

# 1<sup>st</sup> JOHN BIBLE STUDY

1 John 5:14-21

Lesson #21

## Introduction

We've come now to the end of this very enjoyable study of the epistle of 1<sup>st</sup> John. This is lesson 21 of the series and covers chapter 5, verses 14 through 21. In all of his writings, John demonstrates a unique insight into that part of our association with God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, that is the most personal and relational. He deals, probably more than any other writer, with who Jesus is, and His relationship to the Father; and with who we are, and our relationship with Jesus. And he makes it crystal clear that it's our relationship with Jesus that is the unique means to having a relationship with God the Father. And John does a most thorough job of describing the nature of that relationship as to its authenticity, by describing the resultant visible characteristics that must be present, and operative, in every person who has truly been born again of the Spirit of God. As I said earlier, to understand John's gospel and epistles, is to rightly understand who Jesus Christ really is, and His unique place in God's eternal plan, and, what it actually means to say that we believe in Him.

In chapter 2, verses 3 - 6, John says some of the most memorable things of this epistle, things that every person who claims to believe in the Name of the Son of God should know and thoroughly understand, and with which we agree most wholeheartedly. He wrote:

*3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*

1 John 2:3-6 (NASB)

A progressively growing Christlikeness, in both attitudes and behaviors, is essentially the litmus test of authenticity, according to John's epistle. Of course there's other things as well, like not loving the world, or the things of this world. And loving the brethren with a self-sacrificing kind of love that seeks for their eternal benefit, but at the same time doesn't ignore their immediate needs either. And a love for the truth that will actively stand up against sin and heresy, and publically call it what it is, and likewise doctrinal error, especially where it involves the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I have to say that it's with sadness, and some reluctance that we now come to the end this epistle, and leave this study, because, these things are eternal truths that need constant repeating. We are a curious species, us humans, even when we know something, we can lose our fervor to hold onto it, and unless we're reminded often we begin to slip away, little by little. So, I've been most delighted to hear these things taught again to myself, and to be allowed to remind you of them as well beloved. So now, the title of our last lesson in this study is:

## The True God and Eternal Life

*14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. 16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will, for him, give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.*

*18 We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.*

1 John 5:14-21 (NASB)

## Verse 14-15:

*14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.*

I want to make it clear that verses 14-17 are concerning a single thought, and must not be wrenched out of their immediate context. John says that we have confidence that our prayers for our brethren will be heard, and answered, when we pray for our brethren who are beset with sins in their lives, and we ask God to intervene on their behalf.

It is in this context that these verses were composed by John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I won't say that they don't have any broader aspects, but if used for any other purpose, we must understand what we're doing and make sure we're not applying them with too broad of a brush. Just like I said about verse 13 being used outside of its true contextual meaning, this verse also is often, very often, misused as a universal "catch all" for answered prayers, for everything from healing of illnesses to getting a new car we want. Now it's fine to ask God for all of these if you feel the need, but these verses of John are specifically dealing with the issue of our concern for our beloved brethren who are struggling with the issues of life and falling into occasional, or even serious perpetual sins. We are told to pray for them, and God will grant us our petitions on their behalf, because we know that it is according to His will that they should repent of those sins.

Of all the times that I've heard this verse quoted, or made reference to, I don't know if even one percent was in the context that John had in mind when he wrote them. This is one of the famous verses of the name it and claim it crowd. In the health, wealth, and prosperity ministries. But it's rarely, if ever, used by them in reference to our prayers for others, but rather our prayers for ourselves, and our own worldly desires and benefits. Remember what James wrote in his epistle? *3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.* (Jas 4:3)

Isn't James exactly right, Isn't it our own pleasures, and our perceived felt-needs that dominates our prayers? Of course it is, and if we're honest we'll admit it and repent. Then, when we get our priorities right, and begin to genuinely pray according to God's will, we'll begin to see our prayers answered; but not for ourselves and our own possessions, but for our brethren and their repentance from sin and faithful obedience to God. That's what John means by these words that he wrote in this portion of his epistle.

And it's not just misused in these fringe ministries, the mainline evangelical churches are just as guilty of the same abuses, but maybe just a little less blatantly obvious. It is an undeniable fact that self-centeredness dominates mankind's thinking, and this isn't new, it was just as dominant in the past as it is today. So when we read about God hearing our prayers, and granting our petitions, we immediately start to think how we can put this to use for our own benefit. But there isn't one word mentioned by John in these verses, 14-17 about our own interests, they are entirely about the interests of our brethren. And they're not about goods and possessions whatsoever, but about sin and repentance.

John uses the term *if we ask anything according to His will*. So you ask, how do we know what's according to His will? How do we know if God wants us to have that new job, or that new car, or that new house? You see how we think. We immediately put God's will, as it's used in this verse, into the context of our self and our own personal interests. And the answer is, that we have no possible way of knowing what, or if, God has any concerns one way or the other about our job, or our car, or our house, or all the whole plethora of personal daily concerns. There's nowhere in scriptures that exhort us to pray for God's leading on what shirt to wear in the morning, or what car to drive, or what we should have for lunch. Do you understand what I'm saying? God has given us many free choices, and made us with differing personal tastes and individual preferences, but He has told us to be thankful to Him for them, and for our freedom of those choices, but to always use them, whatever they may be, in a godly manner that is fitting for a person that names the Name of Jesus Christ.

It's perfectly fine to pray to God for the things that you need, and there's no prohibition for praying for things that you simply would like to have if God sees no objection. We are free to ask God for a new job, or a new car, or a new house, if we want it. But if we pray for these things it cannot be with any expectations of obligation on God's part. He may well grant us our request, or He may not, as He sees fit, and in these situations we're grateful for His generosity. There are many things of life that lie within the personal desecration of human beings because God has chosen to make us with unique personalities and preferences. This isn't wrong, it's how we were purposely designed. I'm not talking about our propensity to sin, but our simple differences of taste, color, fashion, music, occupations, and all those things that make each of us unique in the sight of God and of each other. Of these things we have no certainty, and can hold no specific expectations. So, when we pray for any of these things we're praying for things that God hasn't specified as His particular will one way or the other. Remember what God said in Genesis concerning husbands and wives, that they were allowed to choose whom they pleased to marry, and were free to do so, as long as they stayed within certain declared boundaries. There are things that God has not expressly specified, and we're free to pray for these things.

But at the same time, we are told some specifics, of which we can be absolutely certain. And that God has called all men everywhere to repent of their sins, and believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, and obey His commandments is a known certainty. We can pray for our brethren, that we see falling into sin, to see the error of their way and repent, and have every confidence that it is *according to His will* that they do so. And therefore, we can pray these kinds of prayers for our brethren with realistic expectations of being heard by God and having our prayers granted. This is what John is telling us in these verses, and to use them for other purposes, and in other contexts, is to take liberty with the word of God that may, or may not be appropriate. So, like all of scriptures, one must pay careful attention to how they interpret and apply them. If you hear them misused by your brethren, then very humbly and gently point out to them the proper context, by reading all four verses (14-17) together. If they're true believers, seeking to please God, and they have a self-sacrificing love of the brethren, then they'll be grateful for that insightful correction, and put it into immediate use.

Now, lest someone argues that I'm just rendering a personal opinion, let's look a John's next words where he himself explains exactly what he's talking about when he says that we know God hears our prayers and will grant us our requests when we pray according to His will. He continues with these words:

### **Verses 16-17:**

*16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will, for him, give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.*

John specifically identifies the objects of his preceding words of prayer according to God's will as *our brethren*, and identifies the subject as that of *committing sins* of various types and degrees. Whether it has further implications or not, nevertheless, the context of John right here in these verses, is undeniably specified as our brethren, and regarding the committing of sins by those brethren. There is no possibility of credible argument to the contrary.

Now, as much as I don't want to deviate away from this theme of praying according to God's will being about our concern for our brethren and their lives of obedience to God, and abstaining from sin, I feel the necessity to make a clarification before we proceed. This verse speaks of sin that is unto death, and sin that is not unto death. This can cause some serious misconceptions if not properly interpreted. We know from scriptures that God recognizes the death of our flesh and blood bodies as different from the death of our spirit, (or our soul) There are numerous verses that demonstrate this, but for the sake of corroboration, let's use one or two of them to prove our point. For instance:

*25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"* John 11:25-26 (NASB)

Now, there's many more references we could use, but this one shows the dual nature of fleshly life and spiritual life very clearly. So, it's possible to say that we die, and that we never die, in the same sentence, without it being a contradiction, when we understand that we're talking about two kinds of lives, the flesh and the spirit. Both are called life, but one will die, and the other will not.

John has already framed these verses within the firm boundaries of "our brothers" which means that it is not addressing the issue of salvation, nor the death of the spirit in the lake of fire, but rather the issue of the mortal flesh body. This is further confirmed by the term *"there is sin not leading to death."* This statement can only possibly be made concerning the flesh body, because the wages of sin is death for the eternal spirit, (soul) as the word of God makes abundantly clear from Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden to the last chapter of Revelation. John can only be speaking of physical bodily death as the result of unrepentant sin by believing Christians. This is the only option that can apply. Thinking it's a salvation verse, dealing with unbelievers, will yield conclusions inconsistent with scriptural teachings.

If we remember, John was most likely right there in person when Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, were literally struck dead by God for lying about the amount of a land sale that was offered to God. Names weren't given, but it says that the young men covered them up and carried them away. John might very well have been one of those young men, or at least seen it all happen with his own eyes. (Acts 5:1-10) So John knows that there is sin of a nature that will cause the death of the offenders. Not any one specific sin, like that unpardonable sin mentioned in Matthew 12 and Luke 12, but rather a class, and/or a degree of sin that requires divine intervention to terminate, lest that individual be lost like the rest of the world.

And again, the apostle Paul, when speaking to the very carnal behaving Corinthian church, told them that many of their membership were physically sick, and some had even died at the hand of God, for the things they were doing and wouldn't stop on their own. So God ended their flesh life so that their spirit would remain justified by the blood of Jesus Christ. But God has limits, even for believers, and He will terminate our flesh bodies before He allows us to exceed His level of tolerance. This isn't a bad thing it's a good thing, but nobody should want it said that they were such a sinful Christian that God had to terminate their life to prevent their loss of rewards or even salvation, which He will never allow.

*30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.* 1 Cor 11:30-32 (NASB)

God will discipline (terminate) any of His own who do not, or cannot, rightly assess and constrain their behaviors on this earth, so that they are not condemned along with the rest of the world says the apostle Paul.

*5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.* 1 Cor 5:5 (NASB)

(It is God's mercy, not His wrath, that limits His children's behaviors and places safe boundaries to prevent their loss)

Now, having made this clear, we can return to the main emphasis of John in these verses, that is his exhortation for us to pray with earnest expectations for our Christian brethren who are practicing sin, that God would grant them repentance and forgiveness, and grant them continued life here on this earth for the purpose of glorifying God and edifying, meaning spiritually and morally improving the quality of, the church. We, the church, don't need a bunch of dead bodies, we need living ones that repent of sin and obey God, as a visible testimony to His mercy and glory. Shame on any Christian who had to be terminated by God to restrain their sinful lusts, I would not expect to see many of these at the front of the rewards line at the judgement seat of Christ. It is perhaps these who are still saved, but yet though as through fire. (1Co 3:15)

Therefore brethren, we are instructed to pray for one another, and more so than for ourselves, because such prayers may be made with earnest expectations of an answer by God, because they are always according to His will, and for His glory. And if there's still some brethren among us who will not repent, then God will mercifully end their carnal worldly lives here on this earth so that their spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of all that the Father gave Me, I will lose not one, declared Jesus, and if that means ending some lives early He'll do that without hesitation. He'll take their lives, so that they do not lose them. Sounds like an absurd contradiction unless you understand the distinction between the fleshly and the spiritual.

Now if you'll allow me a little latitude to extrapolate somewhat on the intention of John when he specifically says that there are sins by Christians that are unto death, and he does not ask us to pray to God to give life to these who are practicing such things. What does this mean? It's difficult to deny that the obvious implication is that it's better for God to take their lives than to leave them. John could have said to pray even harder for these, because they need it the most, but he didn't say that, he said we're not expected to pray to God to leave real Christians on the earth who are so blatantly sinful as to defile the work of Jesus Christ and injure themselves beyond repair. It is necessary to yield to the sovereignty of God when making life and death choices that affect a person's eternal destiny. And we must accept those life and death choices as God's intervention on behalf of His own children. But we must never assume, without justification, that a brother or sister who died a seemingly premature death, did so because they were secretly practicing sin, and God terminated their lives. This would be a grave error and a heartless defamation of character. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, for His own good reasons, and at His own good pleasure, blessed be the name of the Lord.

Now, in proof reading this manuscript, I realized that it's possible go get a wrong impression from what's just been said. While it's absolutely true that verses 14-17 are an exhortation to pray for our brethren, they are by no means a prohibition to praying for our unsaved friends and family. We never said that, nor did we imply any such thing, but I want to say outright that our prayers for the salvation for our loved ones who are lost, should be with us until our final demise. It is right and proper to pray for them as well as our saved brethren, but John is speaking to the church, and his immediate emphasis in these verses is on proper church life and practice. Now, I think we've covered these verses pretty well, and we have the right understanding of them, so lets move on th the next verse:

**Verse 18:**

*18 We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.*

Just to keep our mind's sharp, and perhaps to challenge us poor bible teachers, now, after just speaking of Christians who sin, and sins unto death, John says that *We know that no one who is born of God sins*. Our mind immediately wants to ask - how in the world can he say this, isn't John reading to his own letter? But as always, there's a reasonable explanation if we're astute enough to comprehend it.

When John wrote about our praying according to the will of God, for the repentance and life of those who were misbehaving, he was not speaking of the normal and ordinary Christians. John has already made it crystal clear that a properly functioning Christian, who is abiding in Christ, is visibly demonstrating that by a life of obedience, and love of the brethren, and has been freed from the love of the world and the things of the world. This is what a Christian should look like, and what we do look like when we're healthy, and spending time in the word, and in fellowship with other genuine Christians who are holding us accountable, and looking out for our spiritual welfare.

Not all Christians are poor pathetic examples of Christ all the time. Of course we fall short. Of course we still fall into occasional sin, but we're quick to confess it and repent, and return to a life that honors Jesus Christ. That is the right and true condition of those who really are believers, and are under the guiding influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is charged by God the Father to act as a sanctifying influence on all true believers, and I assure you beloved, that He does not take that duty lightly. (1Pet 1:2) It's better to be humble than proud, and it's safer to be cautious than bold, but too many Christians speak only of our weaknesses and failures, and little, or none at all, about the very real sanctification that has, and is, taking place in our lives and behaviors by the Spirit of God. We aren't by any means perfected, but we had better be very much improved from what we used to be. We should have very much to say about what Jesus has accomplished within us to change our affections, and our attitudes, and yes also our everyday behaviors as well. When Jesus healed people He always told them to say nothing about it, but instead they ran all over town proclaiming publically the amazing things that Jesus had done for them. And Jesus never seemed to be angry about this.

Jesus likened us to salt, and said that it is His followers that season the taste of the earth. Many interpret this differently but the verse defines itself, when it says that the salt is for flavor, or taste, and it is the believers who make this otherwise tasteless world taste enjoyable to God. And in what way do we do that? The next verses in that group tell us this, when Jesus further likened us to a lamp that has been set on a hilltop for all to see. To see what? To see our good works and joyful obedience to His commandments, that's what, because this is how God, who is an invisible Spirit being, displays His own glorious attributes to a tangible world, through the behaviors of His followers. (Mat 5:13-20) This is very much the same as the apostle Peter's calling the church to be a royal priesthood in service to God through Jesus Christ:

*9 But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, A holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

*11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers, to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation .*

1 Peter 2:9-12 (NASB)

I sometimes think we're so accustomed to being told about our shortcomings that we neglect to see and appreciate our successes. We're so careful not to take credit for them ourselves that we don't ever mention them at all. But we are exhorted to be a visible beacon of light, in both our behaviors and our speaking, so let's not be so timid that we're afraid to proclaim from the housetops, all that Jesus has done for us, and the amazing changes He's made in our behaviors and attitudes. But of course, if we do that, then we have to continue to live up to those claims don't we, or we'll put both ourselves and our Savior to open shame, and that might frighten us a little. But the calling to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age, as a testimony to Christ, is a very real obligation. (Tit 2:11-12) So let us embrace it joyfully.

Yes, it is the meek who will inherit the earth, (Mat 5:5) but at the very same time, the cowardly are bound for the lake of fire. (Rev 21:8) There's a very real difference between being meek and being cowardly, and the scriptures delineate that

difference with clear precision. So, to recap this point, yes Christians sometimes fall into sin, and we're told to pray for them when they do, but this is not the ordinary practice of healthy Christians, who know, and are faithfully fulfilling God's call of obedience in their everyday lives, to the glory of Christ and the Father, and are not afraid to openly say so.

And this is why the verse finishes with the statement *but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him*. John says that He who is born of God keeps him. In this instance the "He" who is born of God is referring to Jesus himself, as it is He who keeps them, and the evil one does not touch (meaning actually grasp, or take hold of) them. Jesus Christ does not allow the evil one to take a permanently controlling grasp of His believers. He may tempt them, and test them, as he did with Job, but his powers are limited by God, and never go any farther than God allows. Because we are protected by the power of God, through faith, for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Pet 1:5) And of all that the Father gave Him, Jesus will lose not one. (Jn 6:39) With that, lets move on to the next verse:

### **Verse 19:**

*19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

Only a few sentences earlier, in what we now call verse 13, John said that he had written these things in this epistle so that the true brethren, who believe in the name of the Son of God, would know with objective certainty, that they have eternal life. That they are the true children of God. So, now he can say with reasonable certainty, that *We know that we are of God*, because we have the true testing criteria available to examine ourselves and make that determination. If we demonstrate the vital characteristics of authentic faith, like obedience to the commandments of God, and self sacrificing love of the brethren, and a disregard for the world and the things of the world, and a new set of beliefs and affections, then we can know with certainty that we are born of the Spirit of God. And if we don't, then we can know with equal certainty that we are not, and seek remedy while time still permits. Which remedy is available for the asking.

Have you ever heard someone say that they don't necessarily have these characteristics, but they know they are a Christian? If you ask them how they know, they'll usually say that they just know it. They have every confidence in that as a fact, but not based on any observable evidences, but solely on a feeling, in which they trust implicitly. It's often very hard to get someone to face the truth when they're convinced they already have it. But John has given us the testing manual in one short five chapter epistle, and basing your assumptions on emotions or feelings rather than hard evidence is not a sound principle, and we all know that. So, whosoever has an ear, let them hear. And the rest are free to do as they please. Which brings us to the last half of this sentence.

*and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.* Unless you're a Christian, or in some cases just a cynic, you might be hesitant to accept, or agree that the whole world lies in the power of evil. We regularly hear people say that they choose to believe in the fundamental goodness of humanity. That there's a little good in everybody, if you give them a chance to show it. Well, there might be a glimmer of truth in that perspective, in so much as nobody is as thoroughly evil and corrupt as the could be, and everyone might do something nice once in a while, but history has shown that the fundamental characteristic of humanity is not benevolent, but selfish and diabolical. How many nations and kingdoms, in the known history of the world, can you name that were kind and benevolent to the subjects of that kingdom, and the peoples of the surrounding nations? Now some were better than others, and laws have made some nations less dictatorial than others, but as time goes by, individual rights diminish and the dictatorial tendencies of a small elite group begin to take over. In six-thousand years of recorded history there's been no visible improvement of basic human behaviors. There are more nations at war today than ever in history. Man's inhumanity to man has not diminished, and we all know that.

But, that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one is something that only Christians probably understand. That this statement is based on biblical fact, from the Genesis account of Adam and Eve, and their encounter with Satan, which reveals the historical record of how evil found its way into creation, and the extent to which it (he) now holds dominion over it. Few would accept the fact that they are literally slaves of sin, (Jn 8:34; Rom 6:17) born into a corrupt body, and a sin damaged mind, that thinks it's free to do as it pleases, but in fact, is only free to do that which it innately loves to do, which is to sin against God.

The whole world lies under this dictatorial kingdom of sin, which mankind brought upon himself by following Satan's temptation and lie, and knowingly disobeying God. From the time of the first two humans, there has been only two major players in the larger cosmic game. There is God and there is Satan, and all the goods and treasures of creation, including humans, belongs to either one or the other, there are no free agents, despite our claims to the contrary. We all belong either to God or we belong to Satan, we are the property of one, or the property of the other. Not a molecule in space is unclaimed. All is divided into those two camps. If you tell the average person that they are a slave of the devil they'll either laugh, or take offence. They don't believe it for one second, and this is a brilliant work of Satan, to keep his slaves in utter ignorance of their real situation. Whose going to rebel against a master that they don't even think they have? I don't know who first made the statement that perhaps Satan's greatest work was making people believe that he doesn't exist, but that truly captures the truth of the situation, doesn't it?

Now I've gone through all of that so we're reminded of the situation in which we live and exist. For the entire duration of our lives we live in a whole creation that has been damaged, and taken captive by a powerful entity of evil intent. We don't live among a nice and benevolent people, who are for the most part, God friendly and righteous loving. We live among a captured and sin damaged people, who are slaves to sin and don't even know it. And most of them don't want to know, and will take offence if we tell them, but we ourselves, everyone of us, was just the same. And unless someone had told us the truth about our condition, and the good news about Jesus Christ, we would still be exactly the same ourselves.

We must realize that we cannot ever persuade people to behave righteously, and keep God's commandments while they are still damaged slaves of sin. Therefore, we establish laws for the protection of society, but in the end we cannot successfully legislate godly righteousness, personal ethics and morality, and obedience to God's commandments. We can try, but we will not be successful, that's the whole point of the old covenant law of Moses. It simply doesn't work on broken people. The law is perfect, but the people are not, and imperfect people cannot keep perfect laws. God allocated four thousand years of human history, and countless thousands or millions of peoples lives, just to make this divinely important truth clear to humankind. We will never fix this broken, sin damaged and defiled world to work like God demands it to. And He knows that, and that's why He's going to make a new heaven and a new earth that does work right, because the people will finally work right. First He'll fix the people, then He'll fix the world.

The old ideas, that grew out of the optimism of the reformation, that the church was going to preach the world into submission has faded away with the realities of two world wars and growing godlessness worldwide. No, the world, meaning the people of the world, are going to progressively get more and more godless, until the entire population of the earth is at the brink of total annihilation in the great final battle of Armageddon. Mankind is damaged by sin, and is self destructive, and God is going to demonstrate that openly, publically, and conclusively. Then He will take back possession of creation from Satan's control, (Rev 19) and initiate the permanent corrections. (Rev 20-22) God has kept only a remnant, meaning a small remaining piece, a surviving trace, of humanity which He has predestined from before creation to be His own eternal family, all the rest will have served their intended temporary purpose, and be disposed of in the eternal incinerator called the lake of fire. God has decreed that all sin will be forever banished from His eternal kingdom and put into the lake of fire, so our choice is to either abandon our sins, or hold on to them and go where they take us. Sadly, the vast majority will choose to hold on to them and hope for the best. Mankind just will not, because they cannot, abandon their sins to which they are unknowingly enslaved.

Until the physical, bodily return of Jesus Christ back to this earth, it will remain under the power of the evil one, because God has chosen it to be so, and therefore we should expect it to operate accordingly. Thinking and hoping that things will get better before Christ's return is contrary to biblical prophecies. We should know what to expect, and understand the nature of the people we live among, because we were once one of them ourselves. We should know first hand that it's only the power of God's Holy Spirit that can open the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf, and give life to the spiritually dead. Which He does through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and which He has provided as His one and only remedy to the fatal condition of a sin damaged humanity. Our blessed hope, our only hope, is the glorious return of Jesus Christ to banish Satan, and take back possession of this captive creation, and restore perfect righteousness and holiness forever. With that, I think we're ready to move on to the last two verses of this epistle.

### Verses 20-21:

*20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.*

John says that *we know that the Son of God has come*, to the Gentiles this is a new idea, and embraces a salvation that was never before known; but to the Jew, this is their Messiah, for whom they had waited for centuries, and then rejected when He came. Their whole course of action was based on the assumption that He wasn't truly who He said He was.

But we know with certainty who He is, the beloved Son of God, and we know that He came to earth in the form of a man. And we know these things because He *has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true*. John says that we know Him who is true. We all do understand, don't we, that the truth about who He is, is at the very core, the very foundation of our whole belief system. Unless He really is who He says He is, then we're following an imposter. So it's vitally important that everything He said about Himself, and about our forgiveness of sins in His Name, is the truth. And this is John's point, that we have this understanding, and this confidence, because we've been granted this as a vital element of saving faith, which is the gift of God. God gives understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ so that His elect will comprehend who He is, and accept Him by that gift of saving faith.

As I've said many times before, Christians do not take a "blind leap of faith" when they accept Jesus Christ. Faith is a gift of God, but certainly not a blind gift. It is predicated on understanding the gospel, understanding what is being said as to the person and work of Jesus Christ. God doesn't just drop faith in Jesus on us without any comprehension of who He is, what He's done, or why we believe Him. Faith literally means rightly understand what it is that we say we believe. And what we believe is concerning who Jesus is, and what He has done on our behalf. There's nothing blind about this. This involves a very substantial comprehension as its foundation. Of course we don't know all the doctrines and teachings that issue forth from this belief, but we certainly do know who, and what it is, that we are believing. The privilege to hear it, the ability to understand it, and then the gift to believe it, are all under the sovereign providence of God. And we can see from this why any claims or hopes of salvation apart from Jesus Christ have no possible merit. You cannot be saved by a faith in something you do not even know. And this is at the heart of John's last closing words of this epistle, *Little children, guard yourselves from idols*. By this he means substitutes, of any kind, or shape, or form.

It's not just the fact that only Jesus saves from sins, but it's the ***whole and proper truth about Jesus*** that constitutes authentic saving faith. Countless groups, and cults, and religions use the name of Jesus, but their Jesus isn't the One that's described in the bible. And it's certainly not just a name, there's probably more people in South America today with the name of Jesus than there were people in the whole land of Israel during Christ time. But none of these are the Jesus described in the bible, and none of them can save anyone from their sins. We hear the name Jesus bantered about and waved in the air, but there's nothing magical about a five letter name. It's the Jesus who is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the One described in the holy scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, that is the only true Savior of mankind. And God grants to whom He wills an understanding and belief in this specific man named Jesus. So says the apostle John as the logical implications of verse 20.

Then he says *and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ*. The term "being in Him" is very commonly used in the New Testament. We often say that we're in a group, or we're in an organization, but saying that we're in a specific person seems a little strange to us. But when considered, this is the best description I can imagine, because it rightly captures the essence of this mysterious and supernatural association between God and His regenerated children. It's more than just a membership card into some club or organization, it's an organic, indwelling merger of self and essence at a spiritual level that we don't even understand, but the effects are immediately evident. This is being born again, it is suddenly having a life essence that wasn't there, and it changes everything, and we know that Jesus Christ is the One who is true, and that we truly are somehow "in Him."

We are all aware that we are complex beings, that we have a tangible body, but we also know that we're more than just that tangible container. We are conscious, and alive, at some kind of non-tangible level also. We often call this our spirit

or our soul, and it isn't physically and tangibly observable. But yet, when it departs, this bodily container stops working and they bury it in the ground. We don't know exactly how the two are connected, but they are connected, and I'm aware of no one who denies this.

All who have experienced rebirth by the Spirit of God, also called regeneration, and other terms, know that there has been some kind of joining, at an invisible spiritual level to Jesus Christ, whereby we are now "in Him" kind of like our spirit is in our body. All that He (Jesus Christ) is, in the heart and mind of God the Father, we are also, by some kind of spiritual merger with Him, and all His glory and honor and love bestowed by His Father are shared by us who are "in Him." Knowing this is to know the love of God, and this kind of love casts out all fear of wrath and punishment, because we are "in Him" who has no sin, and is the most beloved of the Father.

*This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols.* We must not separate the last half of verse 20 from verse 21, they are one single thought. After saying everything he wanted to say about Jesus Christ being the Son of God, and Him alone being the only true Savior, and giving us a whole five chapter operations manual on authentic Christian faith and practice, John says that this Jesus that he's been talking about IS THE TRUE GOD, and the only source of eternal life for every mortal human being. In Him is life, so guard yourselves from any and every idol offered by Satan as a substitute. Accept no other gods.

### **Conclusion:**

I'm a little sad to finish, because even though I love to teach all of the bible, this has been among the most enjoyable of all the books that I've ever taught. It stays solidly on the critical issues of authentic Christianity, and offers straight forward, easily understood diagnostics for self examination. It's hard to come up with a conclusion that lives up to the merit of this epistle, and so it probably should be, for any letter that was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We could recap those same things again, about accuracy of teaching about the person and work of Jesus Christ, about obedience to His commandments being the authentication of true faith, and about not loving the world and the things of the world, and having a deep and sincere self sacrificing love for all the brethren; and I guess we just did that, but there's one more thing that I can't end this study without saying.

In all of this epistle the emphasis has been about Jesus Christ, as the Son of God. Everything in this epistle is either leading us to come to that conclusion, or the right and proper effects of having done so. This epistle is about Jesus, the real Jesus Christ of the bible. It replaces myth and mystery with real and observable evidences, and leaves no room for any claims of lack of information.

If you come away from this study with only a single thing, I want it to be the understanding that Jesus Christ is the only true God and eternal life, and your only source of forgiveness of sin and salvation from hell. Much of this epistle is dealing with effects after coming to that belief, so you may not understand them, or you may think they're mythical pie in the sky that nobody really understands, that's perfectly normal for unbelievers. John really boiled this epistle down to the bare essentials, and the barest of all essentials is that you come to the understanding of, and true belief in, Jesus Christ as your only Savior. John has told us, and the whole bible affirms, that belief is a gift of God, and not simply a personal intellectual choice, or arbitrary decision that you make all by yourself, even though a decision is ultimately derived as a result of it.

The scriptures teach that the way we attain saving faith, meaning belief, is by the free gift of God. But it also teaches that we are to ask Him for it. Jesus said *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.* (Jn6:37) And He also said *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.* (Mat 7:7-8)

Therefore, knowing this, who will be so foolish, so determined in their heart to hold onto their sins, that they refuse to even ask God for that repentant heart that leads to life, and for a saving faith, a genuine belief in Jesus Christ, that He has said he will not deny to those who ask. Under these circumstances, if anyone refuses to even ask, then they are deserving of the horrific consequences that their sins will demand. Look, if you ask, and God said "no" then you can say the guilt is on God, but if you've never even asked God for repentance and faith, then it's entirely on you beloved. You have absolutely no excuse whatsoever.

There should be no human being who is old enough to understand these things, and mentally competent to comprehend the significance of them, who has not pondered the importance, and asked God for forgiveness of sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Anyone who fails to ask, does so because of their apathy toward God and their love for their sins, and therefore is deserving of their fate, and they will face that fate, there's no doubt whatsoever. Just as surely as you will die some day, you will face the God who made you, and give an accounting to Him when you do. My dear friends, please do not leave this earth without asking God for His gift of repentance of sin and faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Anyone who accepts substitutes, in the form of religious systems, cults, philosophies, other gods, or even in a false understanding of the true God, will be lost forever; but not just lost, but horribly and excruciatingly lost, and eternally and hopelessly lost, and worst of all, irreversibly lost, forever. We've been warned, and along with that warning we've been given the remedy, that's available for the asking, but there's only one that's true. Jesus Christ. *This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols.*

Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami  
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