speaks to the believers, saying, "Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard" (I John 2:7). In other words, John says that he is not springing some new teaching or doctrine upon them, but is simply calling attention to what they had heard from the beginning of their Christian experience or from the first time that they heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is quite possible that the thing to which he refers is the message of loving God and ones neighbor as oneself—as taught in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:5). Such a message was old and familiar to those to whom he was writing. This old commandment, according to this verse, is the word which they had heard from the very beginning of their acquaintance with the Gospel.

After stating that he is not giving them a new commandment, the Apostle in verse 8 declares: "Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth." Though the Apostle is not springing some new doctrine upon them, but is simply devoting his attention to that which they already knew, he could say that he was speaking to them about a new commandment. The old commandment, instructions, or charge which they had heard from the beginning probably took on a new meaning to them at some time or in some spiritual experience. I can understand the statement quite well, I think, in the light of my experiences from time to time. Frequently passages of Scripture which I have known for years seem to become new to me and jump, as it were, out of the Book right into my face; and though old, so far as I am concerned, yet they become new—new, richer, deeper, and wider than ever before. It is quite likely that such a meaning is that which John intends to convey. The Apostle Peter recognizes that Christians should grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. Thanksgiving, worship, and Christian life, in the light of our experiences and walk with God, often take on a new meaning.

Concerning this old-new commandment, the Apostle declares that it is true in Christ and in those to whom he is writing. Christ is the very embodiment of truth. To the Apostles, the Lord Jesus, according to John 14:6, declared, "I am the way the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Christ was the very embodiment of truth. The message of Christ, which has been delivered to the believers, was true not only in Christ, but in themselves, for God verified the truth in their lives.

The reason for John's making that statement was that "the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth." Originally, the human family knew God, as is seen in Romans 1:18-23, but they refused to retain God in their knowledge. Then they became vain in their reasonings and turned to idolatry. Doubtless the prince of darkness blinded their eyes so that they could not see the truth under any conditions. Though the true Light—Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12)—was shining and its rays were reaching to the uttermost parts of the earth (Col. 1:23), yet darkness was everywhere. Though the dense darkness was in John's day beginning to disappear or recede, it has not yet passed away and never will until Christ, the Light of the World, returns at the end of the Tribulation and illuminates the world with the rays of His glorious light. When Christ comes to the earth and sets up His Kingdom, Satan the prince of darkness, will be incarcerated in the pit of the abyss. The demons likewise will be imprisoned in the abyss so that they cannot touch the human family. Then this message of the true light shining will become a reality in its fullness.

In view of the passing away of the dense darkness and the shining of the true light in the world, the Apostle declares that, if anyone claims that he is walking in the light, but at the same time he hates his brother, such a one is still in darkness, regardless of his opinion and his claim. If such a believer claims that he is walking in the light and still hates his brother, he is in the dark—never having been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col. 1:13). The fact that one hates his brother is proof that he is still in darkness, is walking in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes and he cannot see properly and correctly anything at which he looks. This thought is involved in verses 9 and 11.

On the other hand, the Christian who loves his brother, states the Apostle, abides in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. The stumbling of which John is speaking is sinning, doing wrong. One who has really and truly been regenerated loves his brother and has no occasion of going into sin. The promise that there is no occasion of stumbling in him is similar to Peter's statement in his second Epistle, chapter 1, verses 5 to 11. The born-again person who supplies in his faith the seven Christian graces, here mentioned, can reach a point that he will never stumble. Never go off into sin (2 Peter 1:10).

The Special Message to God's Little Children

In I John 2:12, the Apostle uses a different word from the one appearing in 2:1, though it is translated alike, "my little children." John, who had grown in grace and in the knowledge of the truth, had been perfected in love and had been drawn very close to the children of God wherever they were, spoke in the most endearing manner of his day, "little children."

The over-all reason for John's writing his Epistle was "that ye may know that ye have eternal life, *even* unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God" (I John 5:13). In 2:12-14 John names certain groups and gives a direct message to them. In verse 12 he calls those to whom he writes his "little children" and states that he is writing to them because their sins are forgiven or have been forgiven them for His name's sake. This truth is a glorious one. Their sins—all their sins, past, present, future—had been forgiven them because they had become childlike, had surrendered their lives and hearts to the Lord Christ, and had trusted Him for salvation. When they did so, all of their sins were forgiven them. They were forgiven, not because of their goodness or of their knowledge, or of anything that they possessed, or had done, but

because of their believing on the name of the only begotten Son of God—who left immortal glory, took upon Himself the form of man, went to the cross, and suffered and died in their behalf. Whenever anyone comes to Christ and accepts Him, He, the Lord Jesus, will blot out all of his sins and remember them against him no more forever. A glorious thought this is!

In verse 13 John begins to speak more specifically to certain ones. He begins by saying that he is writing to the fathers, that is, the elderly brethren, because they know Christ who was and is from the beginning. They had accepted Christ. They had been regenerated, born again, and knew Him in a personal manner. John asserts that they know Christ, “who is from the beginning.” This statement evidently is an echo from John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Let us be very careful in interpreting the expression “the beginning,” because it is to be understood in the light of the immediate context where it appears.

In the next place, John addresses the young men, and declares that he is writing to them, “because ye have overcome the evil one.” The young men addressed were young, immature Christians—those who had been believers a short time. John addresses them and commends them because they have “overcome the evil one.” The “evil one” whom they had overcome was none other than Satan, the enemy of God and man. There is such a thing as being triumphant over Satan. In Romans, chapter 8, the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers that they were “more than conquerors through Him that loved us” and gave Himself up for us. One cannot fight Satan in his own strength and win the battle. In order for one to be successful in overcoming Satan, he must be made strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, as the Apostle Paul urges in Ephesians 6:10-20. If one is strong in faith, Satan will leave him. Read especially James 4:5-10. In this connection, also study carefully I Peter 5:5-10. In conflicts with Satan the believer should look to the Lord Jesus Christ and turn the devil’s case over to Him, claiming the power of the blood of Christ. On this point, study Revelation 12:11, 12: “And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death. 12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea: because the devil is gone unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.” According to the teaching of the various writers of the New Testament, as has already been shown in preceding meditations of this series, the believer who is fully surrendered to Christ can live a victorious life in Him. The Apostle Paul declared that he lived in victory: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that *life* which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, *the faith* which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

In the latter part of verse 13, John changes his point of view from that of himself as the writer of the epistle to that of those to whom he writes. He naturally speaks of the letter as having been written because it has been written by the time it reaches the addressee; hence, he said, “I have written.” In the third place, John declares to the “little children” that he is writing to them because they know the Father. He is writing to them because they know the Father in a personal manner, and because he wants to increase their knowledge and stimulate their love for Him.

Having addressed the “little children,” John again speaks to the fathers, saying that he has written unto them because they know Him “who is from the beginning,” the Christ, who was in the beginning, all Eternity of the past. They were growing in grace and in knowledge of the truth.

John declares that he has written to the young men, “because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one” (verse 14). These young believers were strong, not in their own might, but in the might of the Lord. They loved the Lord and meditated upon His Word and understood it. The Word was abiding in their hearts and controlling their lives. They, therefore, were able to conquer the evil one.

The Christian’s Attitude Toward the World

In verse 15, John urges the Christian to assume a definite attitude toward the world: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” The world and all things therein are only temporary, and soon pass. Life is but a vain show, as we are taught in the book of Ecclesiastes. Man at his best estate is simply vanity, declared the inspired writer in Psalm 39. A redeemed person should never center his affections upon the things of the world (Col 3:1-4). If any believer should disregard this exhortation, the love of God has no place in his soul.

All things that are in the world—“the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life” – are not of the Father, but are of the world. The world will pass away, and the lust thereof, but the one who from the depths of his soul does the will of God will abide forever.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 5

THE LAST DISPENSATION
The Message of I John 2:18-29

“Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour” (I John 2:18). The word in the original text translated “hour” is used with various connotations. The facts of each context where it is used must be consulted in order to determine its significance in a given case. In John 2:4 Jesus said to His mother, “Mine hour is not yet come.” Here the word “hour” signifies some special time, a time of crisis. In John 4:23 Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers.” From the context, we see that Jesus was talking of the time when true worshippers do not have to go to a local mountain to worship, or to Jerusalem, but that men can worship God anywhere provided they worship in spirit and in truth. In the light of the facts of the context, it is clear that He was talking about the Christian dispensation, which was dawning when Jesus was here on earth.

According to 2 Timothy 1:8-11, grace was given us in Christ Jesus, “before times eternal” Literally, the Greek says, “before ionian times.” When this passage, with related ones, is studied in the light of the context, it is clear that the Apostle was speaking about the ages of the past which intervened between the time of the original creation and the time when God repaired the wreckage wrought by the catastrophe set forth in Genesis 1:2. In other words, Paul was speaking about the gap of time between the creation of the universe and the work of restoration recorded in Genesis, chapter 1. From various passages of Scripture, we see that there were ages upon ages before the creation, and that there will be ages upon ages of the future after the passing away (Rev. 20:11) of the present material universe and the creation of the eternal order.

Time, that period of eternity during which the material universe is in existence, is also divided into ages or dispensations. In I John 2:18, the Apostle states that the period during which he was living is the last age or dispensation—the last age before the glorious Kingdom Era, when Christ will reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. The writer of Hebrews, in speaking of Christ’s death, declared, “But now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

The word “hour” is used in the same sense of referring to a period of time in John 5:28, 29: “Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, 29 and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” In speaking of this future dispensation—the millennium—Christ declares that the hour comes in which all will be raised: those who have done good in a resurrection of life, and those who have practiced evil unto a resurrection of judgment. When we examine this passage in the light of Revelation 20:1-5, we see that the resurrection of the righteous occurs at the beginning of the millennium—the thousand years’ reign of Christ—whereas the lost, those who have practiced evil are raised at the conclusion of the millennium.

Many Antichrists

“... even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour.” Jesus foretold the coming of false prophets and false Christs: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24). Jesus, moreover, declared in the same sermon: “For many shall come in my name, saying I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray” (Matt. 24:5). There are two elements meeting in and blending together in the word “antichrist.” One of the fundamental meanings of “anti” is “instead of” or “in behalf of.” There also is in this word the idea of opposition. The Antichrist is one who palms himself off as the true Messiah and in so doing he opposes Christ; thus there is a blending of the two ideas.

The fact that there were, declared John, those who claimed to be the Christ proves that we are in the last dispensation. Rabbi Abba Silver, in his book *Messianic Speculations In Israel*, shows that from time to time there have arisen various ones who claimed that they were the true Messiah. Prior to the Christian dispensation, so far as I have been able to learn, no individuals ever made claims to Messianic honors. The fact that certain ones were claiming that they were the Messiah was evidence to John that we, in this dispensation, are in the last one.

The antichrists of whom John was speaking were associated with the body of true believers to whom John was writing. For some specific reason, which the Apostle does not reveal, these antichrists withdrew from the body of believers, as we see in verse 19. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us they would have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us.”

The Anointing of Believers

“And ye have an anointing 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 because no lie is of the truth” (1 John 2:20,21). John told the Christians that they, had an anointing from the Holy One, the Holy Spirit, and that they, therefore, knew “all things.” There is a variation in this verse in the very best manuscripts. The Greek text, which I always use, has as the American Standard Version renders this passage, “and ye all know.” I am persuaded that this is the correct text. Certainly John did not mean to state that Christians know everything. Today, with all of our knowledge, no one would claim to know everything. The more we learn, the less we see we know. But if we adhere to the text and flow of thought, John obviously meant that all of the Christians to whom he was writing knew thoroughly the Apostolic teaching concerning antichrists and their diabolical work.

They knew it, not only because of the illumination of the Spirit in their souls, but because of the truth that they had in the writing of the Scriptures. For John then states, “I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”

In everyone who has been born again the Holy Spirit resides as a permanent guest. He will enlighten us if we depend upon Him in faith and give us spiritual understanding of the Word so that we may see and understand the truth.

David prayed for such illumination in Psalm 119:18. See especially the prayer of the Apostle Paul for spiritual understanding set forth in Ephesians 1:15-23.

The Antichrist

“Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, *even* he that denieth the Father and the Son. 23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also” (I John 2:22, 23). References to the Antichrist appear here and there in the Old Testament, though that name does not occur. He is spoken of as “the willful king” and his high-handed rule and ruthless domination of the world are set forth in Daniel 11:36ff. He is also the “little horn” of Daniel 7:23-25. He is spoken of as “the man of sin,” the “son of perdition,” by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2. John, in Revelation, chapter 13, speaks of the Antichrist as “the beast” (the first of the two beasts in that chapter, the second one being his assistant or right-hand man).

The Message of Truth Abiding In the Heart

“As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise which he promised us, *even* the life eternal” (I John 2:24,25). The Psalmist David said that he had stored up the Word of the Lord in his heart that he might not sin against God. Believers are urged to study the Word and to treasure it in their hearts. See Proverbs 2:1-5 for the conditions of understanding the Word. If the Word of Christ abides richly in our hearts, it will control our every thought and act.

False Teachers

“These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray” (I John 2:26). John was aware that false teachers would attempt to lead true believers astray. Jesus sounded this same note. The Apostle Paul likewise warned the elders of the Church at Ephesus to beware of such (Acts 20:17ff.).

But John assured the believers that the illumination of the Spirit of God in the heart, together with the Word of God, would prevent their being led astray into error.

The Coming of the Lord

“And now, *my* little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (I John 2:28). Some have supposed that John believed Christ would come in his day and time. The language of this verse, apart from all related Scriptures, may be thus interpreted; but when Matthew chapters 24 and 25 are studied thoroughly, it is seen that Jesus spoke in regard to His return. In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus pictures Himself as the man who went into a far country, but delivered to his servants his goods before his departure. It is clear tht Jesus is represented by the man in the parable who goes into a “far country” –to Heaven. “Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them” (Matt. 25:19). Jesus here speaks of His return as being after “a long time.” In the parable of the pounds, Luke 19, the nobleman goes to a far country and, according to Matthew, returns home after a “long time.” In view of these facts, one logically concludes that Jesus

meant to teach that He would not come back immediately. According to 2 Peter, chapter 1, the Lord showed Peter how Peter would die and glorify Him. In view of these facts, it is hard to see how the Apostles could expect Jesus' return in their own day and time.

But to us who are now living, the signs of the times indicate that we are fast approaching the time of His return.

Let us, therefore, be up and doing, serving the Master while we have time and opportunity.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 6

HOLY LIVING
The Message of I John 3:1-12

It is very unfortunate that the chapter divisions of the Scriptures frequently are improperly placed. Chapter three of our epistle is separated from verse twenty-nine of the preceding chapter, upon which this passage is based: “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him” (I John 2:29). The germinal thought is found in the expression “begotten of him.” The child inherits the characteristics and the nature of the parents. God, who is our Father, is, says John, righteous. Everyone, therefore, who has been begotten of Him is likewise righteous, having inherited the characteristics of the Father. This new nature that is implanted in the soul of the one who is born again will ordinarily assert itself in the life and conduct of the individual.

The Children of God

Since we are children of God by virtue of having been begotten of Him and been born again, John is led to exclaim, “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and *such* we are.” It seems almost impossible for mortal man, with his limited outlook, to comprehend the thought that the eternal Holy God can love us with such an intense love as He does. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God loved us and Christ died for us in order that we might have life, and that we should now be called the children of God. We accept the scriptural teaching by faith, because God has thus spoken. We believe Him and are convinced that we are at the present time—in this life—children of God in the scriptural sense of the term.

When Christ was here upon earth, the people of the world, though they saw Him and were intimately associated with Him, did not recognize him. Had the rulers of the world recognized Him, they would not have killed Him, the Lord of Glory. “We speak wisdom, however, among them that are fullgrown: yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nought: 7 but we speak of God’s wisdom in a mystery, *even* the *wisdom* that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory: 8 which none of the rulers of this world hath known; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory: ...” (I Cor. 2:6-8). Since the world did not recognize Jesus, we are not surprised that they do not recognize the children of God today.

“Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be.” The joys of the new birth and the unlimited blessing which we have in Christ are far beyond human description. Our spiritual blessings are but a foretaste of what we shall receive when the Lord Jesus returns for His saints. When Christ was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, radiations of divine glory sparkled forth from His entire body; then this manifestation of His glory ceased. Since we shall be glorified with Him when He comes, it is quite reasonable to suppose that our immortal bodies will scintillate with His glory. This much, we may assume; but the extent of the glorification and the manner of it, do not yet appear.

At the second coming of Christ we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. When Christ came to earth by miraculous conception and virgin birth, He took upon Himself the form of man and offered Himself for our redemption. He arose again with the same body, which had been glorified. When He ascended to Heaven, He did so in His glorified immortal body. When He returns, He will come back in that same glorified immortal body; then our bodies will be fashioned anew like His. Throughout Eternity we shall be associated with the glorified Son of God. Nothing is said in the Scriptures as to the special relationship which we shall sustain toward the Father and God the Holy Spirit, who did not assume human bodies, as Christ did.

Every person who has accepted Christ and has been born again has this hope of becoming like the glorified Saviour. Everyone, therefore, who has this hope set upon Christ, John asserts, “purifies himself, even as he is pure.” Being born again into the family of God and having the hope of being like Christ, every Christian who takes his salvation seriously purifies himself—by availing himself of the spiritual means provided for such a holy life. On this point, read and study carefully 2 Peter 1:1-11.

Christ Free From Every Vestige of Sin

The Apostle Paul, in II Cor. 5:21, asserts that Christ “knew no sin”; that is, there was no sin in His flesh—the principle of sin, which is a diabolical force driving people to do wrong (Rom. 7:7-26). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews asserted that Christ had been tempted in all points as we are “yet without sin.” As is seen in John, chapter 8, Christ challenged His opponents to point to one sin of which He was guilty. They, of course, were unable to mention one single sin. Hence John asserts that Christ was pure and, therefore, urges those who are members of the body of Christ to purify themselves, even as Christ was pure—a very high standard of life.

Sin and Lawlessness

“Everyone that doeth sin doeth lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” The word “sin” primarily means to miss the mark. Everyone who is missing the mark morally and spiritually is also guilty of lawlessness. Whenever one does wrong, regardless of what he does, he is violating some one or more principles of God’s eternal government. The sinner, therefore, is a lawless character.

In verse 5, the Apostle asserts that Christ was “manifested to take away sins.” Sins used in the plural number refer to separate acts. Christ died, therefore, to take away sins—all wrong acts and evil thoughts of all people. He tasted death for every man. In I John 2:2, the Apostle declares that Christ is “the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” Since Christ died for our sins and for those of the whole world, He died to remove or cancel all the sins of the people of the entire world—who in faith accept His atonement.

In John 1:29, John the Baptist, pointing to Christ, says: “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” Here sin is used in the singular number and is a collective noun embracing all the sins of mankind.

Christ, who came to take away all sins—past, present, and future—had no sin in Him. Had there been sin in Him, He could not have made an offering acceptable to a Holy God.

Abiding in Christ

“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him” (verse 6). It is very unfortunate that the translators did not give the literal rendering of the verbs of this passage. The two participles rendered “abiding” and “sinning,” and the finite verb rendered “sinneth” (keeps on sinning) of this verse—and of most of them appearing in this block of Scripture—are in the linear verb stem. An accurate rendering of the verse is “Whosoever keeps on abiding in him [Christ] does not keep on sinning: Whosoever keeps on sinning has not seen him neither hath known him.” If one is really abiding in Christ, he does not keep on sinning. The one who has been begotten of God, and who is keeping on sinning, has not seen Him in the real, spiritual sense; neither has known Him in the same manner. That Christians do wrong at times is assumed in I John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” What John is emphasizing is that born again people inherit from God, their Father, a holy nature, which does not express itself in living a sinful life. On the contrary, this nature expresses itself in holy, clean living.

Following this statement, John warns believers against false teaching: “Little children, let no one keep on leading you astray” (v. 7). He again asserts, “He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.” Following this thought, the Apostle again asserts that the one who keeps on sinning is of the devil, for the “devil sinneth from the beginning.” This statement shows that John is speaking about Christians living clean, holy lives seven days out of every week. To this end, the Son of God was manifested to “destroy the works of the devil.” Some Christians excuse themselves by saying that we sin every day and that we have to—cannot do otherwise. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, the chief of which is to cause people to keep on sinning.

In making these statements, I am not advocating the doctrine of sinless perfection, for this teaching is contrary to the Scriptures. The Bible teaches that the born-again person can avail himself of the power of God and can keep on living a clean, holy life in fellowship with his Maker.

The One Begotten of God

“Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God” (verse 9). Properly and accurately translated, this verse reads, “Whosoever is begotten of God does not keep on sinning because his seed keeps on abiding in him and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been begotten of God.” The reason the one who is begotten of God does not keep on sinning is that his seed—the new nature implanted in the soul at the time of regeneration—abides in him and enables him to live a pure, clean life.

Contrast Between the Children of God and the Children of the Devil

“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” (verse 10). Since the new nature manifests itself in

holy living, and since the old nature likewise manifests itself in a wicked, ungodly life, one who has spiritual perception can detect which one is a child of God and which is not. One not doing righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who fails to love his brother.

The Message of Love

“For this is the message ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: 12 not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (verses 11 and 12). Cain’s heart was not right with God. Stirred with jealousy, he slew his brother. Envy and jealousy are horrible forces which spring forth in the lives of myriads of people; but those who are born again and are Spirit-filled are delivered from such lives. May God keep us in the center of His holy, directive will and may we glorify Him in our living.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 7

ACID TESTS PROVING OUR SALVATION

In the preceding study of this series, we saw that the one who keeps on walking in the light and keeps on living as Jesus lived will not and does not continue to live in sin. “Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God” (I John 3:9). As we have also seen, the one who has been begotten of God does not keep on sinning, that is, he does not continue in the practice of sin, the reason being that his seed, the new nature implanted in his soul by the Holy Spirit, at the time of the new birth, remains in him and enables him to live a life of righteousness and purity.

In the Greco-Roman world, into which Christianity was introduced by Christ and the Apostles, an expression current in those days was that the world was divided into two groups—Greeks and non-Greeks. This thought was from the Greek standpoint. The Jews, on the other hand, also said that there were two groups—Jews and Gentiles. When Christianity became established in the world, the following statement became current coin: there are three races—Greeks; non-Greeks; and the new race, the Christians.

Attitude of the World Toward Believers

“Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you” (I John 3:13). Properly translated this sentence should read “Stop marveling, brethren, if the world hate you.” These Christians to whom John was writing were amazed that the general attitude of the heathen world was hatred toward believers.

On this point Jesus said, “If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before *it hated you*” (John 15:18). The apostles had been associated with Jesus sufficiently that they knew the usual attitude which the people took toward Jesus. If one will study the life of Christ, he will see that practically from the beginning of His personal ministry antagonism here and there showed its ugly head. This fact is clearly seen in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John, which records events near the beginning of the personal ministry of Christ, as we see in this passage. Jesus had healed a cripple man on the Sabbath day. The Jerusalem authorities became indignant and plotted to kill Him. Jesus had not violated the Sabbath law in healing the cripple man, but his opponents, unwilling to see the facts and truth in the matter, so construed His act of mercy and determined to kill him.

In the great intercessory prayer, John 17, Jesus prayed: “I have given them [the Apostles] thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). Latent in the heart of the unregenerated lies the diabolical hatred which caused Cain to slay Abel. Abel had done nothing to occasion his brother’s slaying him, but it was an occasion of satanic hatred and jealousy which prompted this foul deed. It was this same Cain hatred that caused the enemies of Christ to try to kill Him.

Believers Passed Out of Death Into Life

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death. 15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (I John 3:14, 15). In verse fourteen John expressed the profound conviction that he and the other believers are saved because they have passed out of death into life. Believers in the New Testament times knew without a doubt that they were saved: “We know that we have passed out of death into life. ...” This passage evidently is an echo of John 5:24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.” According to this statement the one who believes on Jesus has at the present time eternal life, and he will not come into judgment, the reason being that he has passed out of death into life. The believer at the present time has eternal life and will never come into the judgment of the Great White Throne, into which all the lost will come and be judged (Rev. 20:11-15). It is true that believers will come before the judgment seat of Christ and be rewarded according to the service which they render to Him (II Cor. 5:10). Jesus laid down His life for us, and those who come to Him in faith believing receive eternal life here and now.

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.” If one who claims to be a believer does not love the brethren, his claims are bogus; he has never been born again. “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,” declared the Apostle John, “and no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” Thus the attitude of the believer toward others is an index which reveals the real spiritual condition of one.

The Test of Love

“Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doeth the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth” (I John 3:16-18). We know that Christ loves us because He laid down His life for us. He was willing to enter the realm of death and to grapple with the powers of the unseen world in order to deliver us out of the grasp of Satan and save us eternally. His great love was the cause of His making the supreme sacrifice. We ought, therefore, asserts John, to lay down our lives for the brethren—if the occasion demands. A test that will show whether or not one loves his brethren is set forth in verse 17—if a believer has this world’s goods and sees his brother in actual need and “shutteth up his compassion from him, how doeth the love of God abide in him?” If one thinks more of material goods than he does of his blood-bought brethren, that fact shows that the love of God does not dominate or control him.

Let us, therefore, not love in word, but in deed and in truth. James calls attention to the same illustration: “if a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, 16 and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit?” (James 2:15, 16). Faith and love always, without an exception, manifest themselves in deeds of kindness toward the unfortunate.

The Test of being of the Truth

“Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him: 20 because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (I John 3:19, 20). John, both in the Gospel Record and in the Epistles, has much to say about the truth. Jesus asserts that He is the Way, and the Truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except by Him. John declares that we are of the truth and may assure our hearts of that fact before God. If, on the other hand, our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. If our conscience condemns us, we may be certain that God, who knows all things, likewise will condemn—unless we have been saved and passed out of death into life.

A Clear Conscience and Boldness in Prayer

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; 22 and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight” (I John 3:21,22). According to these verses, if we have clear consciences and if our hearts condemn us not, we have boldness toward God in prayer for the things which we need. One must be conscientious before God in regard to everything, so as to have a conscience void of offense. Believers are encouraged to bring all their needs and wants to Him. The Lord Jesus said that whenever two or three of His disciples agree as touching any one thing for which they should make request, their petition will be granted. It is, of course, to be understood that those praying together for a definite thing understand that their requests must be in accordance with the will of God. Sometimes Christians make out timetables for the Lord to follow in answering their petitions. The Lord, of course, does not promise to answer such prayers according to our human schedules. If, therefore, we have boldness to come before God in prayer because we keep His commandments and do the things pleasing to Him, He will be delighted to answer the petition that is in accordance with His will.

The One Great Commandment

“And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment” (I John 3:23). The one commandment which God demands of all persons is that they believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and love one another. On one occasion, according to John 6:28, 29, the Jews asked Jesus what they would have to do in order to do the work of God. The Lord Jesus replied: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29b). This passage puts salvation within the reach of everyone who believes, and in doing so he does the work acceptable to God.

The Test of Abiding in Christ

“And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us” (I John 3:24). One who keeps the commandments of Christ abides in Him. We know that He abides in us, believers, by the Spirit which He has given us.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 8

WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 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 Jesus is not of God: and this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already. 4 Ye are of God, *my* 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 *as* of the world, and the world heareth them. 6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (I John 4:1-6).

As we have already seen in a former study, there were certain ones associated with the group of believers to whom John wrote, and who were animated by the spirit of the Antichrist. For some reason these unregenerated people withdrew fellowship from the body of believers. Regarding them John said that they had been with them but were not of them. Evidently the atmosphere created by believers was of such a spiritual nature that the unbelievers were uncomfortable in association with them. According to I John 3:7, John urged the believers not to be led astray by these false ones.

Believe Not Every Spirit

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I John 4:1). People who want truth must be open to conviction and must listen to any messages that purport to be of the truth. An excellent example of earnest truth seekers is found in the case of the people of the Jewish synagogue of Beroea (Acts 17:10-15). Paul went to them and preached the Word of God, expounding the Old Testament Scriptures. These Jews did not swallow down without question what the Apostle said, but listened attentively to what he declared. Since Paul claimed to be preaching the Scriptures, they examined the sacred writings daily to see whether or not he was accurately preaching the truth. As the result of their open-mindedness and their quest for the truth, many of them believed... “also of the Greek women of honorable estate, and of men, not a few.”

People who want the truth must realize that in many instances those who purport to be religious leaders and guides are inspired by evil spirits. As an example study careful I Kings 22:1-23. Ahab king of Israel wanted Jehoshaphat king of Judah to join with him in battle against Ramoth-gilead. The prophets of Baal unanimously foretold a sweeping victory for Ahab. But Jehoshaphat would not agree to go unless Micaiah, a true prophet of God, approved the plan. When asked concerning this venture, the prophet of God, in irony, foretold a sweeping victory for the allied kings. At the same time it was evident to all that Micaiah did not mean what he said. Then, being pressed to speak the truth in plainness, Micaiah showed that the prophets of Baal had been inspired by an evil spirit, and that Ahab would be utterly defeated. Thus an evil spirit in this instance spoke through recognized leaders to misguide the people.

Knowing that spirits do work in and through degenerated and evil men, John insisted that the Christians to whom he was writing should prove the spirits speaking through men as to whether or not they are of God. This exhortation becomes necessary since many false prophets have gone forth into the world. One of the acid tests by which spirits speaking through religious leaders may be proved is the subject regarding the nature of Christ: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God..." (verse 2). Everyone through whom a spirit speaks, and who confesses that Jesus the Messiah has come in the flesh is of God. Thus those speaking and denying that Jesus the Messiah has come in the flesh are animated by an evil spirit. If a person doubts the records of the Gospel and denies the historicity of Jesus, the spirit animating him is of the devil.

Moreover, John declares in II John 7-11: "For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, *even* they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward. 9 Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. 10 If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: 11 for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works." The deceivers mentioned in these verses from II John are not those who deny the historicity of Jesus, that He came nineteen hundred years ago in the flesh and was God manifested in human form, but are the deceivers who deny that He is coming again in the flesh. In other words, they deny the very thing which the angels announced to the apostles when Jesus ascended: "And while they were looking steadfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven" (Acts 1:10, 11). Those who deny that He will return in the same manner in which he departed from this world at the Ascension are animated by the spirit of the Antichrist, who will according to II Thessalonians, chapter 2, go to Jerusalem in the middle of the Tribulation and sit in the Jewish temple, opposing all that is called God or that is worshipped as God, claiming that he himself is God.

The deceivers animated by evil spirits of whom John warns the believers in I John 4:1-6 are those who deny the historicity of the Lord Jesus Christ. John, therefore, warned them to prove or to put to the test such teachers as gave evidence of superhuman powers. Usually, when God works in a miraculous manner, He allows Satan to duplicate the miracles—up to a certain point, as was true in the case of Moses and Aaron. After two of the miracles had been duplicated, Moses performed a third one which the magicians immediately attempted to perform, but had to acknowledge their inability. Moses continued to perform his wonders. The Israelites saw by actual observation that Moses and Aaron were true servants of God, whereas the magicians of Egypt were false and were animated by evil spirits. The Apostle John told the believers that they could know what spirit was animating and speaking through religious leaders by testing them with the questions regarding whether or not they believed that the Lord Jesus Christ had actually come in the flesh. Those who denied this proposition were, asserted John, speaking by an evil spirit, whereas those speaking by a superhuman spirit and confessing that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh were speaking by the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul dealt with the same question in his letter to the Church at Corinth. “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. 2 Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led. 3 Wherefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:1-3). According to verse 1 of this quotation, the Church at Corinth had written to Paul for information concerning how to detect the true from the false. He declared: “Wherefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit.” If a teacher came and gave evidence that a superhuman spirit was animating him and speaking through him, the believers were to inquire of such a one what he thought of Jesus Christ. If he, speaking by a spirit, declared that Jesus was anathema, it was quite evident that he was speaking by an evil spirit. On the other hand, if to this question he replied “Jesus is Lord,” It was obvious that he was speaking by the Holy Spirit. (Note carefully that the Apostle was not talking about ordinary people, but teachers who gave evidence of superhuman powers working through them.)

Spirit Activities in the Last Days

“But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; 3 forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth” (I Tim. 4:1-3). In this passage the inspired writer warns against the activity of evil spirits. Working through men and deceiving the people. To my mind, the Apostle had in mind especially the founders of cults and the like—off-color brands of religion.

The Apostle Peter likewise spoke of false teachers who are inspired by demons and of their activities in the last days: But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their lascivious doings; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not, (II Peter 2:1-3). As there were false prophets in Israel, declared the Apostle, so there will arise false teachers who will bring into the body of believers “destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them.” The battle through the Christian centuries has been fought concerning the deity of Christ. This battle is raging today and will continue in increasing intensity, until the very end, when the Lord will appear in power and might and show that He is Lord.

In I John 4:3, the Apostle declares that: “And every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already.” The people who do not confess Jesus are animated by the spirit of the Antichrist.

Victory through Christ

“Ye are of God, *my* 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 *as* of the world, and the world heareth them” (I John 4:4,5). The Apostle John several times states that the believers may have victory in Christ over the powers of Satan and his evil hosts. They can, however, have victory only if they trust the Lord implicitly. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10-21 shows that the Christian life is a warfare against the powers of evil. The only way one can wage a successful warfare against Satan and his hosts is by taking the whole armour of God.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (I John 4:6). Those who are of God hear gladly the message of His servants. Those who are not of God refuse to listen to God’s messages. According to this verse there are two spirits in the world, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth; The devil and his emissaries foster the spirit of error.

Demon Activity in the Tribulation

In Revelation 9:1-11, we have a prediction of the opening of the pit of the abyss, and of the coming forth of a mighty host of evil spirits that John describes in different ways and by various comparisons. For five months these infernal spirits will torment men and women who will be driven to the point of desperation, so that many of them will try to take their own lives, but will not be able to do so.

In Revelation 9:13-21 is another prediction of a mighty host of two hundred million evil spirits that will be let loose upon the world a little before the middle of the Tribulation. These spirits will destroy one third of the world’s population of that time.

In Revelation 16:12-16 is a prediction that three evil spirits, called the spirits of demons will go forth into all the world to move the kings of the earth to go into conference, laying the plan for “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (verse 14). These demons will gather them together in the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.

At the end of the Tribulation, these evil spirits, “the high ones on high,” the hosts of evil spirits infesting the atmosphere around the earth, will be incarcerated in the pit of the abyss with Satan “many days” (Isa. 24:21-23). When this passage is read in the light of Rev. 20: 1-6, it is seen that the evil spirits and Satan will be incarcerated in the pit of the abyss for a thousand years. These spirits will be loosed for a short period following the Millennium, during which they will deceive the nations and cause a rebellion against Christ. After that, they will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where they will be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 20:7-10).

Studies in the First Epistle of John
 Installment 9

LOVE OF GOD PERFECTED IN US

James and John were naturally fiery and fractious men. Having been with Jesus for the greater part of His ministry, on one occasion, as they were approaching a Samaritan village, the people of which refused to receive Jesus, James and John said to Him, “Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?” (Luke 9:54). After the Spirit of God regenerated their hearts and dwelt in their souls, they were different men. John especially grew in grace and in knowledge of the truth. His life and outlook were definitely different from what they were in his earlier days. When he wrote his first epistle, about A.D. 85 he spoke largely about love—the love of God for us and our love for God and for the brethren. Tradition tells us that he spent his last days in Ephesus, that he sat in the meetings of believers, and that, when there was a lull in the services, he would say “Let us love one another.”

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God” (I John 4:7). John’s heart was constantly bubbling over with the love which God had put into his heart. “... 5 and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us” (Rom 5:5). According to this verse, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart of the surrendered believer by the Holy Spirit. John insists that Christians should love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves is begotten of God and knows God.

While sentiment and emotion are involved in love and are always present, Biblical love is a spiritual force, power that manifests itself in sixteen different ways, as is set forth in the following passage: “Love suffereth long, *and* is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 5 doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; 6 rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; 7 beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. 8 Love never faileth” (I Cor. 13:4-8a). Blessed and happy is the person in whose heart the love of God abounds. This love is indispensable. All religious professions and activities are of no value unless love predominates in the heart and life.

God So Loved Us

“Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath 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” (I John 4:9,10). I John 4:9 is just another way of saying John 3:16, the people’s verse. God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us and made eternal life possible for every one who believes. See Romans 5:8-11. According to verse 10 of our passage, quoted above, God showed His love for us in that He “sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.” Christ and His blood atonement dealt with the sin question in such a way that God can forgive people all of their sins and transgressions when they believe and receive Christ as the propitiation for their sins—past, present, and future.

Love for the Brethren

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No man has beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us: 13 hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (I John 4:11-13). Since we are begotten of God and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, we also ought to love one another. Every one who is begotten of God loves those who also have been begotten of Him. According to verse 12, no man has ever beheld God at any time; and, I may add, no one will ever see God in His unveiled glory unless it be “the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8) and those who follow after “sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). All should consider this point very seriously.

If believers truly love one another, the fact is evident that God is abiding in them and His love is perfected in them. Confirmation of these scriptural facts is the further fact that He has given us His Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts.

John’s Witness Concerning the Saviour

In verse 14 John declares that he and his fellow apostles had beheld Jesus and had borne witness that the Father had sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. The apostles were thoroughly convinced that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, was God incarnate, who entered the world to become the Redeemer of mankind. Whosoever, therefore, according to verse 15, confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, the God-man, knows God, and God abides in him, and he in God. Note this reciprocal relationship—God abides in him and he in God, the guarantee of everlasting life.

The Love of God in Us

“And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God and God abideth in him” (I John 4:16). John was very positive in all his assertions regarding Jesus, because there was in his mind no room for doubt. He, therefore, said, “We know and have believed the love which God hath in us.” John and the other apostles had seen Jesus and were convinced that He was God in human form. The apostles were not simply believing; they had absolute knowledge. The evidence that Jesus was God in human form overwhelmed them. Hence John said, “We know that the love which is in our hearts is of God.”

Boldness Perfected in Love

“Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, even so are we in the world. 18 There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love. 19 We love, because he first loved us” (I John 4:17-19). According to verse 17, the love in our hearts may be perfected to the extent that we can have boldness in the day of judgment. The Scriptures hold up a very high standard of life and conduct to real believers. Love may be perfected in the believer who is surrendered to God and His will. Being in this state, the believer has boldness in the day of judgment. What is meant by the day of judgment? Jesus has stated that the one who believes has passed out of death into life and does not come into judgment (John

5:24). The judgment of which Jesus and John speak is the judgment of the great white throne, which occurs after the Millennium and before which all the lost appear and hear their doom. Christians, however, appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive their rewards (II Cor. 5:10).

John's statement "There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear" is indeed a profound revelation. Fear is on every hand, as far as the man of the world is concerned; but the child of God may be perfected in love, in which state there is no fear—of anything. The reason for this statement is that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world, the devil. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us and continues to love us.

Genuine Love

"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, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (I John 4:20).

If a man say that he loves God and at the same time hates his brother, a fellow-believer in God and in Christ, he is a liar; Satan has deceived him. John concludes this chapter by saying:

"And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:21).

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 10

THE LIFE OF THOSE BELIEVING IN CHRIST

Like the Gospel of John, the First Epistle of John (the same writer) is saturated with the idea of the love of God—God’s love for us and our love for Him.

The One Believing that Jesus is the Messiah

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God: ... (I John 5:1). According to this statement, the ones who believe that Jesus is the Christ have been begotten of God. The fact that one believes this proposition is proof positive that he has been begotten of God. This statement in our English translation does not carry the full import of the original text. A better rendering of these words is, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Messiah is begotten of God.” The word “Christ” is more of a personal name to the average Christian than it is a title. We Christians speak of the Lord Jesus Christ, referring to him as the God-man—the second person of the Trinity, who left heaven and entered the human family by miraculous conception and virgin birth. All of these thoughts are involved in our conception of Jesus as Saviour of the world.

But to the Jewish man, or the one who looks at the Lord Jesus Christ from the standpoint of the Hebrew scriptures, the word “Messiah” means much more. The word Messiah means anointed. King Saul, David, and Solomon spoke of themselves, and each other, as a Messiah of Israel. In thus speaking of themselves, they were correct, because each of them was an anointed one. By the ceremony of anointing each was inducted into office as ruler over Israel. Moses and the prophets foretold that one of the persons of the Godhead would come to earth by miraculous conception and virgin birth. They spoke of Him in different ways. Finally, Daniel spoke of Him as Messiah, and of His being cut off and having nothing. (Daniel 9:26). When one studies carefully the various Messianic predictions, he can see clearly that these prophecies refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and present Him as the one who upon His Second Coming will stop all wars, lift the curse from the earth, and establish a reign of righteousness from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Whoever believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of Old Testament prediction—who at His First Coming purchases redemption for the human family, and at His Second Coming establishes a reign of righteousness throughout the world—has been begotten of God.

Believers Loving Fellow Believers

“... And whosoever loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him.” The one who loves God genuinely, also loves all of those who are begotten of Him. The reason for this attitude is that they have a like spirit with the same characteristics and outlook. This same thought lies behind Psalm 16:3:

“As for the saints that are in the earth,
They are the excellent in whom is all my delight.”

Proof that we Love the Children of God

“Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:2,3). John states that we know we love the children of God when we love God and do his commandments. There was no uncertainty, or questions, in the heart of John concerning God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Moreover, he had no questions or doubts concerning the relation of the believer to any of the persons of the Holy Trinity. How may we know that we love the children of God? John’s answer is that we know that we love the children of God, when we love the Lord and keep His commandments. Jesus emphasized that His sheep, the believers, hear His voice and follow Him. If anyone claims to be a believer and at the same time ignores the teachings of Christ and the inspired apostles, all his professions to knowing God are empty claims. Though we are not under the law, as the Apostle Paul states in Romans, chapter 6, but are under grace, the believer delights to do the will of God at all hazards. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (verse 3). Keeping the commandments of God is simply the outgrowth of the love of God in the heart.

John affirmed that the commandments of God are not grievous; instead, they are a delight to the born-again one. If a believer is constantly calling attention to the burdensome character of the teachings of God’s Word, that fact creates a doubt in the mind of an enlightened Christian concerning the spiritual condition of the one thus complaining. If one should over-emphasize the fact of our not being under law but under grace, his doing so shows at least that he has a misconception or an improper interpretation of our relation to the Lord. The one who understands the spiritual relationship to God and Christ of the believer does not have to be driven by “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not.” The one who has the proper conception needs only to have a mere suggestion made concerning God’s will regarding himself. David beautifully stated the case thus:

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go:
I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee” (Psalm 32:8).

The One Overcoming the World

4 “For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, *even* our faith. 5 And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4). Among the uninformed and untaught Christians one frequently hears that statement that we have to sin and do wrong all the time. No one who understand the life in Christ thus speaks. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 8:37, declared: “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” In this verse Paul shows that Christians can, by the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, live a victorious life. Moreover, He besought the Roman Christians to offer their bodies living sacrifices to God and urged them to be transformed “by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1,2). Paul urged the Corinthian

church saying: “Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 7:1).

John emphasizes the victorious life in Christ in the verses under consideration. In fact, most all of the New Testament writers show that one can live victoriously in Christ and overcome the world by faith in Jesus Christ. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.

Christ Came by Water and Blood

“This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood” (I John 5:6). Several different interpretations have been given to this verse, but that which seems to be the most plausible and logical—fitting in with all the facts—may be stated as follows: Though John the Baptist was related to Jesus, he did not know Him personally. Read John 1:29-34. The Lord revealed to John the Baptist that he could identify the Messiah by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and abiding upon him. When John baptized Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17), the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended from heaven and lighted upon Jesus. Then a voice from heaven said: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It was, therefore, in connection with the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan that the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and that God told John the Baptist that Jesus was His son, in a unique sense. Jesus, therefore, became known to John and all others as the one who entered upon His public ministry, coming by water; that is, by the baptism of John.

He came not by water only but also by blood—the blood of the Cross which cleanses from all sin.

The Witness of the Spirit

“And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth” (I John 5:7). All the teachings and the miracles of Jesus which He wrought by the Spirit of God, pointed in a definite manner to His being the Son of God, but the witness of the Spirit by the resurrection of Jesus is the crowning testimony. Christ was demonstrated to be the Son of God by His resurrection according to the Spirit of Holiness, the Holy Spirit. “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, 2 which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh, 4 who was declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; *even* Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:1-4).

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 11

THE WITNESS OF GOD

As we studied I John 5:1-7, we saw that there are three that bear witness to Christ and prove that He is the Son of God, the God-man. These three witnesses, the water, the blood, and the Spirit, are specifically mentioned in verses 6 and 7.

The Three Witnesses of Christ's Deity

In verse 8 of I John 5 we have this statement, "For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one." The Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, is mentioned last in verse 6, but in verse 7 He is given the pre-eminence by being mentioned first. The water is mentioned next and is followed by the blood. As already noted in a former study, the Holy Spirit bore witness to Christ on many occasions and in different ways. According to Romans 1:1-4, He proved and demonstrated the fact that Jesus is the Son of God by raising Him from the dead. This fact was the crowning testimony which the Spirit gave regarding Christ's being the Son of God in a peculiar sense.

On the Day of Pentecost—the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ—the Holy Spirit came and made His presence known by tongues parting asunder like as fire; which sat upon the apostles, and by a peculiar noise like the sound of rushing of a mighty wind (Acts, chapter 2). Then the Spirit spoke through Peter and the apostles the message recorded in Acts, chapter 2. Whenever any of the apostles preached, it was not they who were doing the talking, but the Spirit speaking through them. Thus the Spirit constantly bore witness to the Sonship of Christ.

Jesus came by water and by blood. As we have already seen, the expression water refers to the events connected with the baptism of Jesus. When He was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended and alighted upon Him; then a voice out of heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Thus at the baptism of Jesus the Holy Spirit bore witness to him as the Son of God.

Christ came, as John tells us, not only by water but by blood. The expression blood is an echo of the crucifixion; because, when He was crucified, He poured out His blood for our redemption. According to Leviticus 17:11 it is the blood which makes atonement for the soul. The reason that it does is that the life is in the blood. Thus the Apostle Paul speaks of Christ as entering upon His personal ministry by the term water, and the close of it by the expression blood.

These three—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—are three in one. There is perfect unity in what each signifies, and to which each testifies.

Testimony of God Greater than the Witness of Men

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son.” All events and facts of history are supported by credible witnesses. Historical evidence is unlike mathematical demonstrations. All historical matters must be supported by the testimony of truthful and capable witnesses, whereas a mathematical demonstration is conditioned upon principles. All that we know of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and others is dependent upon human testimony. What we know of the historical Christ is dependent upon the testimony of capable, truthful witnesses who saw, heard and handled the Word of life (I John 1:1-4). Those who accept Jesus Christ, in deed and in truth, have the experience which we call the new birth, the regeneration of the heart. This experience gives one additional evidence concerning the Son of God.

John states that, if we receive the testimony of men regarding material things and earthly experiences, the testimony of God is greater. Some of the testimony of men is distorted, fabricated, added to and taken from; hence is not absolutely reliable. Some testimony of men has a ring of sincerity and truth, and we accept it at its face value. As a rule we believe what we are told unless the story on its face value suggests doubt; but, generally speaking, we accept the testimony of men. Since the testimony of God is greater than that of men, without question we should accept it. There are no distortions, or additions, or subtractions as to what God says.

“The words of Jehovah are pure words;
As silver tried in a furnace on the earth,
Purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6)

Since God’s Word and testimony are pure, as this verse states, men can afford to accept this testimony without any mental reservation.

“... for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning His Son” (verse 9). The witness to which this passage refers doubtless is the testimony of which he has spoken in the verses above, viz., the testimony of the water, the blood, and the Holy Spirit. As we have already seen, God bore witness to Christ at the time of His baptism in a most conclusive and impressive manner. In addition to the circumstance surrounding the case God spoke from Heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” At the crucifixion of Christ everything pointed in the direction that He was the Son of God. Someone has said that Socrates died like a man, but Jesus Christ died like a God. The situation was such that the Roman centurion at the execution could say, “Truly this was the Son of God.” Jesus was executed and buried. On the third day His body was re-vitalized and immortalized. He then came forth from the grave the conqueror over death. In His resurrection the Holy Spirit demonstrated that He was the Son of God. These testimonies which I have just enumerated probably are what John refers to in this verse.

One believes historical facts because of the testimony of others. He believes and acts accordingly. If we accept and receive the testimony of men, we should without question receive the testimony of God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased our redemption by His blood.

There is an abundance of testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the law of Moses judicial matters were to be established by two or three reliable witnesses. Acting upon this principle, God gave us three records of the life of the Lord Jesus in the form of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In addition to this testimony He gave us the Gospel of John, which was called by one of the early church fathers a spiritual gospel. The gospel writers gave their testimony concerning the Lord Jesus in such a plain, straightforward manner that it carries conviction to the heart of all honest truthseekers that Jesus was and is the Son of God.

The Apostle John lifts his eyes, as it were, and sees that the testimony concerning Jesus is the message of all the prophets, “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

The Witness Regarding Christ in the Soul of the Believer

“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son” (I John 5:10). According to this statement he who believes on the Son of God “hath the witness in him.” What is the significance of this statement? Everyone who has truly and genuinely been born again, been regenerated by the Spirit of God, understands this language. Concerning the new birth the Apostle Paul declared, “Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new” (II Cor. 5:17).

I recall my feelings, emotions, attitudes, outlook, and actions before I was saved. I also can recall very vividly that there was a marvelous and supernatural change that came over me when I accepted Christ as my Saviour. Things that I once loved, I then hated; and the things that I did not care for prior to that time, I loved. When I accepted Christ I had the experience mentioned by Paul in the passage just quoted. The old things passed away; behold all things became new. A new power came into my soul; new life began. Constantly bubbling up in my soul was a new joy that I had never experienced. A peace and a calmness came over my heart. These changes in my innermost soul were the result of my being made a new creature in Christ Jesus by the Spirit of God. I, therefore, had the witness in my heart, to which John refers in this passage.

Furthermore, John declares that “he that believeth not God hath made him a liar.” Those who had heard the testimony of God concerning Christ, and who had rejected it, virtually by disbelieving, made God a liar. The evidence was so clear and conclusive that the one who was not for Christ was against Him. The same thing is true today. We also have the written testimony—unimpeachable. If we neglect or refuse to consider this testimony, by so doing we virtually make God a liar. Providentially, God has brought the truth before the world, and men and women are going to be judged by the attitude which they take toward Christ. It is a serious matter to neglect or to reject the testimony which God has borne concerning His Son.

Eternal Life of the Believer

“And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (I John 5:11). God has borne witness not only to the deity of Christ but to our having eternal life, which is in His Son from whom we receive it. This testimony is in harmony with Christ’s statement, “Verily, verily, I say unto you,

He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life (John 5:24). The one, therefore, having the Son hath eternal life; the one not having the Son does not have this life.

Studies in the First Epistle of John
Installment 12

In our study of the First Epistle of John we have come to the last section—I John 5:13-21. Though we have gone carefully over each chapter and have discovered many wonderful basic truths, let us not think that we have exhausted the Epistle; for it, like the Gospel of John, goes to the very depths of the fundamental truths of the Gospel.

Purpose of the Epistle

“These things have I written into you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, *even* unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God” (John 5:13). Every book in the Scriptures was written for a definite, specific purpose. Sometimes a statement is made to this effect, and sometimes it is implied. This statement reminds one of John’s declaration concerning his purpose in writing the Gospel: “Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: 31 but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name” (John 20:30,31). John’s purpose in writing the Gospel was to lay a foundation for faith in Jesus Christ in order that whosoever believes on Him may have everlasting life. John’s purpose in writing his First Epistle was that believers—those who believe and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour—may know that they have eternal life.

The Scriptures are very plain and specific on these points. On different occasions, the inspired writers spoke of believers’ knowing definite, specific things in connection with their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle wants every believer to have perfect confidence and assurance with reference to salvation. In the Gospel of John, chapter 5, verse 24, the inspired Apostle quotes Jesus as saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.” Whosoever hears the Word of Christ and believes God, Who sent Christ to this world, has eternal life—not will have—but has eternal life now. If he has it—eternal life—now, he of course, will never lose it, because it is eternal. He, therefore, will have it throughout all eternity. The believer has passed out of death into life; he will not, therefore, come into judgment—the judgment of the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-15). His judgement occurred at the cross, when the stroke due to everyone fell upon Christ, and by His stripes the believer is healed—is saved.

In connection with our knowing that we who believe have eternal life, let us always bear in mind that all things which come into the life of the believer are designed for his good. The Apostle Paul declares: And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, *even* to them that are called according to *his* purpose. 29 For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be he first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified them he also glorified. (Rom. 8:28-30). So far as human experiences during life are concerned, there are no greater facts which he can base his hopes for time and Eternity than these basic doctrines.

Boldness in Prayer

“And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: 15 and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him” (I John 5:14,15). In the last quiet talks that Jesus had with His disciples (John, chapters 14-16), Jesus encouraged them to pray to the Father in His name. Prior to this time, asserted Jesus, the disciples had not prayed in His name, but from the resurrection onward, believers are to approach the Father through the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. On the point of praying in the Holy Spirit, Jude urged the believers to whom he wrote thus to pray: “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (verses 20, 21). Jesus compared Himself to a vine and the believers to branches in the vine. He assured us that just as the literal branch of the vine draws its substance from the vine, so the believers who are literally saved draw their strength and power from Him. The believer abides in Christ and Christ abides in him. When these conditions obtain, whatsoever one asks for in faith, doubting nothing, he shall receive it. Moreover, Jesus urged the believers to agree on the things for which they should make request. He assures us that, when two or three agree as touching any one thing for which they should make request, God will grant it. The assumption, of course is that they ask in accordance with the will of God. There is power in united prayer. May I also assure the readers that the one who is right with God, and who prays in faith, may be sure that his petition will be granted?

The believer has boldness, or confidence, toward God “that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us ...” One may be assured that God will answer every petition that is made by the believer who is in touch with God, if the petition which he makes is in accordance with the will of God. Often believers confess that they have prayed for a certain thing and that God does not answer. If such is the case, there is a definite reason why their prayer is not answered—either the one or ones praying are not on speaking terms with the Lord, or the thing for which they make request is not according to the will of God. “If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.”

We can advance a step farther: And if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.” Every petition of the believer that is heard by the Lord is answered. Someone has aptly said that God answers our petitions in one of three ways. No; yes; wait. Frequently, we ask for things that would be positively injurious to us. The loving, wise Heavenly Father, of course, will not give that which is detrimental to His faithful child. He knows what is best, and will substitute that which will bring a blessing into the life of His child for that which will be injurious.

The writer of Hebrews assures us that Jesus is our great High Priest, who is seated at the right-hand of God, and to whom we can come at all times with the assurance that our prayers will be answered: “Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help *us* in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16). Equally assuring to our hearts is the following statement: “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 ours only, but also for the whole world” (I John 2:1b,2).

The Sin Unto Death

“If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and *God* will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.” (I John 5:16,17). According to this statement, if any man sees a brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask God and the Lord will answer the prayer for those not sinning unto death. Immediately, John tells us that there is a sin unto death. If a man commit this sin, one is not to pray for him. This passage is acknowledged by all as a most difficult one. What is the sin unto death for which the believer is not to pray? Some Bible students think that it is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but there is no positive evidence that this is what John had in mind. It is true that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven in this age or in the age to come. For the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit there is no forgiveness. Concerning the one guilty of this sin see Matthew 12:31, 32 in its context and Mark 3:28-30. If the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the sin unto death, it is strange that Jesus was silent on this point. He stated that there is no forgiveness for those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit, either in this age or in the one to come.

It is altogether possible that light may be thrown upon this difficult subject by an examination of the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), who sold a piece of property for a given sum, and who agreed between themselves to make a donation to the Lord’s cause, pretending, however, that they were giving the entire price received for the property; whereas they were keeping back information regarding the exact price. In doing so, they were lying to the Holy Spirit and to God, and not to men. For this sin they were smitten with death. We know, therefore, that lying to the Holy Spirit and to God was, in their case, a sin unto physical death. Whether or not this was the particular sin which John had in mind, I cannot say, but am simply calling attention to the possibility.

Another case that may have some bearing upon “the sin unto death” is the situation which arose in the Church at Corinth. On the Lord’s Day the Church would meet for worship and for the observance of the Lord’s Supper. It seems that they took their regular meals along and made an all-day affair of the occasion while they were worshipping God. The congregation was divided into cliques. The rich had bountiful meals and plenty of wine, which made some of them drunk. They turned their weekly worship into a carnal feast. They were thus remembering the Lord’s death and suffering in an unworthy manner. The Lord could not tolerate such carnality among His people. He, therefore, smote some with sickness and others with death. For a full account of the situation, see I Corinthians 11:23-24.

Since we cannot be positive as to what sin John had in mind, let us pray over the matter and seek further light on this difficult though important point.

That the sin unto death was a definite, specific act may be inferred from verse 17: “All unrighteousness is sin: and there is sin not unto death.” Everything that is unrighteous, unequal, is sin. Sin unforgiven, of course, brings eternal death. A person has to come to Christ Who alone gives life. No matter what the person’s life has been, if he comes to Christ and accepts Him in faith, he is forgiven.

The One Begotten of God Sins Not

“We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not” (I John 5:18). John asserts that the one who has been begotten by the Spirit of God—and, of course, born again—does not commit sin. From our English translation it is impossible to see what John meant in saying that the one who is begotten of God does not sin. John does not mean that he never commits a wrong act. The reason for this statement is that the form of the verb translated “does not sin” carries the idea of continuing to sin. The one who is begotten of God has a new nature and has no desire to keep on sinning as he did before he was saved. If John had meant to say that he never commits a sinful act, he would have used the form of the Greek verb that indicates a single act; but, as just stated, he used the form that denotes the practice of sinning—repeated actions.

According to the verse under consideration, the one who has been begotten of God keeps himself and the evil one, Satan, does not touch him. No one can keep himself by his own strength and power. One who is begotten of God puts his trust in Christ and the Holy Spirit, and, in so doing, keeps himself, and Satan does not touch him. We have already seen in this series of studies that He who dwells in the believer, God, is stronger than he who is in the world, the devil. The believers to whom John wrote were having constant victory through the power of the Spirit in their lives. This is what John is speaking of here.

The World Lying in the Evil One

“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one” (I John 5:19). Again, John asserts that the believers know that they are of God. The Holy Spirit, as Paul said in Romans, chapter 8, bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

John also declares that the world lies in the evil one. The evil one, the devil, is the God of this world. He has blinded the eyes of those who are not saved so that they cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, to the one who is blinded by Satan, is simply a man—not God in the flesh. When one, however, thirsts after God, turns, and seeks God, the Lord will open his eyes to see that Jesus Christ is God manifested in human form for the redemption of the human race.

The Believer Knows Him Who is True

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we 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” (I John 5:20). The one who is truly born again, who has a new nature, has an understanding that he never had before he accepted Christ. This spiritual understanding shows that Christ is the true One, and that we are in Him, who is true—even His Son, Jesus Christ.

Warning Against Idolatry

“My little children, guard yourselves from idols” (I John 5:21). The Christians of the first century were living in the midst of an environment that was supercharged with evil spirits, idolatry, and all its sinful practices.

Everything was contaminated and polluted by evil. The Christians had to be on the alert all the time lest they should be ensnared by Satan, who transforms himself into an angel of light to deceive the believers and lead them into sin and degradation.

Though we do not have the exact environment here in America in which the believers of John's age lived, the danger is as great. Our civilization has been made to appear in modern dress of culture and refinement; but, when the dress is removed, sin is seen to be the same old, diabolical thing that it has always been. My brethren, keep yourselves from idolatry, and sinful practices.

The End