



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 1:1-4

"The Eternal Life Which Was with the Father"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Scripture reading today is very short. It is the preface to John's first epistle, chapter 1 verse 1 through verse 4. While you are finding 1 John, some have considered the opening verse of this preface to be something of a title for the book. But we are treating it as part of the preface to the book and considering it as part of the paragraph beginning in verse 1 concluding in verse 4. The apostle writes,

"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life."

Incidentally, I am reading from the New American Standard Bible. I don't really like this style, "what was from the beginning," to my mind it is a little nicer to say what I believe the Authorized Version has, although I didn't look this up, "That which is from the beginning", but the thing I want you to notice is that "Word of life", "Word" is capitalized. Now that represents an interpretation. As is so often in the Bible, one cannot translate the Bible without interpreting the Bible. Interpretation precedes the translation. What this means is that the translators concerned "Word" here to be a personal name for our Lord Jesus Christ. And obviously influenced by John

chapter 1 and verse 1 where we do read, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

And then in verse 14 of John 1 we read, "And the Word became flesh." So it is quite clear that Word there is a personal name of our Lord. He is the Lord God. They have taken that as the meaning here. As one looks however at the context, it is not "word" that is significant, it is "life" that is significant. As is clear from verse 2 on, "And the life was manifested." So it is very possible, in fact, many of the finest of New Testament scholars affirm that it is so. "Word of life" here is a reference to the message. That is, it is the word that has to do with life.

Now we don't have to make a decision like that theologically because either one or the other will be in harmony with New Testament doctrine. Because in the final analysis, the Lord Jesus is the concrete expression of the message we proclaim. We preach as Paul said, "Christ". Of course, we have to explain what we mean by Christ. There are people who like to say that it is not proper for us to preach doctrine, let's preach a person, let's preach Christ. Now that makes good preaching for some people. Unfortunately, it is very poor theology as one can easily see. If you say don't preach doctrine, preach Christ and I asked you who is Christ, then you would have to engage in theology. Or if I say, what has Christ done and you have to engage in more theology. The foolish idea that you can preach Christ and not preach doctrine we should abandon.

Here it is possible to take this as the message or as the person, but they are related. "And the life," he says in verse 2,

"Is manifested and we have seen, and bear witness, and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you, also, may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

One further comment since this is a rather short Scripture reading. Notice the two prepositions, "with". They represent two distinct prepositions and they are in the original text indicating, if you think about it, a distinction in persons within the Trinity, as well as an indication of the writer's consideration of them as equal. Our fellowship is with the Father. Our fellowship is with his Son Jesus Christ. Two persons, divine persons, one God and our Lord is the divine Son.

Then we read, "And these things we write that our joy may be complete." Fulfilled or filled full. I will say something about that in a moment, but we'll stop at that point. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and we thank Thee for the Word which we just read. Preserved through the apostles and the sovereign providence of our great God in heaven, who has made it possible for us in nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, to hold within our hands the written word of God, which points us to the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the way in which Thou has used the Scriptures to bring us into the experience of fellowship with Thee and with Thy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We acknowledge his deity, his Savior-hood, and all the other ways by which he fulfills the office, even at the present time, of Messiah. One who has accomplished a once and for all sacrifice for sinners, a finished work, and who now is engaged in an unfinished work of high priest and advocate for those whom which he died. We praise Thee, we thank Thee for the marvelous hope and blessing we enjoy through Christ.

We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ today, for all who faithfully preach him. We pray for Believer's Chapel, for its ministries, for its radio ministry, for the printed page, for the tapes, and for the staff, the elders, the deacons, the members, and the friends and visitors who are with us today. O God, through Thou marvelous salvation, through Thy grace, pour out Thy blessing on each one of these that we named that they might experience the blessings that Thou does so eagerly desire to communicate to us.

We pray, Lord, for those who have been troubled in various ways who have requested our prayers. We remember all of them. We pray that Thou would give healing in accordance with Thy will, and Lord, we pray especially for some who are bereaving. Comfort and encourage and strength and console. We thank Thee for the opportunity to have fellowship with our fellow believers. And we pray Thy blessing upon this meeting. Bless our singing, the hearing of the Word, the ministry, and Lord prepare us for the Lord's Supper this evening. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] I don't like to wear my glasses, because I see you as you really are with them.

[Laughter] We are today turning to the first four verses of the first epistle of John. This is the first in a series of messages on 1 John. Our message for today is "The Eternal Life with Which Was with the Father." T. S. Eliot once cried out, "Where is the life which we have lost in living?" That melancholy cry by an important individual, John answers by pointing us to the word of life. That's the life that we may have lost in our living. With whom, that is, the Word of life and with his Father, we may have vital fellowship.

Now when we say that we have fellowship with God or when we have fellowship as John says, "with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ," we are not talking about fellowship with the great minds of the past. Of course, that may be helpful to us. It would be nice if we knew Plato so well that we felt that Socrates was one of our friends. Or it would be nice if we had an acquaintance with Aristotle and profited from the things that he has written. It certainly would be nice, even nicer to have an acquaintance that could be called something like fellowship with Augustine. And then we think of the other great men of literature that we might have fellowship with such as Shakespeare or a Tolstoy, or Dostoevsky or something like that, we might think it would be great fellowship. John is not talking about that kind of fellowship. He is not even talking about fellowship with those of our family or friends who may have gone on to be with the Lord. And of course, that is a great fellowship. I look forward to the day when I am in the presence of the Lord, and I am able to have

fellowship with the saints of God who have gone on. What a great experience that is going to be. I surely look forward to it.

John is not talking about that. He is not talking about memories that we may have had. Particularly when he talks about fellowship with God and the apostles when they talked about fellowship with God did not speak about memories, though they had great memories. Their fellowship was a present fellowship. That is what God would introduce us to through the word of God and through the relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact the fellowship with God which the apostle is speaking is the vital fellowship that we may have today, that is precisely that the apostles enjoyed after our Lord's resurrection and ascension. Jesus said, remember, that he was going away and that he would return. He has returned. On the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came, the union which we enjoy with the Father was cemented in the constant indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ by which you and I do not some behind the apostles in any way. They enjoyed the constant presence of the Lord. John is writing about that right here, his fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, in the same sense in which you and I may enjoy that fellowship today.

It may be startling to us to realize that, but that is exactly what John is trying to tell us. That the fellowship that we enjoy today is the fellowship that the apostles had enjoyed after Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. King Zedekiah asked the prophet Zedekiah after he got him out of prison "Is there any word from the Lord?" And Jeremiah said, "There is a word from the Lord." The word, however, was not a word that Zedekiah was interested in because Jeremiah went on the say after he said that there was a word from the Lord, "You will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon." That was the word. Very disappointing. But when T. S. Eliot asks the question, "Where is the life we have lost in living," there is an answer from the word of God. It is one, evidently, he missed. It is the life that John the apostle speaks about, not only here, but throughout his letter.

Now let me just for a few moments introduce a few things that I think will help us as we go along through the epistle. We will say a great deal more about some of the things that are necessary for understanding the epistle, particularly, certain portions of it. The author of this epistle does not name himself. I am sure you noticed that. He does not give us a salutation. He does not say this comes from John the apostle, as Paul's custom is. He simply starts out, "That which was from the beginning." But Christian tradition from the time of Irenaeus on in the second century has attributed this epistle to the Apostle John and that is the wisest solution to any kind of question we may have. The style, the vocabulary, and various other things, particularly the likeness to other Johannine literature certainly support the idea that John is the author.

When he wrote this letter he had several purposes in mind. Just as when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, the letter we studied not long ago, and had a polemical purpose for there were false teachers in Corinth, so the Apostle John years later writing this epistle near the end of the first century, probably, wrote against the background of a brand of Gnosticism that was popular around Ephesus and Colossae, and as a matter of fact, was beginning to spread over the ancient world. The brand that John has in mind is probably the Cyrenthian brand. There is a famous old story about Cyrenthus, who lived in the area of Ephesus. And Cyrenthus is the individual whose story, which is related by one of the ancient church historians, Eusebius.

The story is supposed to have been related by Polycarp, who was the Bishop of Smyrna, and repeated by Irenaeus, for there is a connection between John and Polycarp and Irenaeus like father, son, and grandson. And in Eusebius' account he says that one day in Ephesus John was going to take a bath in the public bathhouse and as he entered the bathhouse he saw Cyrenthus, the Gnostic leader and false teacher according to John was there and he rushed out of the bathhouse without bathing, that was a mistake, I think, nevertheless, he rushed out without bathing saying, "Let us fly lest even the bathhouse fall down because Cyrenthus the enemy of the truth is within."

Cyrenthus was an individual whose views were something like this: when Jesus Christ came, he was simply a man. He was only Jesus. But at his baptism, the heavenly Christ, in some forms of

Gnosticism the Holy Spirit is referred to at this juncture, but the heavenly Christ is the general way in which this doctrine is presented. The heavenly Christ came upon him at the baptism. The Lord Jesus carried on his ministry performing the miracles that marked him out as the Messiah, it would seem, but when he approached the cross and was hanging on the cross, the Messiah, the heavenly Christ, left him. So he was only Jesus, and Jesus died. In fact, it was from the mouths of some it has been put in the mouth of our Lord that Jesus on the cross cried out not "My God, My God why has Thou forsaken Me?" but "My power, My power why has Thou forsaken Me?"

Well you can see fundamentally that this is a denial of the incarnation of the Son of God. So that the Lord Jesus is only a human person who may have experienced some unusual visitation of power from heaven, but is not really God manifest in the flesh. He is not the Son of God who came in incarnate form and carried out the atoning work on Calvary's cross. That is why in the Johannine literature, the epistolary literature particularly, you will find John making points that touch that particular view. For example, he says in 1 John chapter 4 and verse 2, "By this you know the spirit of God every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of antichrist of which you have heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world." So to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh was fundamental for Christian doctrine because if we do not have a Messiah who has come in the flesh, we do not have a God-man and we do not have a Savior.

So that was one of the purposes that John was writing about. He will talk about deceivers and those who are antichrists and he is referring to those who hold to these theological errors. He also had a very constructive purpose in writing. And one who reads these opening chapters or opening sentences would lean, of course, to that particular view because this is certainly a constructive preface to the book. He urges his readers to a full life. And incidentally, that's why I hope in our study of 1 John, that we will move on in our own Christian experience.

So, to urge his readers to a full life and also to an assurance of their salvation. You can understand why that would be true. Let me remind you that he wrote the gospel he says details those

signs in order that you, his readers, might believe. It is a propaganda document. "That you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life through His name." So he wrote the gospel that men might have life through Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. That would speak directly to Cyrenthian Gnosticism.

In the epistle in the third chapter of the 15th verse, he writes this, "These things I have written unto you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life." So the epistle was written so that men may have assurance of eternal life. The gospel was written that they might have life. Now that constructive purpose is one of John's purposes. Fundamentally, if we analyze what John is saying, what he really wants is to get the apprehension of spiritual truth deepened into the experience of it. Now we need a lot of that. I need that. And I think some of you need that. We have an apprehension of spiritual truth that has not deepened into the experience of it, and John's epistle is a marvelous aid to just that experience.

You can realize that if these false teachers were moving in and out, around Ephesus and in the East, and were propounding these doctrines that many of these believers who didn't have a Bible like you have, and you have no excuse, but who didn't have a Bible like you have, you can see how they might be disturbed. And some of them who were not grounded, perhaps new believers, would have been very much disturbed by the things that they were hearing from men who were intelligent men and who professed to have a great knowledge of spiritual truth. So they were no doubt disturbed. Many of them in the assemblies of that area, in the church were disturbed.

Now I don't always enjoy Bloom County. It gets on my nerves every now and then, but I always look at it I must confess. Well, Opus is having trouble psychologically, as you know if you have been reading it. He comes from the store last week in one of the strips saying, "I raided the bookstore for self-help books to help me cope with my mid-life snit." And here are books that all have to do with various types of psychology and the relationship to our daily living. And he says, "Aren't they wonderful. A veritable tower of psychobabble. My goodness, it is great to live in an age where the emotionally discombobulated can so expertly treat themselves." So of the titles are, "*Hug*

Yourself." "Husbands," looks like "Hug". "Good Men and Bad". "Women," and something about "Bad Dogs". "Post," well I can't read that it is too small. "Negative Thinking". "G-spot Blues," "Positive Pondering," etc. "What oh what must our ancestors have done," Opus says. Well his little friend says, "Taken a hot bath." [Laughter]

Now the next day he says, "Thank goodness for the psychobabble, self-help available. These certainly are tough times for people to cope with." "Right," the young fellow says by his side, "How easy they must have had it in the old days." He is speaking cynically, of course. "Civil wars, pestilence, plague, massive starvation, slavery, Indian attacks, man-eating bears, emotionally it must have been a picnic," he says. Opus is upset. He says, "Hey, they moved Cosby to Tuesdays at eight. I was wobbly for a week." [Laughter]

Well you can understand how some of these believers in Asia Minor were wobbly with these false teachers who had come in and were upsetting them with theology. One of the nice things about the history of the Christian church is this, error wins some skirmishes, but it never wins the war. Here we are in 1988, and the Scriptures are, if anything, on sounder foundation than they ever been on the past. Let error win a few skirmishes. It causes us to search the Scriptures and we learn more about the Scriptures by doing that. Error never wins. The church has been founded by the Lord God in heaven and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. In nineteen hundred plus years proved that, at least in my satisfaction. What the future holds, I have confidence in.

Now John's message is very simple. He wants to make us certain about Christ, he wants us to realize that the testimony that is preserved by the apostles and now in the church and expounded in the church is reliable testimony, and he wants us to be certain about eternal life. He sums it up at the end of the epistle when he says, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding in order that we may know Him, who is true, and we are in Him, who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ, this is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourself from idols."

Well it is no wonder that this epistle is called the epistle of eternal life. This is what Eliot missed. This is what would have helped him when he cried out, "Where is the life we've lost in

living?" Here it was in the word of God, set forth for us all along and he missed it. Don't miss it my Christian friend. Don't miss it my non-Christian friend. It is here, right before us.

Now we look at the first four verses very briefly and in the 1st verse the apostle writes about the manifestation of the eternal. Remarkable opening we've commented upon. There is no personal reference. There is no salutation. But what a remarkable preface it is, because if you look at it carefully, you will see that he has outlined the purpose of God from eternity to eternity. That doesn't appear too readily. You must think, ponder. That is what we miss when we read the Bible. We read it like we are reading Opus or reading the newspapers. What is happening in the world? We read, though we don't ponder it. Some of those things we should ponder, but we don't ponder that. He begins by saying, "What was from the beginning." Now in the gospel he said, "In the beginning was the Word." In the gospel we read, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." In the beginning the Word was, that is when the beginning took place which he defines as the time of the creation, the Word was. The Word had been in existence all along. The Word did not come to be then, it was, even in the beginning.

Now here he says, "That which was from the beginning." So he moves from the creation on; all of the process of unfolding of the ages from that time on. So what was from the beginning? Now he says in verse 4, "that our joy may be made complete." No person's joy, not the happiest Christian's joy is made complete, fulfilled in this life. Joy is not fulfilled until the future. In fact, the joy is not filled until the time we enter the presence of the Lord. As the Psalmist said in the Psalm we tried to expound recently, the sixteenth Psalm, "Thou will make known to me the path of life. In Thy presence is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever more." So from the beginning to the future beyond this life and the fulfillment of our joy John writes of that time. So he has outlined the purpose of God from eternity to eternity.

Now from the very first part of the 1st verse he says, "That which was from the beginning." Now let's take that as being a reference to the Son concretely, but the message, perhaps, ultimately the message concerning the Son. This phrase, "Preceding those of His manifestation which are what

we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld, our hands have handled," that phrase, "That which was from the beginning," stands alone in its sublime completeness. "That which was from the beginning." Think of that. That is what was manifested, John says.

Ignatius was one of the early church fathers, who was martyred about 117 A.D. On his way to his martyrdom, he wrote a series of letters to the churches of his day; very brief letters. In one of them to the Magnesians in the eighth chapter of it, the 2nd verse, Ignatius speaks of Christ as the Word. Jesus Christ, who is the Word came forth out of silence. The idea of coming forth out of silence originated in Judaism. For the rabbis asked the question in light of Genesis 1:3, "and God said, Let there be light." What was God doing before he spoke? What was God doing before he created by speaking the creation into existence? Their answer was specifically, to what was there before he spoke? God's silence. That was what was there before he spoke. So it became the token of the inexpressible majesty of the eternal God. God's silence.

The Christian message is, God is no longer silent. He has spoken, and he has spoken out of his silence. And further, he has not only spoken like a general at headquarters, but he has himself come down in among us with words of inexpressible grace. So "that which was from the beginning".

I have a good friend who is now with the Lord. We used to like to talk about preachers together. He was a much older man than I. Believe it or not, he didn't die but just a year or so ago. He was about ninety-five. I mentioned a certain well-known preacher to him and asked if he had ever heard him because he was at that time with the Lord. He said, "Yes, I did hear him. A remarkable message." He said, "I remember it very well. He took two texts and put them together. I never would have thought of putting them together, but he put them together." He said, "First of all, he began by citing the passage in John 1:38 when Jesus speaks to one of the disciples of John following him, one of which was Andrew, where they asked him, 'Where dwellest Thou?' And you remember he said, 'Come and See'.

But he took that text, where dwellest Thou, addressed to the Lord and after he had spoken about that he had us turn over to 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 16, where we read, "To Him who

has only immortality dwelling in the light in which no man can approach unto.' And went on to talk about how they went to be with our Lord but the ultimate glory of the Son of God, the infinite glory, unsoiled glory, of the divine Son no one can approach unto that; never for we are creatures."

Well that was a remarkable thing but that's Lord. "That which was from the beginning." Look, when John looked upon the Lord Jesus Christ, when Paul saw him on the Damascus Road, when Andrew saw him as one of John's disciples and heard John cry out, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," when he looked upon the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was looking upon the face of one who upheld the secret of the universe. The secret of all of this universe. The one, who was there when it was created, and not only there when it was created as a spectator, but took part in that creation; who understands the fundamental principles by which this whole universe, both spiritual and physical, operates. That's who he is; "That which was from the beginning." John is telling us that he had the inestimable privilege of looking upon him, gazing upon him, hearing words about him, and even handling him, probably a reference to the resurrection and Thomas is putting hands into his side and the reference in Luke chapter 24, in which the very word, handle, is used.

The secret of the universe. The animating principle. That is the principle that pertains to the nature of the Son of God. What a magnificent thing to realize, my Christian friend, that you and I today, 1988, may have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. What we miss, what we miss by being occupied with other things. What we miss when we turn on the television set and look at Swaggart or look at Baker or the rest of that similar crowd. What do we miss? Who would want to have fellowship with those shysters when we have the real thing in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well the historical manifestation is set forth, that which was from the beginning, then we've heard him, we've seen him with our eyes. Then he uses a word, "what we beheld," as if there was a time when we really looked at him and pondered him and came to understand something about his essential office and work. Pondered him and our hands handled, referring apparently to a specific

situation or so. So from the abstract to the physical the emphasis is on seeing. Four times he uses a word that has to do with seeing, actually two verbs, but both have to do with seeing. So we with them stand gazing with wonder at this developing climax of certainty that John speaks about, looking upon the face of him who was the eternal Son.

George Truett, who so many years back, pastored First Baptist Church which was fond of saying concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, "He was God as though he were man and he was man as though he were not God." He was the God-man and never did a hyphen mean so much. How true. Robert G. Lee has often spoken of his dual nature thus, "as an eternity He leaned upon the bosom of His Father without a mother, so in time He leaned upon the bosom of His mother without a father." The eternal Son, this is the one with whom we may have fellowship, John says. The message is a message of life. This is what Eliot missed. The life that was missed in the living, it's concerning the word of life; concrete form in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in the 2nd verse he speaks of the manner of the proclamation. After all, if you have an experience such as the apostles had and you have come into fellowship with the word of life, the One who was from the beginning, then you don't monopolize that, like you might do if you struck a stream of gold somewhere. But you do what the apostles did, you proclaim it. And that is what they did. It was given to few to have this experience, but they have given it to the many since then. So with zeal he asserts the actuality of the revelation of the life of God in him. And he says, "And the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and manifested to us. He speaks from the authority of the experience and from the authority of the sense of commission.

Then we have to ask the question, how did John respond to this magnificent creation that came to him? Well he responded as a wise man would. Now I want you to remember this. When John the apostle wrote this, it was at least fifty years it seems after our Lord's ministry, probably sixty. Now in the meantime, guess who has been working? Guess who has been working down through those sixty years? Working hard, they are still working hard. Visit any theological seminary and you

can find some of them. Some theological seminaries you can find a lot of them. Almost everybody on the faculty belongs to this camp, in other theological faculties, a few; in some faculties many, but there is still some true ones.

What has been happening since that time? Since the time our Lord was here, crucified, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, what has been going on? Biblical scholarship. That's right. Biblical scholarship has been going on. Nothing wrong with Biblical scholarship. Everybody ought to be a Biblical scholar under the Holy Spirit. But Biblical scholarship does not follow that particular guideline always. So what has been happening? Scholars have been talking about the revelation which is ultimately to be found in the word of God, and they have been raising objections. The Gnostics raised objections. The Cyrenthian gnostics raised particular ones, so the solvent's of scholarly analysis, by which the faith is often destroyed in the minds of some people, has been at work.

Listen, it is not surprising. Jesus made astonishing statements. Think of the statements that he made; that he was the Messiah that he was the Son of God, he was the eternal One. He came from heaven the rest of us came from the earth. Those are astonishing. As a matter of fact, a mind that is not staggered by the claims of Christ has never really felt the import of those things that he claims. He claims to be God of God, as well as true man. I sometimes think that if we are not staggered by this we haven't felt the import of the things that the Lord Jesus has said and our faith is not really deep. If we are not concerned to investigate these claims that he made in the New Testament and see if they really can be substantiated then maybe our faith is not as strong as it should be.

But in John's day there were people now who were laying serious charges against the Christian faith. But look at John. His faith is calm, it is rational, it is wise. As someone has said, it is sagacious. Listen, the apostle was no fool. The apostles were no fools. They knew what they were talking about and in spite of the biblical scholarship of their day, the apostle concludes his great epistle by saying, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding in

order that we might know him who is true and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ, this is the true God and eternal life. Thank God for biblical scholars guided by the Holy Spirit who searched the word of God for the evidence of its truthfulness.

So the response is the response of this epistle. And finally in verses 3 and 4, he speaks of the purpose of the proclamation. He says, "What we have seen and heard we proclaimed to you also that you also may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Fellowship is salvation in its widest embrace; includes justification, includes holiness, it includes being in the church of the believers. These words are echoes of our Lord's Prayer in John 17, and incidentally as I say, the Father and the Son are separate in personality but on the same level in essence. The ultimate purpose, he says, is "that our joy may be made complete." The immediate purpose: fellowship. The ultimate purpose: joy complete.

So the message leads to fellowship, the fellowship with the Father. Think of it. The fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ. You can go home, get down on your knees, give God thanks for the fact that the Son is with you in the Spirit, and live as if he is with you constantly, enjoying the intercourse of a spiritual return with him that means the life that is life indeed. My Christian friend, don't miss that. Don't miss that. That is what the New Testament is about. Perfect joy we say is not possible now, so he looks on to the future. Augustine has a word on this joy, for he says, "For there is a joy that is not given to the ungodly. That for all those who love Thee for thy own sake, whose joy Thyself art. And this is the happy life to rejoice in Thee, of Thee." This is it. This is it, Mr. Eliot. "There is no other," Augustine says at the end.

Now we still have Neo-Cyrenthians and Gnostics with us, some still claim the possibility of life and fellowship with God without Jesus playing any significant part. It wasn't long ago that a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City said this, an outstanding professor, think of his name, John Knox, was his name, a modern John Knox." John turned over in his grave in Great Fires Church, I think, when he heard this statement, if he ever heard it from John Knox, the theologian. "I for one," he said, "simply cannot imagine a sane human being of any historical period

or culture entertaining the thoughts about himself which the gospel says they stand often attribute to him." I made that statement in the service at 8:30 and two people came up who have attended the Chapel over the years but are now living in Connecticut, and they said you mentioned Union Theological Seminary today. We went over there the other day and we asked for a statement of faith and no body could even give us a statement of faith. We asked several people for a statement of faith, evidently, they don't even have a statement of faith. Well, they used to have a statement of faith. It was the Westminster Confession of Faith at one time, but it is an independent school now, so I guess they don't have a statement of faith. They didn't know what a statement of faith was. That is, the persons they spoke to.

There are two dangers that are still with us in the church, someone has pointed out. One is the assumption that Christian fellowship is possible other than on the basis of a common faith in Christ. John Stott has some very good words here, he says, "This statement of the apostolic objection to the proclamation of the gospel, namely of human fellowship arising spontaneously from a divine fellowship is a rebuke to much of our modern evangelism and church life. We cannot be content with an evangelism that does not lead to the drawing of converts into the church." In other words, para-church activity is suspect because there is no discipline that may be applied properly, biblically. Nor with a church life whose principle of cohesion is a superficial camaraderie instead of a spiritual fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

In the professing Christian church today, we have had another illustration this week of blatant violation of the word of God. Mr. Swaggart, as some of you know, has been a fervent opponent of the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God. Denying the inability that we have from the Fall, denying unconditional election, denying particular redemption, denying efficacious grace, and denying the perseverance of the saints. That raises an interesting question for me; here is a man who believes you can lose your salvation. He has proclaimed that constantly.

Now it emerges that he has been living the kind of life that by any stretch of an evaluation of a sin that might cause one to lose his salvation, that sin that he has been practicing qualifies. What

can we conclude by his own words? He is not a Christian. Now if he is not a Christian there are lots of people who have been listening over a lengthy period of time and pouring in dollars to an organization does not conform to the word of God. As a matter of fact, if his confession was genuine confession last Sunday, some have wanted, doubting it, to give him an academy award, but others have thought possibly that it is genuine. We'll say it is genuine. If it was genuine, that was when he was saved again, according to his theology.

Now the startling or the sad thing about this is some of you in this audience have probably listened to him quite a bit. Some of you listened because you thought it was rather funny. But others of you have listened seriously. You've been taken in. The shysters have taken over. Many have even given money. Confession to the Lord God, it seems to me, should not simply be Mr. Swaggart's task, but others as well who have had a part in fostering something that has brought a blight on evangelical Christianity. The truths of the word of God. It is not possible to have Christian faith other than on the basis of a common faith in Christ; it is not possible to have a true relationship with God while rejecting Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Only by thinking right about him is there fellowship with God. This is the word for Eliot and for anyone else who is wondering, have I lost life in the midst of my living.

We invite you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ not to put money in the collection plate. I got a letter this past week or it wasn't a letter, I apologize. My wife went to a meeting. Two were there, who are members of Highland Park Presbyterian Church, they came over to her and said, we listen to your husband every Sunday morning and we've enjoyed the exposition of the word of God. And one of them went on to say, "And it is so refreshing to have a radio program, Christian program, in which no appeals for funds are made." We are thankful to you in the audience for that. I appreciate it. I appreciate the sentiments of it and others do as well.

The life that is life indeed is life in fellowship with the Lord Jesus and the Father. May God help us to enjoy it in 1988. If you are here without Christ, we point you to him, who is the eternal life who was with the Father, who was manifested, who ascended to the right hand of the Father

after having shed his blood for sinners. And if you recognize that you are a sinner, you can come to Christ and receive eternal life by grace. May God help you to come. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the apostle that has given us such a challenge to enjoy fellowship with the Son of God and with our heavenly Father. O God, we pray enable us by Thy grace to enter into the experience through the Spirit, the experience that the apostle is speaking about. For Jesus' sake. Amen.