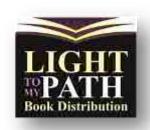
A Devotional look at the New Testament Letters of John and Jude

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

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# Table of Contents

Pretace	5
Introduction to the First Epistle of John	7
1 The Word of Life	9
2 First Barrier to Fellowship: Sin	. 15
3 Second Barrier to Fellowship: Broken Relationships.	19
4 Third Barrier to Fellowship: Loving the World	26
5 Fourth Barrier to Fellowship: Denial of the Son	.32
6 First Test of True Faith: Righteousness	39
7 Second Test of True Faith: Love	. 45
8 Third Test of True Faith: The Renewed Heart	.50
9 Fourth Test of True Faith: The Spirit	.56
10 God's Love in Me	.63
11 Belief in the Son	. 69
12 A Sin Unto Death	.77
Introduction to the Second Epistle of John	.83
13 Walk in Love	.85
14 Continue in the Truth	.90
Introduction to the Third Epistle of John	.97
15 Gaius	101
Introduction to the Epistle of Jude	107
16 Contend for the Faith	109
17 Woe to the Ungodly	116

4	The Epistles of John and Jude	
18 Keep	ourselves12	4

### PREFACE

The letter of 1 John was written that we might know that we have eternal life. In it the apostle John speaks to us about the barriers that can come between the believer and the Lord. John takes us through a series of tests to help us determine whether we are true believers. He boils faith down to its very basic elements and challenges us to look deeply into our lives to see if our faith is real. The letters of 2 John and 3 John are personal letters written to encourage and bless believers going through struggles in life. While 1 John teaches us how we should live in fellowship with our brother and sister in the Lord, John demonstrates this practically in 2 John and 3 John.

Jude was written to address a problem with false teachers who had come into the church, claiming to be believers. These individuals were deceiving and misleading believers. Jude counsels his readers to contend for the faith and gives his advice on how to live the Christian life in a world filled with counterfeit Christianity.

This commentary is not meant to be read in one sitting. Take the time to read the Scripture passage associated with each chapter before reading the commentary. Allow

the Lord to speak to you. Confess any sins or shortcomings. Thank Him for any encouragement. This commentary is not to take the place of the inspired Word of God. Its purpose is to bring understanding, clarity, and application to our present-day lives. My prayer is that the Spirit of God would make these Scriptures come alive to the reader and that their messages would again be heard in our day. May God bless you in this study.

F. Wayne Mac Leod

6

# INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

### Author:

The apostle John is the author of the first epistle of John. He was the brother of James the apostle (Matthew 4:21; 10:2). His father was a fisherman of some wealth by the name of Zebedee (see Mark 1:20).

When Jesus calling John in to follow Him in Matthew 4:21-22, he and his brother James left their father and their nets to become His disciples. John became very close to Jesus and often had the privilege of being with Him at very special moments (see Mark 5:37; Matthew 17:1, 26:37).

After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, John spent time as a church leader in the city of Jerusalem ministering with the apostle Peter (Acts 3:1; 4:1-3). Historically, it is believed that he would also serve in Ephesus (although there is no specific mention of this in the Bible).

### Background:

There is no clear indication in First John as to the intended recipients of the letter. What is clear, however, is the relationship the apostle has with the people who read this letter. John addresses them as "dear children" (2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), "friends" (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11), and "brothers" (3:13). These terms indicate that the apostle had a very deep love and concern for the people to whom he wrote.

The purpose of his letter is explained in 1 John 5:13. In this verse he makes it clear that he wrote so that they would know that they had eternal life. In other words, John's purpose was to give the believers assurance of salvation. He does this by reminding them of the work of the Lord Jesus and the obstacles to a personal relationship with Him. He then showed his readers the change that takes place in the life of the true believer. By examining themselves considering John's teaching, the reader would see evidence of his or her salvation. Also, of concern for John was the false teaching that was circulating in the region. He warned his readers to test every spirit and to be aware those who taught another gospel.

### The Importance of the Book for Today:

The Epistle of First John is a wonderful book for the new believer or those struggling to find the assurance of their salvation. John speaks with tenderness but communicates the truth in a very effective and powerful way. According to John, the life of the believer is a changed life. In this letter John reveals what he believed to be the essential characteristics of a true follower of Christ. We would all do well examine our lives considering what John teaches us in this important epistle.

### THE WORD OF LIFE

### Read 1 John 1:1-4

It is fitting that the apostle John begins 1 John by introducing us to the Word of Life. He begins two of his other writings in the same manner. In his gospel he begins by presenting the Word who "became flesh" (John 1:1-14), and in the opening chapter of his book of Revelation, he makes known the one who stands among "seven golden lampstands" (Revelation 1:9-20). All these are references to the Lord Jesus. Let's consider briefly what John tells us in this letter about this Word of Life.

### This Word Was from the Beginning

In his gospel, John tells us that the world was created by the Word (John 1:1-3). Jesus, as the Word, always existed. He is God. We owe our lives and our existence to Him. He has the power of life in Himself. He is the creator; we are His creation. He was there in the beginning when everything came into being. He is the eternal God, without beginning or end.

This Word Was Heard, Seen, Looked at, and Touched

Though He is a holy God, the Lord Jesus came to dwell with His fallen creation. God is a Spirit and not limited to a physical body, as we are. The Word of Life, however, took on our limitations. The apostle John was one of the privileged few to see and hear Him as He walked on the earth. John touched this Word of Life with his own hands. Notice that John both "looked at" the Word of Life and saw Him (verse 1). The Greek word used here for "looked at" differs from the expression "to see." To "look at" has the sense of "contemplating." It implies a careful examination. What John is telling us here is that there is no doubt in his mind about the person of the Lord Jesus. He carefully examined Him and knows Him to be true. In the first three verses of this letter, John expresses his assurance about the Lord Jesus at least seven times:

- 1. "We have heard" (verse 1)
- 2. "We have seen with our eyes" (verse 1)
- 3. "We have looked at" (verse 1)
- 4. "Our hands have touched" (verse 1)
- 5. "The life appeared" (verse 2)
- 6. "We have seen it [the life]" (verse 2)
- 7. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard" (verse 3)

It is hard to miss the point. John wants us to understand that what he presents to us here is solid fact.

### This Word Is the Source of Eternal Life

The person the apostle describes here is the source of eternal life. John puts it this way in his gospel: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:4). The Word came to offer us life. John is not speaking here about physical life, which we already had (though even this we owe to Him). He speaks here about eternal, spiritual life. This life comes from the Father through the person of the Word of Life. Jesus came to offer us this eternal life.

We come now to the reasons the apostle John feels compelled to write to us about the Lord Jesus Christ. He states two reasons for writing this letter: fellowship and joy.

So That You Also May Have Fellowship with Us (verse 3)

First, there is an evangelistic thrust to this letter. While he is writing to believers ("my dear children," 2:1), he is conscious that not all those who call themselves Christians are really saved. He wants those who have not yet received eternal life to reach out and grasp it. John also wants to edify and encourage true believers in their faith by reassuring them of the truth of the claims of Christ.

A very quick glance at the three letters of John (1 John, 2 John, 3 John) will show us that the apostle John is very concerned about this question of fellowship. He writes his second and third letters to encourage individuals to love one another and restore unity in the church. In this first letter, fellowship is a major theme. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to the theme of love for one another and for God. Here in verse 3 of chapter 1, we see that the basis for this unity and fellowship is in the person and work of the Lord Jesus: "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." We may not always agree with our brother

and sister in Christ but if we have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior and Lord we belong to the same spiritual family. That bond is stronger than any minor differences we may have.

We can have fellowship with each other because we have a common Savior. We are united by means of our common commitment to this Savior. We are united by our common desire to please and love this Savior. We are united by our common understanding of what He has done for us. We are united by our common destiny. Our unity is found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. The more we know and love the Lord Jesus, the more we will desire to actively engage in spiritual relationships with those who belong to Him. John's first purpose in writing this letter is to encourage greater fellowship around the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

### That Your Joy May Be Full (verse 4, NKJV)

John also states a second reason for writing this letter. John shares about the Lord Jesus so that his readers will be full of joy. Where does this joy come from? It comes from their knowledge of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. The Christian life is a joyous life. John wants to see his readers to experience that joy. This is why he points them to the Lord Jesus, who is the source of joy.

There is some debate here over the word "your" in verse 4 (NKJV). Some important Greek manuscripts replace the word "your" with "our." The New International Version reflects this when it reads: "We write this to make our joy complete." John has just told us that he wrote this letter so that his readers would enter fellowship with himself and the Lord Jesus. There is certainly a great joy in seeing people come into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus. There

is joy on the part of the person who introduces them to the Lord as well as on the part of the person entering this fellowship. Ultimately, John's reason for writing this letter is so that together he and his readers could share in the joy of knowing Christ.

The apostle bears witness to what he has seen and heard. His witness is powerful because of his personal experience with the Lord Jesus, the Word of Life, when the Lord walked on the earth. John shares his eye-witness experience with great assurance and enthusiasm. He offers the Lord Jesus whole-heartedly to all his readers. It brings him great joy to speak about the Lord. It is his great desire that his readers would come to know this Word of Life. You can sense his excitement as he shares his knowledge and introduces his readers to the person of the Lord Jesus. Do you have this excitement in your witness for the Lord?

### For Consideration:

- What proof did John have that Jesus is who He claims to be?
- What is the basis for our unity as believers, according to John?
- While we never have seen or touched the Lord Jesus, can we say that we know and have seen Him with our spiritual eyes? Explain.
- Do you share the excitement of John in knowing Jesus? What hinders you from wanting to share Him with others?

### For Prayer:

14

- Thank the Lord for coming down from heaven to make Himself real to us.
- Ask the Lord to bring greater unity to the body of Christ in our day.
- Take a moment to pray for a fellow believer in another church. Thank the Lord that, while you do not always agree in certain matters, you have a common bond in the Lord Jesus.
- Ask the Lord to give you a greater enthusiasm in knowing Him.

### FIRST BARRIER TO

FELLOWSHIP: SIN

### Read 1 John 1:5-2:6

One of the greatest truths of the Christian faith is that you and I can have a close and intimate relationship with our Creator. John reminds us in the first four verses of this letter that though the Lord Jesus existed from the beginning, He came to live on earth with us. John tells us how he had the privilege of seeing, hearing, and touching his Lord in the flesh. He delights in telling us about his friendship with the Creator. He writes his epistle to call on his readers to join him in this fellowship with God "the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ" (1:3).

While fellowship with God is possible, there are several barriers that John wants to warn his readers about. We will examine these barriers over the course of the next few chapters. We will look at the first of these barriers to communion with God in this chapter.

John reminds us that "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all" (verse 5). Light represents holiness and purity. Darkness, on the other hand, represents sin and evil (see Psalm 119:105; John 1:4-5; Romans 13:11-14). In saying that God is light, John is telling us that God is holy and pure. All He does is good and perfect. Never can He be accused of sin. He is the measure of complete holiness and perfection. He is telling us that there is "no darkness at all" in God, and that God's character is flawless. Everything that He ever did or ever will do is perfect and holy. There is no darkness of sin in him "at all."

Having made this statement about God's absolute holiness, John then moves on to the practical application of this doctrine. Remember that John is speaking about the barriers to fellowship with God. Since God is light and there is no darkness in Him "at all," the darkness of sin in us keeps us from a genuine relationship with Him. If we are to have fellowship with God, we must deal with the sin the keeps us separated from Him.

John goes as far as to say that if we claim to be in fellowship with God but "do not practice the truth" (habitually walk in sin), we are liars (verse 6). If we say that we have received eternal life from God and live a life characterized by evil, there is great cause to doubt our claim. Fellowship with God is only possible in the context of obedience and holiness. Because God is pure, He does not fellowship with impurity.

Verse 7 tells us that if we walk in the light, we also have fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a direct connection between our relationship with God and with our fellow believers. When we sin against God, not only do we rupture our communion with Him but also with those who walk in His light. Our communion is around the

Sin 17

person of Christ. When we break communion with Christ, we also break communion with those who belong to Him.

After hearing what John says, we might conclude that we need to be perfect to have fellowship with God and His people. John makes it clear, however, that this is not so. It is true that we are sinners (verse 10). None of us can claim to be without sin. If we are guilty of sin, how then is fellowship possible with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ? It is possible, says John, through the person and work of the Lord Jesus: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (verse 9).

As sinners we can be cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus. Notice, however, that to be cleansed, we need to confess our sins. Those who live in darkness are those who have chosen not to recognize and confess their sin. Fellowship with God and His children is possible only if we are washed and made clean in the blood of Christ. Only by His blood can all the guilt of our sin be removed. Genuine believers live in an attitude of repentance. They have also confessed their sin and know the forgiveness that is theirs through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus on their behalf.

In chapter 2 John tells us that he wrote this letter so that his readers would turn from their sins and live holy and obedient lives (verse 1). The knowledge that God is a holy God should drive us to living holy lives. Who, in their right mind, would want to offend the all-powerful and holy Creator of the universe? To do so would be foolish indeed. If we do sin, however, we have an advocate, "one who speaks to the Father in our defense." That person is the Lord Jesus. That forgiveness is offered freely to all who will come to Christ (verse 2).

How do we know if we are in fellowship with the Light? Fellowship implies living in obedience and turning from sin. We cannot say that we are in fellowship with God if we have not confessed our sin and received the forgiveness of Christ. John holds no punches here. If we say we are living in communion with the Light but are not living in obedience to His Word, we are lying (verse 4)!

If, on the other hand, we live in obedience, God's love is being perfected or "made complete" in us (verse 5). What does it mean to have God's love perfected in us? God's love is demonstrated to us in the person of Christ who offers forgiveness and fellowship with the Father. When that love takes hold of us and is allowed to mature and accomplish its work in us, the result will be forgiveness and a life of holiness and obedience to the Lord. When we delight to live in obedience to the Word of God, we know that the love of God is doing its work in our lives. That love is maturing and shaping us into the perfect image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

If you claim to live for Christ, you will walk as Christ walked, in holiness and purity before God. If you walk in darkness, you cannot have fellowship with the Light. When you sin, it is only by confessing those sins to the Lord Jesus that fellowship with the Light can be restored.

The first great barrier to fellowship with the Light is the barrier of sin. As you read this you may recognize your need to be restored to fellowship with the Lord Jesus or with His children. The promise in this passage is that if you confess your sins, He will forgive you. You can be restored to fellowship this very minute. Don't put it off. Come to Him right now. He wants to forgive you. All you need to do is to recognize and confess your sin. He is willing restore you to

Sin 19

fellowship. He will cast your sins away, never to remember them again. Come to Him now.

### For Consideration:

- Are there sins that keep you from fellowship with the Light? What are they?
- How does sin affect your relationship with God?
   Can you truly have fellowship with God if your heart is not right with him? Explain
- Is it possible to be in a right relationship with God if you are not in right relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

### For Prayer:

- Has the Lord been revealing any sin to you that needs to be confessed? Take a moment to confess that sin
- Thank the Lord for the fact that forgiveness and restoration is possible through the Lord Jesus?
- Ask God to enable you to live in obedience to Him daily. Thank Him for the fellowship He desires with you.

# SECOND BARRIER TO

FELLOWSHIP: BROKEN

### RELATIONSHIPS

### Read 1 John 2:7-14

John told us that the first barrier to fellowship with Christ is sin. He now goes on to tell us about a second barrier. The second barrier is a broken relationship with a brother or sister in Christ.

John begins here by telling us that what he is about to say is not new. Before the fall, though Adam lived in the Garden of Eden in perfect communion with His creator, God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone (Genesis 2:18). God created a woman to be his partner. We were created as social beings. We need the companionship of fellow human beings. We were not created to be alone. We find happiness in harmony with other individuals.

When Cain killed Abel, God was very angry (Gen 4). He cursed Cain and drove him away into exile. He told him that when he worked the soil, it would no longer yield its fruit for him. He would become a wanderer for the rest of his life. Why did God punish him so severely? Was it not to show us how seriously God feels about the mistreatment of those He has created in His image?

God told Noah that if an individual shed the blood of another person, the guilty person was to be killed (Gen 9:6). In the Old Testament, murder was punishable by death. From the very beginning of creation, it was the will of God that human life be respected and honored (Gen 2:24). To disregard the sanctity of life would mean having to answer to God (Leviticus 19:18).

The Old Testament contains many examples of what God expected from His children in their relationship with each other. In Leviticus 25:42-43 God commands His children never to sell their fellow Israelite into slavery. The person who cursed his father or mother was to be put to death (Leviticus 20:9). God's people were to deal honestly with each other in business (Deuteronomy 25:15). God reminds His people in Deuteronomy 5:21 that they were not to covet their neighbour's possessions. God expected His people to respect their neighbour's property. If their neighbour's ox fell on the road they were to help him to get it on its feet.

While this principle of loving and honoring one another is as old as the creation of mankind, there is also something very new and fresh about it (verse 8). John tells us here that "its truth is seen in Him and you." Jesus brought a new meaning to the concept of loving others. By His life on the earth, He gave us a new and fresh look at this old commandment. He showed us in practical terms what it means

to love our neighbors as ourselves. As the Son of God, He was willing to lay down His life for us when we were His enemies. Because of His death and resurrection, our sins can be forgiven. God's love can now live in our forgiven hearts. With His love in our hearts, we experience afresh what it means to love our neighbor in a way we never knew before.

John knew that this love was being experienced afresh in the hearts of those to whom he wrote. He told his readers that he was confident that for them "the darkness of sin is passing" (verse 8). The light of Christ was now shining brightly in them. As that light shone in their hearts, they would experience a new love for others. John went as far as to say that if they claimed to be in the light but hated their brother, they were still in the darkness of sin (verse 9), and as such they could not have fellowship with the Light.

The apostle tells us that if we love our brother, we walk in the light and will not stumble. If, on the other hand, we do not love our brother or sister, we walk in darkness. We walk as those who do not know where they are going because they are blinded by the darkness of sin. What a horrible thing it is to walk in darkness. When people walk in darkness, they are taking great risks. The chance of tripping over obstacles is very high. They risk harming themselves and others. It is the same way with those who do not love their brothers or sisters. They cause great harm not only to themselves but also to those around them. There are serious implications in our spiritual lives when we refuse to love others with the love of Christ. Let's look at some of these implications.

First, those who do not love others separate themselves from God. Jesus tells us that God will not accept our worship if we do not love our brother:

> "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23).

Second, Jesus also tells us that God will not forgive our sins if we do not lovingly forgive others for the wrongs they have done to us:

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14).

This does not mean that he does not accept us as His children. What we need to see here is that we cannot hold bitterness in your heart against another person and be right with God. We will have to answer to Him for any bitterness toward our brother or sister.

Third, Peter reminds husbands that if they do not love their wives, God will not listen to their prayers:

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7).

Finally, the writer of Proverbs tells us that if we do not love our brother, God will remove His blessing from us:

"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered" (Proverbs 21:13).

When you put all these things together, you can see how dangerous it is not to love your brother or sister. If you do not love others, God will not accept your worship; He will not forgive your sins; He will not listen to your prayers; He will remove His blessing from your life. This is very serious. You cannot have fellowship with the Light if you choose to separate yourself from the children of the Light.

The apostle John writes to his readers with the assurance that they will listen to him. He reminds them in verses 12-14 that they have been forgiven and know God. They have overcome the evil one, and the Word of God lives in them. With a certain confidence, therefore, John reminds them to continue as they began and to persevere in love for one another, so that the darkness did not overtake them.

The second barrier to fellowship with the Light is a broken relationship with a brother or sister in Christ. How easy it is for a root of bitterness and hatred to spring up in our hearts. If we do not quickly deal with that root, it will have devastating spiritual results in our lives. May God grant us the grace to live in love for each other.

### For Consideration:

- Do you know of anything that stands between you and a brother or sister in Christ? What needs to happen so that this can be made right?
- Can you remember a time when you were not right with a brother or sister in Christ? What was the result of this in your spiritual life?
- What difference would it make in the church if each member demonstrated this love of Christ for one another? What would you expect to be the results?

### For Prayer:

- Is there someone you have difficulty loving? Ask God to give you a greater love for that person.
- Thank the Lord that He loved you even when you did not deserve it.
- Ask the Lord to break any pride that keeps members of your church from loving each other as God intended.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord and pray for someone you have had difficulty loving.

### 4

## THIRD BARRIER TO

FELLOWSHIP: LOVING THE

### WORLD

Read 1 John 2:15-17

We have examined the first two barriers to fellowship with the Lord Jesus. John has made it clear to us that sin and broken relationships are major hindrances to fellowship with the Lord Jesus. He now moves on to the third barrier: loving the world.

John speaks very plainly here. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (verse 15). What does John mean by this? Was it not this same John who told us in his gospel: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)? If the love of God dwells in us, shouldn't we too love the world, even as God loves it?

To understand what John is telling us here, we need to see the difference between John 3:16 and 1 John 2:15. The Greek word for "world" used in these two passages is the word *kosmos*. This Greek word has different meanings. It can refer to the earth and the heavens that form the physical universe we see around us. It is also used in speaking about the human race. This same word also has a more figurative or spiritual meaning. It describes those things that are opposed to God. In this sense, to be "worldly" is the opposite of being "spiritual."

When John tells us in John 3:16 that God loved the world, he is using the word *kosmos* to refer to the human race. Jesus came to die out of love for the human race. John has already mentioned this in 1 John 2:2: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

When John tells us that we are not to love the world in 1 John 2:15, he is not talking about people. He is speaking about the world in the sense of those things that oppose God and His reign. He is referring to the general philosophy of all ages that denies God and His Word. He is speaking about the endless pursuit of pleasure and riches that so many people get caught up in.

How often we become ensnared by the things of this world. This world offers us its possessions, prestige, praise, and pleasures in exchange for our fellowship with God. In the Garden of Eden, the devil tempted Eve with the pleasure of eating the forbidden fruit and the promise of becoming very wise. Matthew 4 records that the devil tempted the Lord Jesus with the pleasure of eating bread after a forty-day fast. He also offered Him the possession of the world and the prestige of authority in the world if He would bow down to him and worship him. He then offered the Lord the

praise of mankind if He would jump off the top of the temple. The devil also tempts us. He wants to turn our attention from God to the world. A quick look at what is taking place around us will show us that he has been very successful. I recently saw a bumper sticker on a car that said: "He who dies with the most toys wins." Isn't this the philosophy of this world? Instead of seeking God, we place our priorities on the things of this world.

Concerning the possessions of this world, Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 6.10:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Yes, the love of money and earthly possessions has been the source of every evil imaginable. People have resorted to sexual immorality, murder, theft, and dishonesty in pursuit of possessions. According to 1 Timothy 6:10, some have even wandered from their faith because of their love of possessions. Have we not felt the pull of this materialistic attitude? We measure our success or failure in life and business by our possessions. We measure our value by what we have in this life. But with all our possessions, we are not closer to God. In fact, the love of these possessions takes us from Him. We become self-sufficient and do not feel our need of God.

Besides material possessions, another temptation this world offers us in exchange for fellowship with God is the praise of people. John addresses this issue in his gospel when he said:

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. (John 12:42-43)

Even in Jesus' day, the love of the praise of others caused many believers to refuse to publicly acknowledge the Lord Jesus. They would not acknowledge Him because they wanted others to think highly of them.

The love of praise will hinder us too in our walk with the Lord. Jesus willingly suffered the abuse and scorn of the people of His day. He was not ashamed of us. Will we reject Him out of fear of what others might think? How much of God's work has been hindered because of a love of worldly praise?

David, the man after God's own heart, turned his back on the Lord in the pursuit of temporary pleasure. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers. To cover it up, David resorted to murder. (2 Samuel 11:1-25)

In 3 John, Diotrephes turned his back on the Lord because of his need to be respected by others as a man of importance. He wanted to be first in the church. In verses 9-10 of 3 John, the apostle writes:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

In his desire to be first, Diotrephes fell prey to the sin of gossip and slander. He was more than willing to blacken the character of others to make himself look better. In so doing he drove a wedge between himself and God.

In 1 John 2:16 the apostle describes for us the desires of people caught in the trap of loving the world. He tells us first that they are full of the "lust of the flesh" (NKJV). They seek the gratification of the flesh. This may come in the form of sexual sin, alcohol, drugs, or another means. They crave worldly pleasures.

Second, individuals who love the world are full of the "lust of the eyes" (verse 16, NKJV). This seems to be the sin of materialism. What they see they want. They cannot bear to see their neighbors with nice cars or nice homes. They must have the best of all everything.

Third, those who love the world are full of the "pride of life" (verse 16, NKJV). The New International Version translates "pride of life" as "boasting of what he has and does." Individuals who love the world are status conscious. They have a need to boast about their achievements and possessions. They find meaning and significance in these things and not in God.

John tells us that none of this comes from the Lord. All that the world has to offer is, at best, temporary. Not only are these things temporary, but the love of things can also keep us from the Lord.

We are reminded that the third barrier to fellowship with the Lord Jesus is the love of the world. Have you been caught in this trap? Your soul will never find fulfilment in the world. In fact, the love of the world will keep you from Christ. In God alone there is fullness of joy.

### For Consideration:

- Are you tempted to love the things of this world?
   What tempts you?
- What is it that makes the world so attractive, even to the believer?
- What is the difference between enjoying the good things that God has given us and getting caught up in the love of the world?

### For Prayer:

- Ask God to set you free from the love of the world.
- Do you know some people whose pursuit of the things of this world has been driving a wedge between them and God? Take a moment to ask God to set them free.
- Thank God for the many wonderful blessings He has given you. Ask God to show you the difference between enjoying what He has provided and loving His blessings to the point of putting them before Him.

# FOURTH BARRIER TO FELLOWSHIP: DENIAL OF

THE SON

Read 1 John 2:18-27

John has been teaching us about the barriers to fellowship with the Light. Sin, broken relationships, and the love of the world will keep us from knowing the joy of fellowship with the Savior. Throughout the ages these barriers to fellowship have drawn countless individuals away from the Lord Jesus. In verses 18-27 John teaches us about the fourth barrier: the barrier of denying Christ.

The apostle reminds us, first, that we are in the end times. One sign of the end times is the coming of antichrist. John speaks in greater detail about the Antichrist in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 13 John describes for us a beast that comes out of the sea. This beast receives his authority from Satan, who is described as a great dragon. Antichrist,

by the authority of Satan, exercises dominion in the world for a time. He blasphemes the name of the Lord. He makes war with the saints. He is given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. John tells us that in his vision he saw all the inhabitants of the earth bow down to worship this beast. Only those whose names are written in the book of life refuse to worship the Antichrist.

This great beast is assisted by another beast that performs many miraculous signs. Only those who carry a certain mark either on the forehead or the right hand can buy or sell. The mark is a symbol of submission to the authority of the beast. This time in the history of the world is described as a time that calls on the saints to exercise patient endurance and faithfulness. There has been much speculation concerning the identity of Antichrist. He seems to represent certain powers that deny the lordship of Jesus and set themselves up above God.

John reminds us that while we await the Antichrist spoken of in the book of Revelation, there have been many antichrists that have already come. He tells us that this is a definite sign that the end is drawing near. What does John mean when he tells us that there have been many antichrists? Who are these antichrists? Let's explore the three things he tells us about them here in this passage.

First, John tells us that these antichrists "went out from us, but they were not of us" (verse 19). The fact that these individuals went out from them would lead us to believe that they were men and women who had made some kind of religious confession. They were, at one point in time, found in the fellowship of the church. For a reason not stated in this verse, these individuals left the fellowship. The fact that they left, says John, shows that they did not really belong in the first place. The implication here is that

had they been true believers, they would have persevered in the truth. They had knowledge of the truth, but they turned their backs on it.

Maybe you have met individuals like this. For some reason they left the fellowship of the church and became, like Judas, its worst enemy. Their hearts became hardened to the truth. They wanted nothing more to do with the church. Maybe they had been hurt in the church. Maybe they had seen certain inconsistencies in the lives of believers. We are not told why these individuals left, but they began to live in rebellion against God and His work. They became instruments in the hands of Satan to blaspheme the name of Christ.

We will come back to verses 20 and 21 in a moment. Verse 22 tells us a second thing about these antichrists: they deny the Father and the Son. Maybe they are in our denominations and in our seminaries. Maybe they are in our churches. What characterizes them is the fact that they deny that the Lord Jesus is the Christ. "Christ" means "anointed one." When we use this term, we are saying that Jesus is the Son of God, the one anointed to come as the sacrifice for our sins. John tells us that anyone who rejects the Lord Jesus as the Christ is a liar and an antichrist. We can deny that Jesus is the Christ by promoting a salvation apart from Him.

No true Christian could ever say that Jesus was not the Christ. To deny that Jesus is the anointed one who came to save us from our sin would be to deny the salvation He came to offer. There can be no fellowship with God until we accept the Lord Jesus as the Christ. Our salvation rests solidly on the truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The antichrists that John speaks about here preach another gospel.

Third, these antichrists seek to lead us astray from the truth about Jesus and His work (verse 26). In our day there are many cults and sects which are doing just that. They go from house to house seeking to lead people into a faith that denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. These individuals are antichrists. Many of them come in very deceptive terms. They are successful in drawing individuals away from Christ. They do not know the Lord Jesus. To know Him is to know that He is God. To know Him is to bow the knee before Him and submit to His lordship. These individuals are instruments in the hands of Satan, turning people away from Christ. These antichrists existed in the church of John's day; they also exist in our day.

Having warned his readers about those who deny that Jesus is the Christ, John goes on to say something about the true believer. The true believer has an anointing from the Holy One and knows the truth (verse 20). John says the same thing in his gospel:

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31-32).

There can be no question about what Jesus is saying here. The true disciple knows the truth. In John 16:13 Jesus tells His disciples that when His Spirit came to them, He would guide them into all truth. If the Spirit of God lives in us, we will have a very definite conviction about the person of the Lord Jesus. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that it is only by the Spirit of God that we can claim Jesus as Lord:

"Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

John was assured that his readers knew the truth about Jesus because the Spirit of God lived in them.

Notice in verse 27 that the Holy Spirit, the "anointing you received" from Christ, testifies about Jesus. John is saying that believers do not need anyone to teach them that Jesus is Lord. While the Lord has given to the church teachers and preachers of the Word, (Ephesians 4:11-12) John is telling us that there are certain doctrines that the true believer knows intuitively. These are things the Spirit of God clearly reveals. One of these doctrines is that the Lord Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The apostle Paul was on the road to Damascus to arrest believers who confessed that Jesus was God (Acts 9:1-2). He was going to return them to Jerusalem where they would be persecuted or put to death. On the way he met the Lord Jesus. In an instant he was transformed. The instant he met the Lord Jesus, he knew Him to be the Christ. Never again would he doubt that Jesus was the Son of God who came to save him from his sin. No human sat him down to teach him the doctrine of the deity of Christ. The Spirit of God convinced Paul of this vital truth. This is what John is telling us here. As a true believer, you do not need anyone to tell you that Jesus is Lord. You know that because the Spirit of God has revealed it to you.

John challenges us in verse 24 to remain in this teaching we have heard from the Holy Spirit of God. We should not let anyone dissuade us from this Spirit-inspired teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. There is hope in no one else. Jesus alone is the Christ. Apart from Him there is no salvation.

John tells us that we are to guard with all diligence our understanding of who Lord Jesus Christ is. He is telling us that we are to have nothing to do with anyone who seeks to tell us that Jesus is not the Christ. To deny that Jesus is the Son of God is to deny the only hope we have. We cannot walk in the Light if we deny that Jesus is the Son of God.

Do you want to walk in the Light? You must accept the Lord Jesus as the Christ who came to save you from your sins. Accepting Him as Christ, the Son of God means that you willingly bow the knee to Him. It means that you surrender to His lordship in your life. It means that He alone is your hope of eternal life. The fourth barrier to walking in fellowship with the Lord Jesus is denying Him to be the Christ, the Son of God.

#### For Consideration:

- Where would we be today if Jesus were not the Christ?
- What opinions are there in our day about Jesus?
   What can we do to help people understand that Jesus is the Christ?
- Why is it impossible to walk in fellowship with Christ if we deny Him as the Christ?
- Are their individuals or groups in your community that deny that Jesus is the Christ?

### For Prayer:

 Thank the Lord that He came to offer hope to us who were lost in sin?

## The Epistles of John and Jude

- Thank the Lord for His Holy Spirit who gives us the assurance of who Jesus is.
- Thank Him that He revealed Jesus to you.

38

 Take a moment to ask the Lord Jesus to reveal Himself to a friend or loved one who does not yet know Him as Lord and Saviour.

# FIRST TEST OF TRUE FAITH: RIGHTEOUSNESS

#### Read 1 John 2:28-3:10

The apostle John has just reminded us of four barriers to fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Now that we know what can keep us from fellowship with the Lord, we shift our attention to another important question. How can I know if I am in fellowship with Christ? In the next few chapters John will give us several tests of true faith. I would challenge you to carefully examine these tests. The first test of true faith is the test of righteousness.

John begins this section by challenging his readers to continue in the Lord Jesus so that they will not be ashamed when He returns (verse 28). The apostle then reminds them in verse 29 that anyone born of God will do what is right. We can be unashamed only by doing what is right. This is the heart of the true believer.

John goes on in chapter 3 to remind us of the great love of the Father toward us (verse 1). He rescued us from the world of sin and despair. He took us from the jaws of Satan and made us His children. As children of God, we are no longer the people we used to be. We have been changed. This change has been so radical that the world no longer knows us (verse 1). They cannot identify with what is taking place in our hearts.

The day is coming when the Lord Jesus will return. When He comes, He will take us to be with Him. The changes we have seen in our lives here on earth cannot be compared to what we will become in heaven. John tells us in verse 2 that we will become like the Lord Jesus. When He comes, the Lord will destroy the power of sin over us. The forces of Satan will be terminated. Our old natures will no longer hinder us. We will love the Lord with undivided hearts. We will be like Him, and we will see Him face to face. What a glorious day that will be.

The apostle John reminds us in verse 3 that those who have this hope will purify themselves. If you understand the love of the Lord Jesus and have the hope of eternal life, you will want to obey and love Him in return. If you have been born of God, His character and righteousness will be seen in your life. You will have a natural compulsion in your heart to purify yourself so that you may become more like your master.

John tells us that sin is the breaking of the law of God (verse 4). As sinners, we have a natural tendency to turn away from God and His law. Left to ourselves we do not seek God and His ways. Before we knew Christ, we were slaves to sin.

When the Lord Jesus came to this earth, He came to take away the domination of sin that blocked our relationship with God (verse 5). He was the only one who could give us victory over sin. No one else could conquer it. He alone was perfect. He is our only hope of being set free from the rule of sin in our lives.

John tells us in verse 6 that when the Lord Jesus came to live in our hearts, He gave us a new nature. If He is living in us, we will not continue living lives characterized by sin: "No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning". The Holy Spirit came to empower us to live the lives God requires of us in His Word. This is not to say that we will never fall into sin's traps. John does not tell us that the true believer never sins but, rather, that the true believer does not continue in habitual sin. The conviction of the Holy Spirit and love for the Lord Jesus will drive true believers to deal with the sins that are exposed in their lives.

John reminds us of the power that now lives in the life of the believer:

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them [evil forces], because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Because the Spirit of God now lives in us, we have a new power to overcome sin. True believers will show evidence of that power by righteous lives because the Spirit of God now lives in them.

John speaks of this power and enabling in his gospel. He compares believers to branches on the vine (John 15). The sap of the presence of God flows through us and brings life, vitality, and fruitfulness. The apostle Paul also spoke

of this power in the lives of believers. Paul puts it this way in Philippians 2:13:

"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

As believers we are vessels through which the power of God can flow. He is alive and active in our hearts. This becomes evident as we yield the control of our lives to the Lord Jesus. When the power of God is at work in us, we have a new desire to serve and honor the Lord Jesus in all we do.

It was clear to John that true believers, in whom the Spirit of God lives, will not be happy in sin. This does not mean that believers never fall into sin. John tells us in 1 John 1:10:

"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

Every one of us has fallen into sin. We will wrestle with sin until our dying day. John is telling us, however, that while true believers may fall into sin, they will not be happy in this sin. There are times when sin will gush up from the hidden recesses of our old natures, but when it comes face to face with the presence of God in our lives, it is defeated. Because the Spirit of God is in us, our lives ought to be characterised by victory over sin.

If sin reigns and continues to dominate your heart, you must ask yourself the question: have I ever experienced the presence and power of God in my life? If you know the presence of God in your life, you will also be experiencing increasing victory over sin. If you continue to live in sin

without regret, remorse, or conviction, you need to ask yourself if you have truly come to know Christ.

John concludes what he is saying in our passage by making some very powerful statements in verses 7-8: "He who does what is right is righteous... He who does what is sinful is of the devil." The life of Christ is a life of victory over sin and the devil. When the Spirit of God comes to live in your life, He makes some radical changes. If you have yielded the control of your life to God, you will not persevere in sin. If God is living in you, you will see continued victory over evil. As He did in the life of Jonah, God will chase after you until that sin and rebellion is removed from your heart and you are right with Him again.

Admittedly, there are sins in our lives as true believers that we may have difficulty dealing with. Just because we struggle with stubborn sins does not mean that we do not belong to Christ. The issue here is willing persistence in sin. Genuine Christians are uncomfortable with sin in their lives. If we are living for Christ, we will do everything we can to deal with sin and overcome it. However, if we find ourselves comfortable in our sin and stubbornly persist in it without regret and shame, we should ask ourselves if the Spirit of God is living in our hearts at all.

The first test of true faith is the test of righteousness. Those who know the Lord Jesus Christ will experience His power at work in their lives. The presence and the power of the Spirit of God will chase away sin and rebellion from the hearts of believers and cause them to live in obedience and faithfulness. Has this been your experience?

### The Epistles of John and Jude

#### For Consideration:

44

- What sins do you struggle with in your life as a believer?
- How does it make you feel when you fall into sin?
- Is there evidence of a new righteousness in your life?
- What changes has the Lord made in your life since you came to Him?
- What is the difference between falling into sin and persisting in that sin?

## For Prayer:

- Thank God for sending His Holy Spirit into your life to convict you of sin.
- Ask God to give you victory over the sin you struggle with today.
- Take a moment to surrender yourself more fully to the Lord as His servant. Ask Him to make you more aware of the ministry and voice of the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin.

## SECOND TEST OF TRUE

FAITH: LOVE

#### Read 1 John 3:11-18

The question we are considering in this section of John's first letter is this: how can I know if I am walking in fellowship with the Lord Jesus? John proposes several tests. In the last chapter we looked at the test of righteousness. Here in this section we will look at the second test: the test of love.

John introduces us to this second test in verse 10. Here he tells us that he who does not "love his brother" is not a child of God. It is important that we understand what it means to love our brother. Love is often confused with the warm feeling we get when we are with someone whose company we enjoy. John is not telling us that he wants us to have a warm feeling toward everyone we meet. He is not even telling us that we must enjoy being with everyone. There

are some people we will never enjoy being with. If love is not a warm feeling, what is it?

To explain what he means by "love," the apostle John gives us the example of the Lord Jesus. "This is how we know what love is," begins John in verse 16. We know what love is because Jesus laid down his life for us. If you want to love in the way God wants you to love, you need to follow the example of Christ. To love is to lay down your life for another.

There are many ways to lay down one's life for another. John gives us an example in verse 17. Suppose you have material possessions, and you see a brother in need. What would be the loving thing to do? The loving thing to do would be to share your possessions with him to ease his pain. To "lay down your life" for your brother in this situation would be to sacrifice your own possessions for him, even as Christ sacrificed His life for you.

To lay down one's life is to make a sacrifice. The sacrifice that Christ made was the sacrifice of His life. While we may never be required to die physically for our brother or sister, we will certainly be called on to die in other ways. Some of us will be required to die to our pride. Some will need to put aside their comforts. Some will need to give of their time and effort. Some will be constrained to give financially or materially. What John seems to be telling us here is that if you love others, you will be willing to sacrifice yourself and your possessions for them. Love is not simply words. Love requires action and deeds. Love requires the sacrifice of time and resources.

This love needs to be cultivated. If you are married, you will know how easy it is to let love grow stale. Do you remember when you first started seeing you husband or

Love 47

wife? There was nothing you wouldn't do for him or her? You went out of your way to make life as pleasant as possible. That meant dipping into your wallet. It meant some late nights and early mornings. It required a major investment of your time and effort. No expense was too great, because of your love. As time went by, things began to change. You were no longer willing to make those sacrifices. Instead of wanting to make your partner as comfortable as possible, you may have found yourself using your partner to make your own life more comfortable. Your time and effort began to be invested in yourself. Your love faded, and now you no longer delight in laying down your life for your partner.

In verse 11 John reminds us that it has always been the will of God that we love one another in a sacrificial way. This concept of sacrificing oneself for another in rooted in creation itself. How was Eve created? Was it not from the rib of Adam? Adam had to sacrifice a rib for Eve to be created. Why did God require his rib? He could have formed her from the dust of the ground like Adam. I believe that God was teaching Adam a lesson. He was teaching him about this concept of sacrificial love. For Eve to be born, it required a sacrifice on the part of Adam. In the sacrificing of ourselves, we give life to another. This is what it means to love.

Through Adam and Eve sin entered the human race and people lost their ability to love as God loves. In verse 12 we are reminded of Cain and Abel. Cain killed his brother Abel after God accepted Abel's offering but refused Cain's. Cain's worship was not acceptable because he did not come to God in faith (Hebrews 11:4). Cain was not a child of God but "belonged to the evil one." Cain's true nature was revealed in his jealousy and hatred toward his righteous brother. Cain's unwillingness to lay his pride on the

altar and worship God in faith led him to murder his brother.

This principle of dying to self is not very popular. John tells us in verse 13 that the world will not be able to understand this concept of laying down one's life for another. This principle goes against the grain of our society. The apostle warns us that we ought not to be surprised if the world thinks we are crazy and rejects us because we are not like them. It is not the natural tendency of people to sacrifice themselves for others. The true believer does not hate his brother: "He who hates his brother is a murderer" (verse 15). We do not have to literally kill someone to be guilty of murder. To be guilty of murder before God, all we have to do is to allow hatred for others to live in our hearts. We cannot live in fellowship with God while harbouring this hatred. If we do not love, we remain in death (verse 14). In other words, those who do not love are still under the judgment and condemnation of God.

John concludes this section by reminding us that "we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" (verse 14). When God resides in the heart of the believer, there is love in that heart. Hatred, bitterness, and jealousy are banished from the heart in which God dwells. When God lives and reigns in our hearts, His love for our brothers and sisters will be evident.

The second test of true faith is the test of love. You can know that you are in fellowship with God, as His child, if you are experiencing the self-sacrificing love of Christ in your heart for others. This love is not a love you ever knew before. It is not your love. You could never naturally love like this. It is new. It is real. It is God in you. If you know what I am talking about, you know that God is in you and your faith is real.

Love 49

#### For Consideration:

- How did your relationship change with those around you when you came to know the Lord Jesus? Did you love them more?
- What is the difference between your human love and the love that the Lord Jesus places in your heart?
- Are there people you struggle to love? Does God love these people? How can you let Him love them through you?

## For Prayer:

- Do you have someone in your life who is hard to love? Ask the Lord Jesus to help you to love them.
- Thank the Lord for the new heart that He has given you. Thank Him for how He has taken away the darkness of hatred and replaced it with the light and warmth of His love.
- Take a moment to pray that the church of our day would experience a renewing of this self-sacrificing love for one another.

## THIRD TEST OF TRUE FAITH: THE RENEWED HEART

Read 1 John 3:19-24

The first epistle of John is immensely practical. John is concerned with the very basics of our faith. We are examining the question: how can I know that I am walking in fellowship with the Light? The apostle has already given us two tests of true faith. John now proposes the third test: the test of the renewed heart.

This question of whether I am a true child of God and walking in the Light is a question that all of us need to ask ourselves. If you are anything like me, you have times in your life when you are absolutely shocked at your own sinfulness. There are times when we look at the condition of our hearts and recognize how far from God we really are. It seems that the closer we get to the Lord, the more sinful we feel. Someone compared the Christian life to a man walking through the woods on a dark and rainy evening.

He is not able to see clearly as he makes his way to his friend's home on the other side of the forest. As he walks he stumbles over an old tree root and falls into the mud. He picks himself up, brushes off the dirt, and continues his way. Soon he sees his friend's porch light shining through the trees at a distance. As he approaches the light, he looks at his clothes. He becomes aware of how dirty he really is. Several minutes pass and he is even closer to the light of his friend's house. He looks at himself again and sees dirt that he had not seen before. It seems that the closer he gets to the light, the more dirt he sees. Is this not how it is in our relationship with the Lord? The closer we get to the light of His holiness, the dirtier and more sinful we feel.

There are times in our lives, says John in verse 20, when our hearts condemn us. At times we look deep inside our hearts and see the blackness of sin. There are times when the presence of the Lord is obscured. The Lord seems far away. How can we "set our hearts at rest in his presence" at these times (verse 19)? In light of the reality of a sinful heart, how can "we know that we belong to the truth"? Verse 20 tells us that we can know we are still his children because God is "greater than" our sinful hearts "and He knows everything." Let's look at what John is telling us here in greater detail.

The heart has a natural tendency to turn from God. Jeremiah, the prophet, tells us:

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Notice how God describes the human heart in the days of Noah:

"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5).

This is the Bible's description of our hearts. We may not like what the Bible says, but we know it to be true.

I often ask myself the question: what would I do if I were left to myself to do whatever came naturally? If I were not restricted by upbringing, law, or a sense of having to maintain a good reputation, what would I do? If I did not have a fear of dishonoring God in my heart, where would I be today? Where would I be if I let my basest desires rule my life? Where would I be if I let my sinful heart dictate to me the path I should take? There are times when I am afraid to answer these questions. As I reflect on this question, I am forced to recognize the blackness of my own heart. In the midst of these uncertainties, how can I possibly know that I am a child of God? When my own heart condemns me, how can I claim to belong to the Lord Jesus?

John reminds me that when my heart condemns me, I need to remember that God is more powerful than my sin. Since I belong to the Lord Jesus and He has come to live in me, I am experiencing victory over the evil desires of my heart. Since Jesus came into my heart, I have been set free from the slavery of having to do what my evil heart tells me to do. I am experiencing a new power in my life. I am experiencing victory over sin. I am finding that the love of Christ has overcome the natural hatred and bitterness that used to reign in me. Yes, God is greater than my sinful heart. When the enemy condemns me and points a finger at the sinfulness of my evil heart, I can tell him that though this is indeed my very nature, I am no longer its slave. God

enables me to live a new life. When your heart condemns you, look to Him who is greater than your heart.

John reminds us secondly in verse 20 that God knows everything. God knows our hearts. He knows how sinful we are. He knows our need of strength and enabling. He knows those things with which we struggle. He knows those areas in which we need victory. He knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves. Not only does God know all that goes on in our hearts, He also knows what to do about it. He is more powerful than our sin.

God knows you and what you need. He knows the hidden sin in your life that needs to be overcome, and He knows how to overcome it. There is no hurt He does not know how to cure. There is no sin He does not know how to overcome. He has the answer for the need of your heart right now. Won't you let Him heal you? He alone knows how. He is your only hope.

The apostle has told us that God is more powerful than our hearts. He has also reminded us that God knows how to heal the wounds and sins of our hearts. John moves on in verse 22 to tell us that God is willing to give us all that we ask of Him. What an incredible promise this is! We have the promise of God Himself that when we wrestle with the sin of our hearts, all we need to do is to call out to Him, and He will answer us. It is important, however, that we see this statement in its context.

John tells us that we can have anything we ask, but there is a condition attached to this promise. Notice that he tells us that we can have whatever we ask, "because we obey his commands and do what pleases him" (verse 22). This promise is *not* for those who are living outside of Christ.

The promise is for those whose hearts do not condemn them.

How is it possible for our heart not to condemn us? This is only possible when we allow God to reign in us and overcome our sinful hearts. Our hearts cannot condemn us if we are living according to God's commandments and doing what pleases Him. Even when I do fall into sin, my heart cannot condemn me when I bring that sin to the cross of Christ. In the cross there is complete forgiveness and cleansing. John calls us to live in this forgiveness and cleansing.

It is in this context that you and I can ask anything in His name, and it will be done for us. It is when I allow Him, who is greater than my heart, to reign supreme in my life that I can claim this promise. It is only when my heart has been conquered by the Lord Jesus and I have died to the sinful desires of my heart that I can know the joy of asking anything in His name. When His desires are mine and His Spirit has conquered me, then I can ask anything of Him and it will be done for me.

How can you know that you are walking in fellowship with the Lord Jesus as a true Christian? John asks you to take the inner test of the heart. When you look deeply into your soul, do you see the one who is more powerful than your heart? Is there evidence of spiritual victory? Is there proof that your old, deceitful heart has been conquered? Whose life now pulses in your veins? Is it still the old life of your sinful heart, or is it the new life of Him who has conquered your heart? We know we are Christians because our desires and ambitions have changed. Our hearts have indeed been conquered, and we have been given a new heart.

#### For Consideration:

- Is there evidence in your life of a changed and renewed heart? What is that evidence?
- What changes have come about in your heart and life since you came to know the Lord Jesus?
- What are the conditions for asking and receiving anything in His name?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that God is more powerful than your heart?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the wonderful way in which He has provided for your forgiveness.
- Thank God for the evidence of a clean heart that He has given you.
- Thank God that there is no sin He will not give you victory over.
- Take a moment to pray for a friend or loved one who has never experienced this changed or renewed heart.
- Is there a sin in your life that you still need to overcome? Ask the Lord Jesus to give you complete victory.

## FOURTH TEST OF TRUE FAITH: THE SPIRIT

Read 1 John 4:1-6

How can we know if we are walking in fellowship with the Light as a true child of God? John has given us the test of righteousness, the test of love, and the test of the heart. The fourth test is the test of the spirit.

As the chapter begins, John calls us to examine every spirit to be sure that it is of God (verse 1). The word "spirit" has many meanings in the Scriptures. It can refer to the breath we breathe. In the spiritual dimension, it refers to either the Holy Spirit or evil spirits. Beyond this, it describes that part of man that gives him the ability to think and reason. Still further, it is also the part of man that is able to commune with the supernatural.

In our passage John refers to six spirits:

- 1. The Spirit of God (verse 2)
- 2. The spirit that confesses Christ (verse 2)
- 3. The spirit that does not confess Christ (verse 3)
- 4. The spirit of antichrist (verse 3)
- 5. The spirit of truth (verse 6)
- 6. The spirit of falsehood (verse 6)

To understand what John is speaking about, we need to examine each of these spirits. The "Spirit of God" (verse 2) seems to refer to the Holy Spirit. The "spirit that confesses Christ" (verse 2) is the heart of a person who responds favorably to the Lord Jesus and His claims. The "spirit that does not confess Christ" (verse 2) is the heart of an individual who rejects the Lord Jesus. The "spirit of antichrist" (verse 3) refers to the Satan-inspired reasoning of our age that rejects Christ and His claims. The "spirit of truth" (verse 6) refers to the teachings of the truth as it is taught by the Spirit of God and revealed in the Scriptures. The "spirit of falsehood" in verse 6 refers to the teaching of error as taught by the spirit of antichrist or Satan.

Having said this, let us now examine what John tells us about these various spirits. He begins by reminding us that not all spirits are good. Obvious examples of these are the "spirit of antichrist" and the "spirit of falsehood." Even in John's day there were many false prophets who had "gone out into the world" (verse 1). These false prophets were instruments in the hands of Satan to distract people from the truth of the Word of God.

If you have ever planted a garden you are aware of the problem of dealing with weeds. Weeds in your garden tend to choke out the vegetable plants or flowers. These weeds generally grow fast and take away the nutrients in the soil. Gardeners know that if they want to have a good crop of vegetables at the end of the season, they are going to

have to deal with the weeds. One of the most important things a gardener needs to know is how to recognize the difference between a vegetable plant and a weed. John is telling us here that this world is much like a garden. The vegetable plants of truth grow in the same soil as the weeds of error and falsehood. How do we know what is of God and what is of antichrist? John gives us some instructions here in this passage.

First, "every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (verse 2). What does it mean to acknowledge that the Lord Jesus "has come in the flesh"? On a very basic level it means that we believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God who came to live among us. He took on the form of a man (though He was God) and lived with us. He died for our sins, rose again from the dead, and now lives in heaven with His Father.

There is much more, however, to acknowledging that Jesus "has come in the flesh" than to believe that He walked on the face of this earth. There are some practical implications for our lives as well. The Lord Jesus came to rescue us from Satan and sin. He came because we are sinners, condemned to an eternity without God. He came to crush the head of Satan. To acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh requires a response from us. To acknowledge the Lord is to recognize that if He died for me, then there is no sacrifice too great for me to make for Him. To acknowledge Jesus is to submit and offer my life to Him in return for the wonderful sacrifice He made for me. Does the spirit within you draw you into a deeper appreciation for the work of the Lord Jesus on your behalf? Does it encourage you to surrender your all to Him because of His wonderful sacrifice? If it does, then the spirit within you is the Spirit of God; if not, it is the spirit of antichrist (verse 3).

A second means of testing the spirits is found in verse 4. John tells us that we can know our spirit is from God if we have overcome the spirit of this world. As we have already seen, this world is full of falsehood and error. The spirit of antichrist has permeated every aspect of life. From advertising and television to education and entertainment, the spirit of antichrist is evident. It promotes life without God. It places man on the throne of the universe and claims that he is god. The spirit of antichrist calls us to grab as much of this world's pleasures and possessions as we can get. It invites us to throw off restraints and do as we please. It tells us that the law of God is an unnecessary hindrance to living life to its full. Many have fallen into this trap.

Our natural tendency would be to fall prey to the temptations of the enemy. However, there is a power that lives in the heart of the believer that is greater than the spirit of antichrist. The Spirit that is within the believer is overcoming the spirit that is in the world. If you are experiencing victory over the spirit of this world, its lusts and temptations, then you can be assured that the spirit that is within you is the Spirit of God. Jesus reminds the Pharisees in the Gospel of Matthew that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand:

"Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:25).

The spirit of this world is at war with the Spirit of God. If we discover that the spirit within us is driving out the influences of this world from our lives, we can be safe in assuming that the spirit working within us in the Spirit of God. This is one of the characteristics of the Spirit of God. He

moulds us and shapes us into the image of Christ. When the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, we will find a new set of desires reigning within. The world will lose its attraction. The things of God will take on new meaning and significance in our lives. When the spirit within us is from God, we will be finding victory over the things of the world.

In verse 6 John gives us a third way of testing the spirits. Those who are children of God will understand and receive truth. John says that "whoever knows God listens to us." The Spirit of God enables believers to recognize truth. Those who do not know God do not accept the truth. Their ears are shut, and the Word of God does not make sense to them. They may read the Bible, but it has no meaning for them. Even when truth is explained to them, they are not able to comprehend it in a way that is life changing. Those who belong to the world understand only the things of this world.

Those who are of God, however, are able to receive truth when they hear it. Before the Spirit of God lived in our hearts, we could not recognize, hear, or understand the truth of God. But now we know that God is real. He speaks with us in our spirit. We understand spiritual things that we never had before. We delight in hearing Him speak to us through His Word. He guides us when we need to know where to turn. He speaks comfort to us when we are discouraged. He convicts us when we are walking on the wrong path. He has become closer to us than any friend could ever be. We delight in hearing Him. We can say today that He is both our friend and our God. Like Moses, we commune with Him as friend with friend. Does the spirit within you lead you to a closer and more intimate walk with the Lord God? Does the spirit within you enable you to hear God in a deeper and more personal way? If so, then you can be sure that it is the Spirit of God who dwells in you. A spirit of antichrist will not lead you to a deeper knowledge of Christ.

How can we recognize the difference between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error? How do we know which spirit lives in our hearts, our church, or our community? We can know by examining that spirit in the light of these three questions. First, does our spirit acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh and therefore humbly surrenders all to Him? Second, is the spirit in us overcoming the spirit of antichrist in the world? Third, does the spirit in us open our minds to the truth and draw us closer to the Lord Jesus? Only by answering these questions can we be assured that the Spirit in us is indeed the Spirit of God.

You can know that you are walking in fellowship with the Light, as a child of God, by examining the spirit that lives in you. If the spirit in you is in tune with the Spirit of God, then you know that you are in fellowship with the Light and walking in the truth.

#### For Consideration:

- What are the tests John gives us here to confirm whether the spirit within us is really the Spirit of God?
- Take a moment to examine your heart. What do these tests reveal to you about the spirit that resides in you?
- Apply the same test to your church. Does this test reveal anything to you about your church?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for putting His Spirit within you.
- Ask God to fill you more and more with His Holy Spirit.
- Ask God to drive out any ungodly influence of the world in your life.
- Take a moment to pray for your church, asking God to drive away any spirit of antichrist. Pray the same for your community

## 10

## GOD'S LOVE IN ME

#### Read 1 John 4:7-21

One of the most distinguishing signs of true faith is love. John speaks often about love and its importance in the life of the believer. In the Gospel of John, he reminds us that the world will know we are believers by our love for one another (see John 13:35). In this next section the apostle examines the importance of love in greater detail.

John reminds us twice in these verses that God is love (see verses 8 and 16). This forms the basis of his argument. John is not saying that God is only love. God is also all-powerful, all-knowing, and holy. God has many other characteristics as well. Why does John emphasize the attribute of love in this passage? Is it because John sees love as the connection between God and man? God is holy, but we are sinful. Because of His holiness there is an infinite gap between us. God is also eternal and infinite, whereas, we are creatures of time and space. We have a very limited understanding.

As sinful men and women, our only link to God is love. If we remove love from the list of God's characteristics, we would permanently alienate ourselves from God. His holiness and His justice would inevitably overwhelm us and condemn us for eternity. It is only because of love that we can have a relationship with God. It is because of love that forgiveness is possible.

From this starting point, John moves on to tell us that not only is God love, but He is also the source of love. Where God lives, love reigns. When God lives in our hearts, our lives are filled with love. God's reign is a reign of love because He is love and the source of love. If we do not love, it is because we do not know God's presence in our lives. John reminds us in verse 12 that though none of us has ever seen God, we can know His presence by means of this love in our hearts.

The question may be asked: can a person without God love others? To answer this question, we need to understand what John means by "love." To explain this John turns our attention to the Lord Jesus. In verse 19 John tells us that we can only love God because He first loved us. How did God show this love to us? Verses 9 and 10 tell us that God showed His love for us in sending His Son, the Lord Jesus, to die for our sins. In sending the Lord Jesus to die for us, God showed us what it means to love. To love others is to sacrifice your life for them. To love others means to put their well-being above your own selfish desires. True Christian love does not distinguish between friend and foe. Christ came to die for those who hated Him. He gave His life to save His enemies.

Let us return to our question: can a man or woman without God love others? Let me make this answer personal. As I look deep into my own heart, I am reminded of how selfcentered I really am. Any love that I find in my heart would naturally be selfish. I would love to be loved in return. I would give to receive. I would respect to be respected. I would not naturally love my enemies. My love for others would be a matter of convenience. I would love them if it suited me and worked to my advantage.

When I see another human being responding out of selfless love toward another, I believe I am really seeing the hand of God, because I know human nature is corrupt. I believe that when anyone (believer or unbeliever) exhibits selfless love, God is at work. Any evidence of selfless love in my society is. I believe, an indication of the gracious presence of God in my society. I ask myself the question: where would we be if God removed His presence from our country? We would see an increase in abortions and murder. We would see an increasing disrespect for our fellow human being and their possessions. Rape and sexual violence would be on the increase. There would be a growing sense of self-centeredness. The divorce rate would sour. Marriage would be called into question. Couples would choose to live together without making a life-long commitment to each other (leaving the door open just in case things didn't work out). Is the condition of our society an indication that God is removing His presence? God is the source of love. Where God is absent there is no love.

As believers we can see God's love in a deeper way because He has given us His Holy Spirit (verse 13). The Holy Spirit was given to point us to the Lord Jesus, who is the visible demonstration of God's love. We can only know and acknowledge God's love for us because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (see verses 13-16). Until the Holy Spirit touches people, they will never understand the greatness of God's love for them personally. This is what distinguishes believers from unbelievers. Believers have

understood the love of God for sinners and have opened their hearts to receive it. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. John reminds us that as we live in love, we live in God because God is love.

John tells us in verses 17 and 18 that if we have truly understood and accepted God's love, we will have great confidence in the Day of Judgment. We can have confidence, says John, because we are like Him in this world (verse 17). In what way could it be said that I am like Christ in this world? When I accepted the Lord Jesus, He came into my life to reign. His love transformed my life. I am experiencing His reign of love in my heart. I now find myself loving others as Christ loves them. When I see how my heart has been transformed by the love of Christ, I have great confidence as I look toward the Day of Judgment. I know I am his. I know he lives in me.

John goes on to tell us that "love casts out all fear" (verse 18). The love of Christ has given us forgiveness for all our sins: past, present, and future. In love He did not hesitate to die on the cross for us. His love is greater than our greatest sin. His love has granted us complete access to the throne of God. There is nothing more that needs to be done. His love has done it all. You do not need to seek His approval because in love you have been accepted as you are. You can approach a holy and righteous God with no hesitation or fear because in love you are accepted. Shall He who died on the cross for you reject you now that He is seated on the throne (Revelation 3:21)? His love is an unconditional love. His love is a love that will last throughout eternity. Nothing can separate you from that love. Approach Him boldly. He will not turn you away. His love casts our fear of judgment and condemnation.

In conclusion, John reminds us that if we have understood the love of God for us, we in turn will love our brothers and sisters (verses 19-21). If you do not love your brother, you do not love God. This is not something that you will have to cultivate in your own strength. The natural result of the reign of Christ in your heart will be an overflowing love for your brothers and sisters.

Have you been experiencing this love in your life? Has the Spirit of God enabled you to understand and accept the love of God for you? Has your life been transformed by this love? Are you experiencing a real reign of love in your heart? May the Spirit of God give you this understanding of the love of God. May that love invade your soul and fill it to overflowing. May it overflow in your heart. This is how we know we belong to Him: the love of God reigns in us.

#### For Consideration:

- What change has the Lord Jesus brought in your relationships with those around you now that you have accepted Him as your Lord and Savior?
- Is there evidence of this love in your heart toward those around you? What hinders the expression of His love in your heart toward others?

## For Prayer:

- Are there people in your life you have difficulty loving? Ask the Lord to let you experience His love for them?
- Thank the Lord for His unconditional and unmerited love for you?
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for not always demonstrating His love to those around you

## 11

## BELIEF IN THE SON

#### Read 1 John 5:1-12

John tells us here that if we believe in Christ we are born of God. What does it mean to be born of God? All of us have had a physical birth. This needs no explanation. John is telling us, however, that there is also a second birth. In the Gospel of John 1:12-13, John tells us that those who accept the Lord Jesus are given the right to become children of God. The implication here is that not everyone is a child of God. We become a child of God by accepting the Lord Jesus and His work on our behalf. Later in John 3, Jesus told a man by the name of Nicodemus that it was necessary for him to be born again to see the kingdom of God. His physical birth was not enough. Listen to what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5-6:

"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." Jesus makes it clear that there are two births. There is, first, the birth by water. The birth by water is a reference to our physical birth and the water that is expelled at the time of birth. Jesus tells us secondly, however, that there is also a spiritual birth. In this passage Jesus told Nicodemus that if he wanted to go to heaven, he needed to experience this spiritual birth. Our physical birth brings us into the physical world. Our spiritual birth makes us children of God. Heaven is only for those who have been spiritually reborn.

How can we know that we have experienced this new birth? John tells us in 1 John 5:1-5 that there are at least four demonstrations of this new birth. Let's look at them briefly.

## Belief that Jesus is the Christ (verse 1)

The first indication that we have experienced this spiritual rebirth is the fact that we believe that the Jesus is the Christ (verse 1). The term "Christ" means "anointed one." When we believe that Jesus is the Christ, we believe that He is the one God sent to die for our sins. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to cling to Christ as our only hope of being accepted by God the Father. That means that we do not expect that there is anything we can do that could add to the work of Christ to make it more likely that God would accept us. Our hope for salvation is in the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross on our behalf. He is the only one God sent for our salvation and His work alone is sufficient.

## Love for His children (verse 1)

Second, if we have been born again and truly love the Father, we will experience a love for His children (verse 1). John has often repeated this in his epistle. Because God is love and He lives in us, we also love. We find a great love in our hearts for fellow children of God. When the Spirit of God comes to live in our hearts, He causes us to love what God loves. If the Spirit of God is in us, then we will love the children of God.

## Keeping his commandments (verses 2-3)

Third, if we are children of God, we will keep His commandments (verses 2-3). Obedience means dying to our own ways. It means putting aside our own interests and desires for the sake of the Lord. Obedience is not a burden for true believers. We delight in surrendering our will to the Lord. It gives us great joy to lay aside our own interests to serve God's interests.

## Overcoming the world (verses 4-5)

Fourth, if we are born of God, we will overcome the world. John has underlined this often in his epistle. He tells us in chapter 3 that no one living in Christ will continue to sin (see 1 John 3:6). In 1 John 4:4 he reminds us that He who dwells in us is greater than he who is in the world. If we are truly born of God, we will be living in ever increasing victory over sin and the world. The darkness of sin will be chased away by the light of Christ in our hearts.

Verse 4 tells us that this victory over the world comes by faith. According to verse 5, this faith is in the person of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. In other words, we cannot experience victory on our own. How often have we tried to

live the Christian life in our own strength? Maybe you have committed yourself to spending more time in prayer. Maybe you told yourself that you were going to stop a certain sin in your life. For a time, things seemed to be going well, but your victory was short-lived. Your spiritual engine ran out of gas. You can only go so far in your own strength. John is saying here that if you want to overcome the world, then the victory is only possible by faith in the Lord Jesus. He alone can overcome the world. You cannot possibly do it yourself. He can change your heart. He alone can supply you with the strength necessary. By faith trust Him to do it.

Verses 6-11 speak to us about the person of the Lord Jesus, through whom we can overcome the world. They remind us that Jesus "came by water and blood." This is not easy to understand. The word "came" can mean to make an appearance or to show oneself. What John appears to be saying is that Jesus revealed Himself to the world by means of water and blood. How are we to understand the terms "water" and "blood" in this passage?

There is some confusion among commentators concerning the meaning of the word "water." Some see a reference to the water of baptism. Jesus did reveal Himself to the world by means of his baptism. It was after His water baptism by John the Baptist that Christ began His public ministry. It was here that the Spirit of God descended upon Him. The people present that day heard the voice of the Father declaring Christ to be His beloved Son. The baptism of Christ was a public declaration to the world that He was the Son of God.

Other commentators see in this word "water" a reference to the physical birth of Christ. John 3:5 tells us that we must be born of water and the Spirit. At the time of birth, "water" is expelled and the baby is born. If this is the interpretation of this verse, then Jesus, the Son of God, revealed Himself to the world by means of His physical birth. He took on physical flesh, was placed in the womb of Mary, and was born among us by natural birth.

John reminds us that Christ revealed himself to us not only by taking on human flesh (by water) but also by means of "blood." Most commentators agree that the term "blood" used here refers to the death of Christ on the cross for our sins. Though we have never physically seen Christ, He has revealed Himself to us by means of the cross. Countless numbers of men and women from all nations have met God through the cross of Christ. Jesus told His disciples on one occasion that when He was lifted up (on the cross) He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32).

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ is central to all that we believe. Our hope is solidly fixed on His finished work on the cross. How can we be sure, however, that the work of Christ is sufficient for our need? John reminds us of three witnesses to the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Let's take a brief look at these witnesses.

John tells us in verses 7 and 8 that these witnesses are "the Spirit, the water and the blood." By the Spirit John seems to refer to the Holy Spirit who testified to the person and the work of the Lord Jesus by filling Him and demonstrating the power of God in His life through great signs and wonders. That same Holy Spirit, however, also fills our hearts and reassures us that the claims of the Lord Jesus are real and true. Those in whom the Spirit of God dwells know that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save them from their sin.

The second witness to the person and work of the Lord Jesus is the "water." We have already said the water represents the physical birth and life of our Lord. Anyone who seriously examines the life of our Lord Jesus will understand that His claims are true. Never do we see him falling into sin. We see the character of God the Father revealed to us in the person of the Lord Jesus. We see demonstrations of the Father's love and holiness in the physical life of our Lord on this earth. His compassion, sinless life, and selfless love all demonstrate to us that He is everything He said He was.

For those who see "water" referring to baptism, this too is a testimony to the work and person of the Lord Jesus. On the day that the Lord Jesus was baptized, those around Him heard a voice from heaven declaring that He was the Son of God. They saw the Holy Spirit descend on Him in the form of a dove. This was clear confirmation that Jesus was indeed who He said He was and that His work was the work of the Father.

The third witness to the person and work of the Lord Jesus is the "blood." This we understand to be His death on the cross for our sin. This death fulfilled perfectly all the prophecies of the Old Testament. That same death was shown to be approved by God by means of the resurrection. Through this death, the lives of countless individuals have been changed. All these witnesses are in perfect agreement. What further proof do we need?

There is another witness to the truth of the claims of Christ. If you are a believer, you have this testimony or witness in your heart. The Spirit of God in you assures you of the truth of Christ's claims. That inner assurance is nothing other than God Himself confirming to your heart that the Lord Jesus is indeed everything He claimed to be. While we

may have reason to doubt the witness of our fellow human beings, we cannot doubt the witness of God Himself.

John tells us that it is possible to reject the claims of Christ. To do so, however, is to call God a liar. When the Lord Jesus claims to be the Son of God and you refuse to believe Him, you call Him a liar. Eternal life can only be found in the Lord Jesus. To reject Him and His claims is to reject life. No one who rejects Christ will inherit the kingdom of God.

In summary John tells his readers in this passage that those who are born of God believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This belief is based not only on a careful examination of the claims of Christ but also on practical experience in their lives. They are people in whom His love abounds. They are overcoming the world and its temptations by His power working in their lives. They see in the life and death of Christ the proof that He is exactly who He claimed to be. They are individuals who have a deep Spirit-given conviction that Jesus is the Christ. They cling to Him as their only hope of eternal life. They know His presence in their lives. There is no doubt that Jesus is everything He said He was. If you do not believe in Jesus and His claims, says John. you have no basis to assume that you are a child of God. Everyone who is born of God believes that Jesus is the Christ.

## For Consideration:

- What evidence is there in your life that you have experienced the new birth?
- Take a moment to examine the proofs of John here in this chapter concerning the person and work of

## 76 The Epistles of John and Jude

the Lord Jesus. Can there be any doubt about the Lord Jesus and what He came to accomplish?

 Is it possible for a person not to believe in the claims of the Lord Jesus and be a Christian?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the assurance He gives us about the person and work of His Son.
- Ask God to make these truths plain to your friends and loved ones who have not yet accepted Him as the Christ.
- Ask God to remove any doubt you might have in your heart about Him and His claim.

## 12

## A SIN UNTO DEATH

#### Read 1 John 5:13-21

As we come to the end of the epistle of 1 John, the apostle reminds us in verse 13 of the purpose of the letter. He has written this letter so that we may know that we have eternal life. In this epistle, John has described to us what it means to be a true believer. He has offered us a series of tests to help us determine whether our faith is real. His epistle causes us to look deeply into our souls. I trust that it has confirmed you in your faith.

If our faith proves to be real John gives us a promise in this conclusion. He tells us that we can approach God with confidence. We can ask anything that is according to His will and He will hear us. You can be assured that if the Lord has put a burden on your heart to know Him, He will answer your prayer when you call out to Him. You can be sure that when you ask God to give you victory over your sins, He will hear and answer your prayer. Let us approach Him with boldness and claim His promise. If we know that what we ask is according to His will, we can be assured

that He has heard us and will answer our prayers. It is for us simply to wait on Him and surrender to His leading.

This promise of God hearing our prayers also applies to our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Christ (see verse 16). When we see others falling into sin we should petition God to release them from the chains of sin and death. We are to ask God to restore their spiritual lives so that they will again know the joy of their salvation.

God will hear our prayers for the release of our brother and sister, says John. There is tremendous power in prayer. How we need to make the spiritual condition of our brothers and sisters a matter of constant prayer. As a church we need to unite our prayers for fellow believers who have fallen into sin. God has promised that He will hear us and restore the wanderer.

Notice, however, that John tells us that "there is a sin that leads to death" (verse 16). He tells us that we cannot pray with assurance that God will deliver a person who has committed such a sin.

Listen to what God said to his prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 14:11-12:

"Do not pray for the well-being of this people. Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plaque."

The Lord said the same thing in Jeremiah 7.16:

"So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you."

The Lord is speaking here about the people of Israel. They had turned their backs on God. They had refused to listen to His prophets. God had given them every chance to hear and to repent, but they refused. God now passed His sentence of judgment on them. They would die in their sins. There was no use in praying for them now because God's judgment was final.

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit about money they had received from the sale of their property. Because of their sin, they were struck dead by the Lord. What they were involved in was deliberate disobedience to the Lord. Though they knew what was right, they chose to rebel against God. They were unrepentant, and God judged them with physical death.

In 1 Corinthians 11:30 certain individuals were coming to the table of the Lord in an unworthy manner. Obviously, they were unwilling to confess their sins, and yet they came in the name of the Lord to participate in the Lord's Supper. Paul reminded the church that this was the reason many members of the church in Corinth were sick and some had died. God judged them for their blasphemy and stubborn hypocrisy.

Paul told the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 5:5 that there was a certain individual among them who was living in sexual sin. Paul told the church that they were to put that individual out of the church and deliver him over to Satan so that the flesh would be destroyed but his soul saved.

There are times when, because of the hardness of an individual heart, the Lord sentences that person to die. What is accomplished by the death of these individuals? In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the whole church feared the Lord (Acts 5:5). There is something about seeing the judgment of God in such a visible way that brings a whole church into repentance and fear of God. By the death of the offending party God also stops the offenders from falling deeper into rebellion and taking others with them. Sin is removed and the church advances.

What protection do we have as believers today from this sentence of death? We know the hardness of our own hearts and the stubbornness of our human nature. John tells us in verse 18 that those who belong to God will not continue in sin because God will keep them safe. He goes on to tell us in verse 20 that the Son of God came to give us understanding "so that we may know Him who is true" (verse 20). We are protected by God in two ways here. First, God keeps the believer from persisting in sin. Second, God reveals His Son to the believer as the source of all truth and forgiveness.

It is a very serious matter to continue in sin. The writer to the book of Hebrews put it this way:

> "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Hebrews 10:26).

It seems to me, from what we have seen in this last chapter of 1 John, that the sin that leads to death is the sin of willful, continuous rebellion against God and the rejection of God's revelation of the truth about Jesus His Son. It is the

sin of those who know the way of truth but turn their backs on it. It is the sin that Peter warned us about in 2 Peter 2.20-22:

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.

While God will keep His own, no one can live in willful rebellion against God and expect that God will not judge. Those who know the truth but rebel against it are more accountable to God than those who never knew the truth at all. It is one thing to act in ignorance of the truth and quite another to act in rebellion against a truth we know full well.

John warns his readers here that there comes a time when they forfeit all hope. God will not listen to prayers for those who have willfully and rebelliously rejected the truth of this epistle. This shows us just how important it is to take the words of John seriously.

The apostle concludes his epistle by telling us that we are to keep ourselves from idols (verse 21). An idol is anything that would replace God in our lives. John calls us here to surrender to Christ and walk in His truth. He challenges us to jealously guard our hearts for Christ and Him alone.

Everything else must be chased away. He must be everything. He must be the central focus of our thoughts and desires. This is the secret to walking victoriously in the Light.

## For Consideration:

- Have you ever seen a case of God judging sin in the life of one of His children through trial, tragedy, or even death?
- How can the death of a rebellious believer accomplish the glory of God in the church?
- How does God protect us from the sin that leads to death?

## For Prayer:

- Do you know a believer who is wandering far from the Lord in willful rebellion? Take a moment to pray that the Lord would bring this person back to Himself.
- Ask the Lord to protect you from willful rebellion against His Word. Ask Him to keep your heart always soft before Him.
- Thank the Lord that we have everything we need to live a victorious life in Christ.
- Thank the Lord for the work of His Spirit in our lives, protecting and keeping us secure in our relationship with Him.
- Ask God to give you grace to trust Him more fully for all you need to walk in holiness and power

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

#### Author:

Though there is no mention of the author's name in this second letter, it is widely accepted, however, that the apostle John is its author. He was the brother of James the apostle (Matthew 4:21; 10:2) and son of Zebedee, a fisherman by trade (see Mark 1:20).

When Jesus called John in to follow him in Matthew 4:21-22 he and his brother James left their father and their nets to become His disciples. John became very close to Jesus and often had the privilege of being with Him at very special moments in His life and ministry (see Mark 5:37; Matthew 17:1, 26:37).

After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, John spent time as a church leader in the city of Jerusalem ministering with the apostle Peter (Acts 3:1; 4:1-3). Historically, it is believed that he would also serve in Ephesus (although there is no specific mention of this in the Bible).

## Background:

The letter is addressed to "the elect lady." The identity of this lady is uncertain and has led many commentators to assume that it is a term used to speak of the church in general. What is clear is that the letter was written to warn believers of the danger of false teaching in their midst and to encourage them to continue to walk in love for each other. The apostle also takes the opportunity to tell his readers that he was planning to visit them to explain these things in more detail.

## The Importance of the Book for Today:

The Epistle of Second John draws the reader back to the "teaching of Christ" (verse 9) and to the old command of loving God and our neighbour (verse 5). In these thirteen brief verses, the apostle John shows us the two key ingredients of the Christian life, loving God and our neighbour and walking in obedience to His Word. This is the secret to a victorious Christian life. In our day we have made the Christian life very complicated. John brings us back to the basics in this brief letter. We would do well to read it and examine our lives afresh in light of its most basic teaching

# 13

## WALK IN LOVE

#### Read 2 John 1-6

John introduces himself in this second epistle as "the elder" (verse 1). He tends not to mention his name in any of his letters. Obviously, he is so well-known that he does not need to mention his name. His concern here, however, is not to focus on himself. He writes this second letter as an elder in an official capacity. The letter is addressed to the "elect lady" (KJV) or the "chosen lady" (NIV). We do not know the exact identity of this lady. Some commentators view this person to be an actual lady known to John, the apostle. Others believe that John is writing to a specific church referring to her as a chosen lady. The reference to her children is to her members. From the context we understand that John is speaking to a group of believers. In verses 4-6 he challenges them to walk in love for one another. In verses 7-11 he gives them instructions in how to deal with the false teachers that are among them. This may imply that he is writing to a church.

Before offering his first challenge, John reminds his readers of how much they are loved. He reminds them of his own personal love for them. His love for them is "in the truth" (verse 1). What does it mean to love in truth? It may simply mean that he loves them without hypocrisy. He loves them sincerely. From verse 2, however, we understand that this truth lives in the heart of the believer. Could the truth spoken of here refer to the message and person of Christ? Is John telling his readers that he loves them in Christ? His love for them is not a worldly love; it is Christ's love in him.

Not only is this group of believers loved by the apostle John, they are also loved by "all who know the truth" (verse 1). John is saying that all believers, who know the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, are tied together in the bonds of love. Because Jesus lives in us, we love the brethren, even as He loves us. Notice that John tells us in verse 2 that this truth will be with us forever. Jesus will never leave us. We can be assured of His constant presence.

John offers some further words of encouragement in this passage. He tells his readers that the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father and Jesus the Son will be with them in truth and love. God's grace is His unmerited favour toward those who do not deserve it. His mercy refers to His loving-kindness and patience with us. Peace is the result of knowing that all hostility between God and believers has been broken down and that God is caring for His own in every situation they encounter. All of this is ours as believers. Notice that John tells us that these things are ours in truth and love. That is, they have come to us by means of the truth about Jesus Christ and because of His great love for us.

Having encouraged the believers, John moves on to the first challenge of his letter. He is very positive in his approach. He tells them that it gives him great joy to know that some of the children in this body are "walking in the truth" (verse 4). John could have said this in another way. He could have expressed his grief that not all her children are walking in truth. Maybe this tells us something about John. He is a very loving and compassionate person. He seems to be able to focus on the good. In saying this, however, John does not ignore the reality of their present situation, there were some who needed to learn to walk in love.

Notice how John includes himself in this challenge to these believers. He uses the word "we" in verse 5: "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands." The apostle, in a very humble way, has just reminded his readers of how much they are loved by God. He then moves on to tell them that they, who are so greatly loved by God, need to love God in return. This love for God will be expressed in two ways in their lives.

First, if God's love is in them, they will love each other. John has stated in his first epistle that people who say they love God but do not love others are liars. If God dwells in their hearts, their hearts will be filled with love for those around them. John wants to see these believers grow in their understanding of this love. He wants to see a greater expression of love for one another.

Second, if God's love is in them, they would walk in obedience to His commands. He tells them here that if they loved God, they would obey Him. Disobedience to the Word of God proves only one thing: a lack of love for God. We can measure how much we love God by how obedient we are to Him. Those who love God will not count the cost

of obedience. To please their Lord and Savior, they will willingly lay down their lives, worldly goods, possessions, reputations, and everything else.

John's challenge to the elect lady and her children is that they walk in love. Obviously, there was a problem with relationships in their Christian assembly. John challenged the church to evaluate their spiritual health by looking at their relationships with each other and their obedience to God and His Word? These two tests are a measure of maturity in Christ.

What are you willing to endure to walk in obedience to the Lord? Is the reality of Christ's love in you such that it overflows in you to others? This was the challenge of John to the elect lady. It is also his challenge to us today.

### For Consideration:

- Are you walking in love? Do you see evidence of love for your brother and sister?
- Take note of how gentle the apostle John is in this epistle. How gentle are you? Is there anything you can learn from the apostle's manner in this passage?
- What cost are you willing to pay for obedience to the Lord Jesus?
- How does your obedience demonstrate how much you love God?
- How should being a believer affect how you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? Does the church of Jesus Christ today demonstrate this life for one another?

## For Prayer:

- Is there anyone that you have trouble loving? Ask the Lord to help you to love them as He loves them.
- Ask the Lord to give you the same spirit of gentleness that He gave to the apostle John.
- Thank God for His gentleness toward you when you fall into sin.
- Ask God to help you live in deeper obedience to Him and His Word. Ask Him to show you if there is any way that you have fallen short of His standard

## 14

# CONTINUE IN THE TRUTH

#### Read 2 John 7-13

In the first part of this second epistle, John challenges the elect lady to walk in love. He now moves on to his second challenge. He begins by reminding her that there are many deceivers in the world. Obviously, these deceivers are posing a threat to the harmony of this assembly. John states that deceivers can be recognized because they do not acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh. Let's examine this statement in greater detail.

In his first epistle the apostle speaks about those who do not acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh (see 1 John 4:2-3). What does this mean? On the surface it means to recognize that as the Son of God, Jesus took on the form of a man and lived on earth. There is much more to acknowledging "Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh," however (verse 7). Even Satan acknowledges the historical fact of Christ's human presence on this earth. The person who truly acknowledges Christ "as coming in the flesh" will also embrace the reason He came. He came to deliver

us from our sins. He came to give us victory over Satan and death. Believing that Jesus came in the flesh is to confess Him as our only hope of victory over sin and death. Beyond all this is our personal response to these historical and theological truths. Those who fully acknowledge Christ turn their lives over to Him as Lord. Those who acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh offer Him their bodies, minds, and souls. They commit themselves to Him and accept the sacrifice that He offered on their behalf for the forgiveness of their sins. John warns his readers that those who do not acknowledge Jesus in this way are deceivers. He goes as far as to say that they are antichrists.

There is a second characteristic of deceivers. In verse 9 John tells us that "anyone who does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God." It is important to state here that not all Christians will have the same beliefs. They will differ concerning what the Bible teaches on minor issues. John is saying here, however, that regarding the person and work of Christ, there can be no dispute. True believers will recognize that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God who took on the form of man and lived among us. He lived a perfect life on earth and died as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. He rose victoriously over the grave and now reigns with the Father in heaven. He is coming to take all those who have accepted Him to be with him forever. His work alone is the only hope of eternal life. Beware of those who depart from this teaching—they are deceivers. We recognize deceivers by their doctrine of Christ.

Our faith is centred on the person and work of the Lord Jesus. While there are many doctrines that can divide us as believers, regarding the person and work of the Lord Jesus, we are perfectly agreed. Having told us how we can recognize deceivers, John now moves on to warn his readers about what these deceivers can do. In verse 8 he tells us that they can cause us to lose our rewards. There are rewards offered to those who are faithful to the end. The overcomers of the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are promised a reward for their faithfulness. Paul speaks of this reward in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 of the reward that awaits those who faithfully serve the Lord. There will be some, however, whose life work will not survive the fire of God's judgment. They will suffer loss of reward though they themselves will be saved, "but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:15). We do not know the nature of these rewards. Suffice it to say that to lose this reward is a terrible thing. They are of such a nature that no one should say, "As long as I get to heaven, I don't care whether or not I have a reward." What John is telling the elect lady in this epistle is that these deceivers and false teachers can lead astray men and women of faith and cause them to lose their rewards in heaven.

How are we to deal with deceivers? John tells us that we are neither to welcome them nor share in their evil work (verses 10-11). These individuals are so dangerous that

John warns his readers that if they come to their houses, they are not to offer hospitality. There are at least three interpretations of this verse.

Firstly, there are those who take this verse to mean that if false prophets come knocking on your door, you are forbidden by Scripture to allow them entrance into your house. To allow false teachers into your house would be to subject the members of your family to their false teaching. You would give them the right to spread their false teaching under your roof. John says you are not to do this.

Secondly, some commentators see here a reference to how these false prophets supported themselves. The false prophet depended on the good will of individuals in the cities in which they worked for both food and shelter. Is John telling his readers that they are to refuse to feed and shelter these false prophets? To do so would be to encourage them in their evil work. From this we understand that God does not want his people supporting the works of those who do not preach the truth about Christ.

Thirdly, other commentators remind us that the churches of these early days met in the homes of various members. They believe that John is saying here that the church is not to allow false prophets to come into their assemblies to preach falsehood.

What is important for us to note here is that John is commanding us to be very cautious in our dealings with false teachers. He is encouraging us to separate from those who do not teach the truth about Christ. He is telling us that we are not to support them in their work. We are not to allow them to spread their lies in our homes or in our churches. We are to close the door on them and refuse them entrance so that they do not cause our brothers or

sisters to fall and lose their rewards for faithful service to our Lord Jesus.

John now concludes his letter by reminding his readers that he wants to see them personally. He is assured that his presence would bring great joy both to them and to himself. This is an indication of just how much he loved them. Not only are they loved by John, but they are also loved by their brothers and sisters in the area where John is presently worshiping. These believers also send their greetings.

#### For Consideration:

- Are there false teachers in your community? Based on what you have learned in this chapter, why would you consider these individuals to be false teachers?
- Is there a difference between befriending teachers of false doctrine for the purpose of winning them to the Lord and allowing them into your house to influence you in their beliefs? How would you find a balance?
- What does this passage teach you about the precautions you need to take so that these false teachers do not deceive you?

## For Prayer:

- Do you know individuals who have gotten caught up into false teaching? Take a moment to pray that the Lord would rescue them.
- Ask God to protect us from the subtle onslaughts of the enemy to dilute the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus.
- Ask God to expose the falsehoods of any false teachers in your church

# INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

#### Author:

Though there is no mention of his name in this third letter, it is widely accepted that the apostle John is its author. He was the brother of James the apostle (Matthew 4:21; 10:2) and son of Zebedee, a fisherman by trade (see Mark 1:20).

When Jesus called John to follow Him in Matthew 4:21-22 he and his brother James left their nets to become his disciples. John became very close to Jesus and often had the privilege of being with him at very special moments in his life (see Mark 5:37; Matthew 17:1, 26:37).

After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, John spent time as a church leader in the city of Jerusalem ministering with the apostle Peter (Acts 3:1; 4:1-3). Historically, it is believed that he would also serve in Ephesus (although there is no specific mention of this in the Bible).

## Background:

The apostle John addressed his third letter to a man by the name of Gaius. The name is mentioned at least two other times in Scripture (see Romans 16:23, 1 Corinthians 1:14). John calls Gaius a dear friend in verses 1 and 2 and commends him for his faithful service (verse 3) and love for strangers (verse 5). It appears that Gaius was in poor health but despite this he persevered in his service for the Lord (verse 2).

In the church in which Gaius fellowshipped, there was a man by the name of Diotrephes. He was a proud (verse 9), gossiping (verse 10) and controlling man (verse 10) who would have nothing to do with the apostles. John warned Gaius about him. He told Gaius that he wanted to come to see him and the church to deal with the problem. John likely wrote to encourage Gaius who was facing opposition in his service of the Lord through the efforts of Diotrephes.

The apostle commends a man by the name of Demetrius who was well spoken of by everyone and one stood firmly for the truth. It may be that the concern of John is that Gaius have someone of like mind with which to fellowship at this time of need.

### The Importance of the Book for Today:

The Third Epistle of John shows us that, from the very beginning, there were problems in the church. Diotrephes was a controlling and proud man who wanted to be first. His concern was for position and glory and not for the kingdom of God. Gaius, as a faithful worker, was experiencing opposition in his church. John's concern for Gaius shows us his heart for sincere believers facing difficulty in their lives and service for the Lord. We see in this letter that

opposition does not always come from outside the church. Sometimes we face opposition from those within. John encourages Gaius in these times to persevere and not to lose heart in doing what was right. The letter also shows us the importance of finding people of like mind with whom we can fellowship in times of need. Demetrius would be a support and encouragement to faithful Gaius as he persevered in his service of the Lord

## 15

## GAIUS

#### Read 3 John 1-14

This third letter of John is addressed to a man by the name of Gaius. Gaius is a living example of all that John has been teaching us in his first two letters.

Gaius is a dearly loved friend of the apostle John. It seems that Gaius was not in good physical health. John commends him in verse 2 for his spiritual health and prays that his physical health would be as good as his spiritual health. In our day we are seeing a great emphasis put on physical health. We are concerned about being overweight and out of shape physically. How much emphasis, however, do we place on our spiritual health? Gaius has poor physical health but is spiritually strong.

The second thing we discover about Gaius is that he continued to faithfully "walk in the truth" (verse 3). To walk in the truth involves much more than simply believing the truth. To "walk" is to put feet on the truth we believe. It is possible to believe the truth and not walk in it. Gaius not

only believed the truth, he also lived it out in his personal experience. What he believed about the Lord Jesus become part of his daily life. It affected every decision he made. It had a bearing on how he treated others. It governed what he said and what he did. God requires nothing less from us. As an apostle of Christ, John has great joy in his heart to see Gaius's commitment to the truth of Christ.

John moves on to the central message of his letter to Gaius. He commends Gaius for his faithfulness in offering hospitality to the saints. It appears that Gaius was doing all he could to help visiting missionaries who passed through his area. John encouraged him in verse 8 to persevere in this ministry. It takes all kinds of people to advance the work of God. There are some who go and there are some who give. God chose Gaius to be a "giver." His support meant a lot to traveling missionaries. Some of these missionaries shared with John how much Gaius meant to them. John tells us in verse 7 that these servants of God went out for the sake of the "Name" (the Lord Jesus). They were entirely dependent on the support of believers such as Gaius. John encouraged Gaius to continue in this work "so that we may work together for the truth" (verse 8). John saw Gaius as an important part of the expansion of the kingdom, through his ministry of hospitality.

There was a problem in Gaius' church which sometimes made it difficult for him to offer hospitality to the saints. There was an individual in his church who opposed his ministry. This man's name is Diotrophes. Diotrophes "loved to be first" in the church (verse 9). He resented anyone and anything that took the attention away from him. He would have nothing to do with either the apostles or visiting missionaries. He spread malicious rumours about the apostles and Christian workers of his day to destroy

their reputations. He refused to welcome visiting preachers and teachers of the Word who were traveling through the area. Diotrophes went as far as to put out of the church those who welcome these visiting preachers (verse 10). He was a controlling and manipulative man.

Diotrephes was also a very bitter and proud man. He was a hindrance to the work of the gospel. His only real concern was for himself. Diotrephes was really an instrument of Satan to destroy the work of God in that church. John told Gaius that he would personally deal with Diotrephes. Was it because of Diotrephes that Gaius was losing heart in his ministry of hospitality? John seems to be writing this letter to encourage Brother Gaius to continue in his good work despite the efforts of Diotrephes to stop him.

Are you discouraged like Gaius? Because of opposition do you feel like giving up? You wonder if it is worthwhile to continue. Maybe you wonder if the opposition is a sign from the Lord that you are to leave your ministry and seek something else. John's letter to Gaius may be an encouragement to you in these times. Joined to this word of John are the voices of Paul and Peter:

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believer's (Galatians 6:9-10)

"And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right" (2 Thessalonians 3:13);

"For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15).

I like to think of Gaius as a dear faithful servant of God who is in need of encouragement. John is the instrument of God to bring that word of encouragement to a discouraged brother in ministry. Let John's word be an encouragement to you today as well if you are facing a similar obstacle.

John gives us an example to follow. We see here that John practices what he preaches. Not only does he teach about the importance of loving others—he lives it out in his life. When he sees a brother in need, he takes up his pen and writes him a letter of encouragement. How about you? Do you know of a brother or sister in need today? How will the love of Christ be made evident in your life for that person?

John reminds Gaius that he is not to follow the evil example of Diotrephes. According to John, Diotrephes really did not know God. If he knew God, he would be doing "what is good" (verse 11).

John concludes his letter by commending to Gaius a man by the name of Demetrius. He tells Gaius that Demetrius was well spoken of by everyone and that he lived according to the truth. Why does John mention Demetrius at this point? Some commentators believe that Demetrius is the one who delivered this letter of 3 John to Gaius. Others feel that Diotrephes had slandered Demetrius and Gaius needed reassurance about him from John. While we do not really know why John mentions him at this time, we discover that Gaius is not alone. In Demetrius he can find a true believer with whom he can fellowship.

John reminds Gaius that he was hoping to come see him and speak face to face with him. He sends greetings from other believers and asks Gaius to greet his friends personally by name. Gaius 105

This letter is a very practical example of how the apostle John puts in practice what he is teaching about loving others. It reminds us that obedience to the Lord will sometimes require suffering. There are times when we will be opposed. We need each other in the body of Christ. The ministry of Gaius was a real source of joy and encouragement for the apostle John, and in return he wanted to be an encouragement to his brother in need. Together they built each other up in the faith. May this become a reality for us today.

#### For Consideration:

- Are there individuals around you who need to be encouraged in their ministries? What can you do practically to be an encouragement to them?
- Have you ever met individuals like Diotrephes? Have you ever found yourself in the situation of Diotrephes, becoming proud and jealous of others whose ministries seem to be more important than yours? What is the real reason for these feelings?
- What does this passage tell us about our need for one another?
- Are all important ministries practiced in public?
   Why was the "behind the scenes" ministry of Gaius important?

## The Epistles of John and Jude

# For Prayer:

106

- Thank God for the ministry of someone in your church who has been a real blessing behind the scenes.
- Do you know of someone who is feeling oppressed and discouraged in the ministry? Take a moment to pray that God would lift up and encourage that person.
- Thank God for the support and encouragement He has given you by means of friends and fellow believers in Christ

# INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

#### Author:

Little is known about Jude apart from the fact that he was likely one of the twelve apostles. In Luke 6:16 he is identified as Judas the son of James to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot who would betray the Lord. Matthew 13:55 shows us that he was the son of Mary, the mother of Jesus making him an earthly brother to the Lord Jesus. He is also called Thaddaeus in Matthew 10:3.

## Background:

Jude (or Judas) writes his letter to "those who have been called, loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ." The letter appears to be a general letter to all believers. Its purpose is quite clear. Jude wants to warn believers about false teachers who perverted the truth and denied the Lord Jesus. He brings a sharp and stinging condemnation to all who would teach anything other than the truth passed on by the apostles.

### The Importance of the Book for Today:

In his letter, Jude speaks powerfully about false teachers. For him, there could be no compromising of the truth. Those who taught another gospel twisted the truth to serve their own purposes. The church was to beware of anyone who did not teach the doctrines passed on from the apostles. Jude shows us the danger of allowing false teachers in our midst and reveals their true nature. The letter is a call to faithfulness in preaching and teaching God's Word and a challenge to the church in our age to stand against compromise or watering down the truth to make it less offensive to our society.

# 16

# CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

#### Read Jude 1-7

As he begins his letter, Jude introduces himself to his readers. He calls himself simply "a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (verse 1). Commentators believe him to be the brother of the Lord Jesus. While he could have identified himself as the brother of Jesus, Jude avoids this acknowledgment. Jesus was far more than a brother to Jude—He was his Savior. Jude saw himself as a humble servant of his Lord.

Jude writes his letter to those who are "called . . . loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ" (verse 1). It is important for us to consider what Jude is saying here. His letter is addressed to believers in general. He defines a believer in three ways. The believer, says Jude, is someone who is "called." This calling is far more than a simple hearing of the message of salvation. The hand of God is on the ones He calls to bring them to Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. God has a purpose and plan for the lives

of those He calls. They are called for salvation, and they are also called for service. The Lord, trains and equips those He calls so that they will be useful servants in the ministry of the kingdom (Galatians 1:15-16).

Notice that not only is the believer "called" but also "loved" by the Father. So great was the love of the Father for His children that He willingly sent His Son to die on their behalf so that they could be forgiven of their sin and brought into fellowship with Him. There is no greater love than this. The believer is one who has been loved of God and for whom the Lord Jesus died.

Beyond this, however, Jude tells us that the Lord Jesus keeps the true believer. Paul reminds us in Romans 8 that nothing can separate believers from the love of the Lord Jesus. True believers are eternally kept in the salvation the Lord Jesus gives. This eternal inheritance can never be taken from God's children. The Lord Jesus will keep them safe. There is a wonderful assurance here in this thought. How often have we fallen? How often have we failed our Lord? Despite these failures and shortcomings, the Lord Jesus keeps us. He will never leave us or forsake us.

Jude's desire for his readers is that the mercy, peace, and love of God would be theirs. It is his desire that believers experience each day a renewed sense of the mercy (unmerited favor) of God. The mercy of God is indeed a daily experience for those who believe. None of us deserve His favor, yet His mercy is renewed to us each morning we get out of bed (Lamentations 3:22-23).

God's peace and love, as well, can be our daily experience. Jude's desire is that his readers experience this peace and love in abundance. How much of His love and peace are you experiencing right now? One thing is sure:

### Contend For the Faith

none of us has ever experienced the limit of His love and peace. There is more love and peace in God than we could ever experience in this life. It is the desire of Jude that his readers overflow with the mercy, peace, and love of God. Our God is an extravagant God. Look at the creation around us. Consider for a moment the vastness of the universe He has created for our enjoyment. God does not ration out His mercy, peace, and love. The only limit is how much we are willing to receive.

Jude originally wanted to write to these believers about the common salvation they shared (verse 3). Such a letter would have been uplifting and positive. What he heard about them, however, changed the tone of his letter. Instead, he writes to challenge them to contend for the faith that had been passed on to them. The reason for this was that certain individuals had slipped in among them and were perverting the truth. Notice what Jude says about these individuals.

First, their condemnation was written about long ago. We have several examples of this in verses 5-7. He reminds them of how even the angels of heaven, who turned from their original purpose, were condemned eternally. He also reminds them of what happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah when they turned their backs on the Lord God. Jude compares the false teachers who were disturbing his readers to the fallen angels and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their condemnation would be similar. This is a powerful statement. Jude truly sees these false teachers as the enemies of God.

Second, notice that these individuals have "secretly slipped in among" the believers (verse 4). Our enemy Satan is very subtle. It is his desire to penetrate the ranks of believers with his lies. He does not publicly announce his

intent. He infiltrates with the intent to destroy. We need to be always on the alert. Satan will stop at nothing. He is very bold. He will slip into our prayer meetings or church services. He seeks access to our church committees. He may even use those who stand behind our pulpits. Those he uses look like ordinary people. They may even come across as being very spiritual. How we need to be discerning in this matter.

How can we recognize these false teachers? Jude tells us that they are godless (verse 4). This godlessness can be seen in two ways. First, it can be seen in the way they live. Verse 4 tells us that they change the grace of God into a license for immorality. While these individuals preach the message of God's love and forgiveness, they do not live a life of holiness. God's true servants will have lifestyles that reflect the character of God. False teachers emphasize God's love, forgiveness, and grace and then use this teaching as an excuse to live out their lusts. They live in rebellion and do as they please. We must beware of those whose lives do not reflect His character. You can discern false teachers by their godless lifestyles.

Second, Jude tells us that these false teachers "deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (verse 4). We must refuse those who do not accept that Jesus is the *only* Lord. We must reject those who bow the knee to any other god and not to Jesus Christ alone. These false teachers do not accept Him as the only sovereign. They do not bow the knee to Him alone as their king. They do not obey Him alone. They do not turn from all else to serve Him as their one true king and Lord. They do not give Him the right to be their only master. They may come across as being very accepting of other religions and have the favor of many in the community, but to do this they must deny the fact that there is only one way of salvation—through the Lord Jesus

### Contend For the Faith

alone. What is the destiny of these false teachers? Jude reminds the believers of several incidents in Scripture that reveal what will happen to these false teachers and prophets.

Jude reminds his readers how God, after delivering His people from the land of Egypt, destroyed those who turned their backs on Him in the desert. Do you think that if God destroyed His own people in the desert, He will spare these false teachers and prophets? Their destiny is the same as the destiny of the people of God who turned their backs on Him in the days of Moses. They too will perish for their sin.

In verse 6 Jude gives his readers another example. Here he reminds them of the angels of heaven who turned their backs on the Lord God. He speaks of Satan and his evil spirits who abandoned their heavenly calling through pride and arrogance. These angels were cast into darkness. They are bound in that darkness with chains until the day of final judgment. This is not to say that these demons are inactive. Peter tells us that Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour "(1 Peter 5:8). Satan and his demons will never repent, nor can they repent. Christ died to save the human race. The fate of Satan and his angels, however, is sealed. They live presently in the darkness of separation from God with no chance of coming to the light of the truth. Satan and his demons will be cast eternally into the lake of fire where they will be eternally punished for their rebellion against God (Revelation 20:15). If God punished these fallen angels in such a manner, will He not also punish those who pervert the truth of the gospel and seek to turn people from the truth of His Word?

The final example Jude gives us here is the example of Sodom and Gomorrah. The individuals in these cities gave themselves over to sexual immorality and perversion. They did not concern themselves with God's standard of holiness and truth. These false teachers and prophets have also turned from God's standard of holiness (see verse 4). They are not concerned about living the life God expects of them. Jude challenges his reader to remember what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. If God destroyed whole cities because of their immorality and perversion, will He hesitate to destroy those who seek to mislead His people and refuse to live according to His holy standard?

All these examples serve as warnings for us today also. The false teachers among Jude's initial readers were in danger of falling under the harsh judgment of God. They would suffer the consequences of their actions. Believers were not to be deceived by these false prophets and teachers who denied the Lord Jesus and refused to live according to the standard of His Word.

It is an awesome responsibility to be a servant of the Lord Jesus and to present Him to the world. Those of us who have been called to this ministry are to live lives worthy of this calling. We must be careful to make Christ Jesus central in our teaching and preaching. We must also be careful to live the lives that God requires of us in His Word. We must not only be faithful to the truth of God's inspired Word, but our lifestyles must also be in harmony with the standards of that Word.

### Contend For the Faith

#### For Consideration:

- Is there evidence of false teachers and prophets in the churches of our land today?
- How can we recognize a false teacher according to Jude?
- What truths do we need to stand up for in our churches today?
- Is there evidence of Satan's attempt to infiltrate the work of God you are involved with today? What kind of errors has he been trying to communicate?

## For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray for those who stand in the pulpits of our land but who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and only Lord.
- Pray that God would open the eyes of those who listen to these false teachers so that those being led astray would come under the clear teaching of the truth.
- Pray that we would see a renewal of holy lifestyles among those who profess the name of the Lord Jesus.

# 17

# WOE TO THE UNGODLY

#### Read Jude 8-16

In the last meditation Jude called his readers to contend for the faith in light of the false teachers and prophets who were among them. Here in this section he continues to speak out against the evils of these wicked men. Let's consider in greater detail what Jude has to say about these false teachers.

## Pollute their own bodies (verse 8)

Jude describes the false teachers who have slipped into the church as "dreamers." Dreams in the Scripture were often given by God to His prophets as a means of communicating His will (Numbers 12:6; Matthew 1:20). Do these men about whom Jude is speaking claim to be spokesmen for God? Do they claim to have revelations from God through dreams for His people? Notice here that while they claim to have revelations from God, their lifestyles do not correspond with the claims they make. While

# Woe To the Ungodly

they claim to be God's spokesmen, they pollute their bodies. In verse 4 Jude tells us that they live in immorality. These are dreamers who pollute their own bodies. The fact that they live such a lifestyle proves that they are not from God.

### Reject authority (verse 8)

A second thing to note about these false teachers and prophets is that they do not accept authority. They do not want anyone telling them what they can or cannot do. They are accountable to no one. They live the way they want to live and resent anyone who challenges their lifestyles or doctrine. If they were true servants of God, these individuals would submit to established authority in the body of Christ. They will not listen, however, to anyone but themselves.

# Slander celestial beings (verses 8-9)

Not only do these false teachers reject the authority of the church, but they also slander celestial beings. Who are these celestial beings? The context speaks of angels and demons (see verse 9). Jude gives an example of what he means in verse 9. Here he uses an example of how Michael, the archangel, disputed with the devil over the body of Moses. The Scriptures do not speak of this incident. This story can be found in an ancient book entitled *The Assumption of Moses*. This book contains the supposed prophecies of Moses which he gave to Joshua when he handed the leadership of the nation over to him. The book, however, was not accepted as part of the Jewish Scriptures.

In this story, the angel Michael was given the responsibility to bury the body of Moses. When he took the body to bury it, he was approached by the devil who accused Moses of being a murderer. Moses had indeed murdered an Egyptian when he was in Egypt. The devil claimed the body of Moses for himself. Michael did not retaliate or slander the devil but simply left the matter for the Lord God to deal with as He saw fit.

While Michael refused to slander the devil, these false prophets speak slanderously about celestial beings. We are not told what they said. Do they feel that somehow they are above showing them respect? Do the feel superior to these heavenly beings? We simply do not know.

Jude understands the reality and power of spiritual beings. Consider for a moment what the devil did to Job. Recall how Jesus set people free from the oppression of demonic forces. Many of these individuals were held in physical, emotional, and spiritual bondage to these evil spirits (Mark 9:25; Luke 13:11). While we understand the power of God to give us victory, we also need to understand that these beings are not to be played with or verbally abused. The false teachers that Jude speaks of here had no respect for spiritual beings. Very likely they had little respect for those who walked in the truth of God's Word either and were quite quick to criticize and condemn them as well.

Speak against anything they do not understand (verse 10)

Jude goes on to tell us that the false teachers who had secretly slipped in among them were individuals who spoke abusively of anything they did not understand. We have just seen that they understand very little about the reality of the spiritual forces around them, and so they insult them. I suppose we have all met individuals whose response to anything they do not understand is to speak evil of it. There are those who criticize other believers and their

# Woe To the Ungodly

styles of worship or their spiritual gifts. Because they are not comfortable with something, they condemn it. These individuals are, for the most part, bitter and angry people. Jude speaks his mind very clearly here. The false teachers were "like unreasoning animals." They claim to be God's spokesmen, but their god was no bigger than their own ideas of Him. They refuse to accept anything they could not understand. Their religion was human in nature. It had nothing to do with faith and trust in a God who was bigger than them.

# Go the way of Cain (verse 11)

False teachers, according to Jude, "have taken the way of Cain." Genesis recounts the story of Cain killing his brother Able when God refused his offering while accepting Abel's. Cain killed his brother out of anger and jealousy. He could not bear to think that God would accept his brother but not him. These false teachers were self-absorbed individuals whose only desire was to receive the praise and adoration of others. They willingly hurt other people to elevate themselves. They have taken up Cain's sinful ways.

## Rush into Balaam's error (verse 11)

In 2 Peter 2:15 we are told that Balaam loved the financial reward of wickedness. While he refused to curse the children of Israel (Numbers 23-24), Revelation 2:14 tells us that he devised a plot to entice the children of Israel to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality (see Numbers 25:1-2). What we understand from this is that these false teachers and prophets were immoral and corrupt individuals, and they persuade others to follow their evil ways. They did this for their own profit.

Perish in Korah's rebellion (verse 11)

Jude also compares these false teachers to Korah. In Numbers 16 Korah led a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron. God judged him and his followers: the earth opened and swallowed them alive. These false teachers, like Korah, were rebellious against God's authority. They would meet the same end—the judgment of God.

# Blemishes at your love feasts (verse 12)

The love feasts of the New Testament period were meals the believers shared together. During these meals they would participate in the Lord's Supper. It is clear from this that these false prophets and teachers were taking part in these meals. They were in the church, but they were enemies of the church. They participated in these love feasts and in the table of the Lord, but they did not live for the Lord. According to Jude, their presence at these meals was a stain on the church. They were an unwelcome intrusion at these meals. They should not have been there because they were not in fellowship with the Lord or His people. Notice, however, that these wicked people do not have the slightest problem with being at the Lord's Table. They feel no guilt for their evil lifestyles. They have no consciences. They resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

## Shepherds who feed only themselves (verse 12)

The term "shepherd" in Scripture is often used in connection with spiritual leaders who have a responsibility toward the body of Christ. These false teachers are called shepherds. While they may have seen themselves as shepherds of the flock, they were in ministry only for what they can get for themselves. They used the flock for their own greedy ends. They contributed nothing to the spiritual well-

# Woe To the Ungodly

being of God's people but took everything they can get from them.

Clouds without rain (verse 12)

Like clouds without rain, these individuals made great promises but keep none. Blown by the winds of jealousy and pride, they offered no refreshing rain to God's people; instead, they left them dry and barren. They preached a false gospel that led to death.

Autumn trees without fruit (verse 12)

They were like autumn trees without fruit. The autumn tree is a tree that ought to be heavy with produce. These false teachers have the outward appearance of authenticity, but they generate no spiritual fruit in their ministries. They have nothing of spiritual value to offer the people of God. They promised a feast but brought a famine.

Wild waves of the sea foaming up their shame (verse 13)

In verse 13 Jude compares these false teachers to wild waves of the sea foaming with shame. As they crash up against the shore, the foam of their shame and evil is sprayed all over those nearby. These wicked people were not even pleasant to be with. Their arrogance and shame splattered on all who spoke to them.

Wandering stars reserved for darkness (verse 13)

Jude told his readers that these false teachers were wandering or falling stars. They promise direction but are aimless. They are falling to their doom. Their light was burning out. They were destined for the blackest darkness where

they will dwell forever. They would be separated eternally from the light of God's presence.

## Grumble and find fault (verse 16)

In verse 16 Jude reminds the believers that these teachers were complainers and faultfinders who could find anything good to say about anything. They were bitter and angry people. Nothing was ever good enough. Nothing was ever the way they wanted. Nobody ever did anything right. The spiritual fruit of gentleness is not part of their lives.

Boast about themselves and flatter for their own advantage (verse 16)

They excel in boasting about themselves. For their own advantage, they tell people what they want to hear and live to satisfy their own sinful desires. As we have already said, these are self-absorbed and self-centered people.

## Doomed (verses 14-15)

Jude does not hesitate to speak out against these false teachers. In verses 14 and 15 he reminds his readers of the judgment that is coming. Enoch prophesied about these individuals. This prophecy is not recorded for us in the pages of inspired Scripture, but according to Jude it is nonetheless true. The Lord is going to come with thousands of angels to judge the ungodly acts and harsh words spoken against Him. This, says Jude, is the destiny of these false teachers and prophets who had come into their congregation.

# Woe To the Ungodly

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever met individuals like these spoken of here in this section of Scripture? What brings them to the church?
- Have you ever found yourself being critical of things you did not understand? Is this right? Why is this a temptation for us? What is the solution?
- Jude compares false teachers to autumn trees without fruit. Is there evidence of fruit in your life? Explain.
- Why is it important for us to be willing to submit to the authority of the larger body of Christ?
- Should it surprise us that Satan brings his false prophets into our midst?

### For Prayer:

- Ask God to produce the fruit of righteousness in your life.
- Ask God to pour out gifts of spiritual discernment on His church so that we can discern those who are from God from those who are from Satan.
- Thank God that despite our frailties He still advances His cause.
- Ask God to bring false teachers in your community to an awareness of the truth of the Gospel.

# 18

# KEEP YOURSELVES

#### Read Jude 17-25

Jude has been warning his readers about false teachers in their midst. Not everyone in the church was truly a genuine Christian. Some individuals had secretly infiltrated their midst and were misleading many into error and immorality. This same thing is happening in our day. Satan continues to place people in the church who seek to pervert the truth of Jesus and His Word. How do we live in light of the battle before us? In this section Jude makes several suggestions for believers who want to remain true to the faith that has been passed on to them.

# Remember what the apostles foretold (verse 17)

If we are going to contend for the faith and become everything the Lord calls us to be, we need to remember what the apostles foretold. They prophesied that in the last days there would be many scoffers. These individuals would follow their own ungodly desires. The first step to conquering

# Keep Yourself

the enemy is to recognize his presence. Satan is a master of disguise. From his very first entrance into the Garden of Eden, he has sought to hide his true identity. He came to Eve disguised as a serpent. In the book of Acts he sent Ananias with a large sum of money to support of the work of the gospel. Here in Jude we see that he secretly infiltrated the ranks of the believers by sending false teachers and prophets (see verse 4). When we understand that the enemy will do anything to distract us from the gospel, we will be more cautious about what we accept. The first thing we need to understand is that it has been predicted that there would be scoffers and false teachers seeking to enter the church of God. The enemy is seeking to destroy the church. Be aware that he has the church in his sights. When you understand that the enemy is waiting for every opportunity to penetrate your ranks, you will put on your armour (Ephesians 6:11-18). When you are aware of his presence, you will move with extreme caution. Don't be naive. Don't accept everything you hear. Live your life with the understanding that the enemy is on your heels, seeking to devour you at any moment. We must be especially careful in these last days.

# Build yourselves up in the faith (verse 20)

Because the enemy is out to destroy the church, Jude challenges his readers to build themselves up in their most holy faith. The battle before them was not for weaklings. Satan is a powerful adversary. If we are going to do battle with him, we will have to be strengthened in our faith. We will never be strengthened in our holy faith unless we spend much time in the Word of God and with the people of God. Our times with the Lord must become a priority in our lives. We must know the Lord and His Word if you are to overcome the enemy. This may mean getting rid of other influences in your life that draw you away from the Lord

and His Word. If we want to win the battle before us, we must strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

## Pray in the Holy Spirit (verse 20)

Also important is our prayer life. God's power is unleashed by means of prayer. Notice, however, that it is not just any prayer that Jude speaks about here. He challenges us to pray *in the Holy Spirit*. What is this prayer in the Spirit? Some would interpret this as praying in tongues. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that not all believers have the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30).

It is quite easy for us as believers to come to God with our own ideas of what to pray for. We need, however, to learn the art of praying under the direction and guidance of the Spirit of God. True prayer is motivated and inspired by the Holy Spirit. To pray as we should, we need to be motivated and led by the Holy Spirit of God. Do you have enough of a relationship with the Holy Spirit that He could lead you in what to pray for? What a difference it makes when our prayers are motivated and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Our own natural prayers are lifeless and dry. Prayers in the Spirit, however, are passionate and full of life. The Spirit prays through us. He moves and motivates our hearts and burdens us with those things that burden the heart of God (Romans 8:25; James 1:5). We must learn the art of praying in the Spirit if we are to win this battle for truth.

# Keep yourselves in God's love (verse 21)

Next, Jude tells us that we are to keep ourselves in the love of the Lord. While it is true that nothing can separate us from the love of the Lord, our experience of that love can be clouded over by sin. It is also quite possible for us to lose our "first love" (Revelation 2:4). If we want to keep

# Keep Yourself

ourselves in the love of the Lord, we must not allow that love to fade. Even after many years of living for the Lord, the apostle Paul still marvelled at the wonderful love of the Lord Jesus for the sinner. The love of the Lord Jesus should become more and more real to us. Do you marvel at God's love for you more today than on the day you accepted Him as your Savior? Never stop marvelling at His love for you. Allow Him to surround you more and more with His arms of love. Don't let the trials and tribulations of this life cause you to doubt how much He loves you. If the enemy can get you to doubt the love of the Lord, you will be more open to the rest of his temptations. Keep yourself in the love of the Lord.

Wait for the mercy of our Lord to bring you to eternal life (verse 21)

Realize that none of us has finished the race before us. While our destiny is heaven and eternal life, the path to that eternal life may lead us through many valleys and deep rivers. Remember that no matter how steep the path or how deep the valley, the Lord Jesus has promised He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. Trust Him. Nothing can take this from you. Let the assurance of His mercy and kindness encourage you in your time of difficulty and trial.

Be merciful to those who doubt (verse 22)

Even as the Lord Jesus has promised His mercy (unmerited favor) to you, let this also be evident in your life to others, particularly to those who are weak in the faith. Overcoming the enemy is not something we can do on our own. We need each other. Reach out to doubters to strengthen and encourage them in their faith. They need you and you need them.

Snatch others from the fire (verse 23)

There are some who are wandering dangerously from God. They are unaware that their rejection of Christ will lead then straight to hell. Reach out to these people and warn them. Do everything you can to get them back on the right path. Snatch then from the flames of hell.

Show mercy mixed with fear (verse 23)

As you reach out to others in Christ's name, show mercy mixed with fear. What is the fear that Jude speaks about here? Could it be a deep reverence for God? Is Jude telling us to reach out with a deep fear of God in our lives? Is he telling us that our motivation ought to be the honor of our almighty and sovereign God? Our concern for His name is such that we would risk anything to reach out to those who are heading down a path that does not bring honor to the name of our Lord Jesus. If you want to win the battle and contend for the faith, you must have a heart that fears God and earnestly desires His glory.

Hate the clothing stained by corrupted flesh (verse 23)

Not only do we need to have an intense fear and reverence for our God, but we also need to cultivate a hatred for the corruption of this world. You cannot live for the Lord if you do not hate the things He hates. You cannot serve two masters. Your love for sin and the things of this world will only hinder you in your walk with the Lord. You must see things as God sees them. You must learn to love what God loves and hate what God hates. Sin must become an abomination to you. You must detest even the very appearance of sin. This hatred of sin and corruption can only come as we allow the Spirit of God to move and minister in our lives. It can only come as we grow in your most holy

## Keep Yourself

faith by spending time with your Savior and allowing His Spirit to change our lives and our thoughts.

Remember that He can keep you from falling (verse 24)

In conclusion, Jude reminds us that our Savior is amply able to keep us from falling. It is true that the enemy is very powerful, but our Savior is even stronger. He can keep us as we trust in Him. We do not have to fall. He will hold us up as we surrender to Him. He is bigger than any temptation or trial the enemy can send our way.

Jude reminds us that Jesus will present us before the glorious presence of the Father without fault. How is this possible? It is only possible through the forgiveness He provides. Even when we fall short of God's standard, we can come to Him and be forgiven of our sins. Because of the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus, we can stand before God without fault. Notice that it is the great pleasure of the Lord Jesus to do this for us. He presents us faultless before the Father with great joy. The Lord delights in nothing more than the forgiveness of our sin. There is great joy in heaven over the forgiveness of even one single sinner (Luke 15:7). When you fall, come to Him for forgiveness. He delights to forgive all who fall short. What a wonderful thing it is to know that He is so willing to forgive us when we come to Him.

Jude concludes this letter with a note of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus. In light of the victory that is ours in Christ, this is indeed a very fitting way to end this letter: "To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 25). Because of what the Lord Jesus has done, glory, majesty, power, and authority rise to the triune God from this world below. Jesus has revealed God to us. Through all eternity, because of the Lord Jesus, human lips will sing His praise and glorify His name.

### For Consideration:

- What challenge do you find in this section of Scripture? Is there something you need to put into practice in your life? Review what Jude tells us about keeping ourselves in the faith and pick out some truths you need to apply more fully to your life.
- What encouragement do you find in this section of Scripture to help you face the obstacles in your spiritual life?
- Will the spiritual life be an easy one? What are some of the obstacles that you can expect to face? What does Jude say here that will help you to deal with those obstacles?

# For Prayer:

- Take a moment to praise the Lord for the victory He promises you in this passage.
- Do you know someone who has wandered from the faith? Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything you can do for this person to help snatch them from the fire.
- Ask God to give you a deeper burden for His honor to be revealed in this world. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have failed to be moved when His name and His Word were being dishonored.
- Choose one of the principles that Jude has mentioned here in this passage and ask the Lord to help you to apply this to your life in a deeper way.

# Keep Yourself

# Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne Mac Leod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

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