



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 5:18-21

"The Triple Mark of Christian Affirmation"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Those who are working in the library have asked me to urge you too, if you ever plan to read a book from Believers Chapel, that before you check out the book you read the instruction sheet. And one thing you must not do, which has already been done, is when you sign your name, not only should you write legibly, but sign your last name too. [Laughter] Because occasionally one will just be signed, John, and it's very difficult for them, not being equipped mentally and spiritually to read the minds of the individual who signed his first name, to know the last name. So if you would do that, it would help a great deal.

The ladies who have been involved in bringing the library up to a more workable state would appreciate it very much, and it will make for a much more efficient and more usable library. We hope, of course, you will take out some books. And some of you haven't read a book in a long time; there are some in there that, I'm sure if you read them, you would find in them great profit. So we urge you to use the library. We hope to add, from time to time, useful books in it, but read the instruction sheet. That's addressed to me as much as to you, because I usually sign my last name. I don't error that way but in other ways I have erred too. This is not a confession, you understand, it's just a fact of life.

For the Scripture reading, we are turning to 1 John chapter 5. And I must say I am sorry for the series on this great little epistle to come to an end. As I explained, I think, one time, having

expounded many, many of the books of the Bible from verse 1 to the last verse of them, this was one little epistle that up to the present time I had never expounded beginning at chapter 1, verse 1 through chapter 5, in verse 21. I have particularly enjoyed it; I'm sorry that we have come to an end. Probably, next Sunday, we'll have a very short time on 2 John and then 3 John. But now we are concluding and reading verse 18 through verse 21, four verses that are the final words the apostle wrote in this letter, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."

Now, I want to make two or three comments about these verses that are somewhat technical and I'll do it in the Scripture reading so that when we come to the exposition we will not have to go through that. The expression, "but he that is begotten of God," in the Authorized Version that I'm reading, gives you the impression that the apostle is speaking of an individual, such as you and I are begotten of God, who has been born again. It is possible, however, to render that expression, "He that was begotten of God," and capitalize the "He." In which case, it would be a reference to our Lord and his own begetting. And we need not deal with the theology of that at the moment. It really hinges upon the meaning of the expression translated here, "himself," that follows. In some of the manuscripts, in fact, the great majority of the manuscripts, "himself," is found.

Now obviously if it is "himself," then "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself" could not be a reference to our Lord, but if "himself" is genuine then "he that is begotten of God" refers to an ordinary individual who has been born again. He keeps himself. Some of the manuscripts, in fact, many feel, better manuscripts, have the word that may mean himself or simply him. In other words, it may be reflexive or it may not be that depending upon the way in which it is pointed or handled by the individual looking at the text. So it could mean keepeth himself or keepeth him. If it is him, then "He that is begotten of God," referring to our Lord, capital He, "keepeth him," would be a reference to our Lord keeping the one who has been born of God or an individual such as you and I. So let's read it that way and we would read it, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth

not; but He," capital letter, "that is begotten of God keepeth him," and then we read, "and that wicked one toucheth him not." That's one way to do it.

The other way is also a way. To actually deal with the whole question would bring us to an impasse exegetically and critically and force a decision that we really are unable to make with the information before us. But let me simply say that the majority of the interpreters today would take that "He," that is Christ, "that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the wicked one toucheth him not." We'll expound it that way. "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth," the Authorized Version says, "in wickedness." It is universally agreed among interpreters that this is personal, and, therefore, we should render it, "and the whole world lieth in the wicked one," a reference to Satan.

In verse 20, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true," the little word, even, in the Authorized Version should be omitted. As you can see it's italicized; it is something added by the translators. And let's render the "in his Son Jesus Christ" as "by his Son Jesus Christ." That's not necessary, it might clarify. "And we are in him that is true by his Son Jesus Christ," or because we are in Christ. "This is the true God, and eternal life."

"This" is a demonstrative pronoun; to what does it refer? It may refer to the one who is true, genuine; that is the Father. "That we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, by his Son Jesus Christ," that is the Father. "This is the true God and eternal life." That would be in harmony with the context, which has to do, primarily, with the Father in those statements previous. However, as anyone who writes language knows, language tends to be more difficult to comprehend if pronouns do not refer to the nearest antecedent. If it refers to an antecedent that is up a little farther back in the context, the tendency is confusion on the part of the reader. He'll be asking himself, "What does he mean?"

Now, if then, "this" refers to the nearest antecedent, it would refer to his Son Jesus Christ. "This," that is the Son Jesus Christ, "is the true God, and eternal life." That's valid theologically,

because, of course, Christians believe in one God who subsists in three persons: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God. The term, God, may apply to either of the three persons. So "This is the true God," that is Jesus Christ, "and eternal life."

Furthermore, the apostle began his letter in verse 2 of chapter 1 by saying, "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." Now, that would be in harmony. There are many other things I could say here, but this is not a class in biblical acts of Jesus of the Greek text. So I merely want to let you know these are the questions that you think about and you must resolve in your mind, one way or the other, as you read this passage. I'm going to take it as a reference to Jesus Christ, but understand that there are many excellent students of 1 John who take it as referring to the Father.

There are some excellent ones who take it as referring to the Son, as well. So I am not taking an interpretation that is weird, unusual. I try to avoid that. I think that anybody who comes out with something strange and different all the time, in light of the fact that Christ gave the Holy Spirit to instruct the church down through the centuries and he's been doing it for nineteen hundred years, that we should expect the believing body to come to some fairly general conclusions of a similar kind concerning the interpretation of the Bible. So when there is someone who assumes, I think it's arrogance, exegetical arrogance, for a person to say, "Now, no one else believes this, but this is really what this teaches."

I think that can also be understood as, "My word to the Holy Spirit is that he has not done his job for nineteen hundred years and the church has not really come to understand the text in the right way until I came along." To my mind, that borders on arrogance. So acknowledge the good Christian men who take one view, the good Christian men who take the other. It's very difficult to know exactly what this should be, but we are going to take it as being a reference to Christ, "The Son Jesus Christ is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Now, my text has "Amen." Most of the manuscripts do not have that "Amen." Even in the text that many

people, for many years, read, the "Amen" is not universal. So we leave it off, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." It's a very interesting way to end an epistle, is it not?

Now we have taken a lengthy time, but that's part of the time for the message. I think you will understand what I am going to say a little better, and I won't have to say it again then. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the privilege that is ours on this, the Lord's Day, to gather together, to listen to the word of God, to sing hymns of praise and thanksgiving together, to express our worship, our thanksgiving, and, by Thy grace, to enjoy the Christian fellowship that we have in the body of Christ. The fact, Lord, that Thou hast preserved the church of Jesus Christ to 1989 is such a tremendous testimony to the providential care that Thou hast exercised over the church and the sovereign control of history manifested in that. We worship Thee today; we praise Thy name. We ask Thy blessing upon us, upon the whole church of Christ, upon this church, others where Christ's name is lifted up.

Bless the sick, give healing, encourage them and console them, supply their needs. Bless those who minister to them: the physicians. May they be physicians of the body in such a way that Thy name may be glorified. Give healing as it pleases Thee.

Lord, we pray particularly for this country and for our new president and for those who will be associated with him in the government. We pray for each one of them, and we ask that the United States of America may enjoy an administration that supports some of the great things that have to do with life as it is represented in the word of God. We commit President Bush to Thee, and Vice-President Quayle, and others in authority and ask for a sovereign providential care over them. Be with us now as we sing, as we listen to the word of God in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today in the conclusion of the exposition of John's first epistle is "The Triple Mark of the Christian Affirmation." John's final paragraph, a condensed summary of

things the apostle has already said, is the capstone set upon the edifice of the apostolic theology by the last survivor of the twelve. The confession, as you noticed, is introduced by a threefold, "We know." Verse 18, verse 19, verse 20: all begin with the little words, "We know." That's a creed of three articles and of these truths, John asserts, Christians have sure knowledge. We know. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not. We know that we are of God. We know that the Son of God has come and has done some significant things for us. These are things of which we have sure knowledge. He does not say that we suppose these things are true, we know that they are true. The three things may be put this way: We know what God's begotten; do not sin.

Now, you'll reflect as you think about the epistle, if you've been here as we've been attempting to expound it over the past weeks and months, you'll remember chapter 3 where the apostle says much the same thing. In verse 6 of chapter 3, he wrote, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." In the 9th verse, even more to the point, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." To sum up the first article of this creed, John would say, "I believe in holiness." "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not." The second statements might be called, "We are born of God; we are not world links." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one."

Essentially, he has said this in chapter 3, in verse 10 through 13, and in other places as well. And so we could sum this article up by saying, "I believe in the new birth." So if John were here with us he would say, "I believe in the new birth; I believe in holiness." And, finally, in the 20th verse he states, "We know the Son of God has come, and hath given us an understanding, that we might grow in the knowledge of him who is true." So the Son has come and he has brought a knowledge of God and the experience of communion with God. Chapter 4, verse 9 and 10, chapter 5, verse 1, he has alluded to these great truths previously. John, if we were to ask how this particular article should be expressed he would say, "I believe in the incarnate God's mission to men.

Now, you have probably noticed the order in which these words are given: I believe in holiness, I believe in the new birth, I believe that Christ has come and has accomplished a certain work. That seems in the reverse order, doesn't it? If we, thinking theologically, sought to put these things together, we would have put it in the reverse order. We would have said, "I believe Christ has come, I believe that he has made it possible for men to be born again, or given new life, and I believe that that life that they are given should be a holy life." So what he has done is give us the order of experience and not the order of theology, although, experience is theological as well. But let me reiterate, he says, "These are things that we know," not we suppose, not we hope, not we should like to believe, not I think this is so, but we know. These are things, that those who have confidence through the Holy Spirit that God has spoken to them, these are things of which the apostles were sure.

Now, the world does not like for us to speak as if the things we believe are sure things. They don't really like for us to use the term, know. Owen Meredith, who wrote in the 19th Century, once said, "There is nothing certain in man's life but this, that he must lose it." That's a mighty small amount of certainty. Ben Franklin said, he must have said this with a smile, "But in this world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes." President Bush, pay attention to Ben Franklin, someone might say. Mr. Adler said, "Certainty, even with regard to the essential dogmas, appears to be impossible." I'm so glad he said "appears to be impossible." If he had said "was impossible," then of course we would ask Mr. Adler, how are you so certain that uncertainty is true? You surely, then, have one certainty in the midst of all your uncertainties. And if there is one certainty, your whole statement is wrong. We need not pay a bit of attention to what you have said.

Philo said, "We can say nothing with certainty about anything, because the picture presented to us is not constant," and Philo, though you wrote many interesting things, we therefore, cannot believe you either. Because you say there's nothing with certainty and you say it certainly, or with certainty, so we cannot really accept what you say. "Our life has wrought of dreams and waking, fused of truth and lies; there lives no certitude," Schnitzler said. So we cannot believe him. But the

apostles speak in the language of certainty: We know. We know. We know. We know these are things that we can be sure of.

Well, let's see what they were. First of all, in the 18th verse, the apostle says, "We know the security of holiness." "We know that whosoever is born of God does not go on sinning; but he that was begotten of God," I have translated that slightly different because of the change of tense in the original language, "but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and that wicked one toucheth him not." A magnificent statement, "We know that whosoever is born of God does not live in sin." I don't have to argue that point; we argued that in great detail in chapter 3. When the apostle uses the present tense, he is talking about persistence in sin, life in sin, continual sin. Believers do sin, all believers would testify to that. They do sin, but if a person persists in sin and lives his life out in persistent sin, then he does not have the assurance of the possession of eternal life of having really truly been born of God. Whosoever is born of God does not go on sinning.

Now, if, as we have said, the rest of that text reads, "But he who is begotten of God keepeth him," we have a magnificent statement of the way in which it becomes understandable that we do not persist in sin. We are the objects of the keeping ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ who, through the Spirit, indwells us and keeps us from persistent sin. What a magnificent statement that is, what a magnificent hope that is, what a magnificent kind of life that is, that the dominion of sin is not a fact of our lives any longer. Sin does not rule over us. Now, if this text read, "He that is begotten of God, the believer keeps himself," I would not object to that. That expresses a spiritual truth also.

Now it has been said of people who attend Believers Chapel that they hear a ministry that is Calvinistic. And it has been said that those who attend Believers Chapel hear a ministry that is extremely Calvinistic. And then it has been said, a few worse things than that, that they who attend Believers Chapel hear this kind of ministry and it's extreme and it's wrong. Well, I hope that you have heard an intelligent defense of the sovereign grace of God. That is essentially what we are proclaiming, the sovereign grace of God. Not simply the grace of God, but the grace of God that is

sovereign in our salvation. Do not forget the adjective in that little motto of the doctrine of the apostles: sovereign grace of God. We do proclaim it.

It has sometimes been said that such doctrine indicates that we don't have any human responsibility. We have sought through the months and years to make plain that when we extol the sovereign grace of God in our salvation we do not, for one moment, deny human responsibility. The New Testament is filled with indications of human responsibility. And when we say that the Lord God keeps us in our salvation, we do not mean that he keeps us that we may live as we please, but he keeps us. No, no. We are responsible to follow the teaching of the New Testament with the help of God, the Holy Spirit. And we have the assurance, if through the power of God and through the word of God, through our Lord and his ministry, he guides us to give ourselves to keeping of holy Scripture, that he will keep us in the faith. We believe that. The Lord Jesus has given us that promise. Many times the apostles have reiterated that promise. We believe that he keeps us, but we believe, also, that we must, in human responsibility, keep ourselves to the extent to which we are able, out of the strength that God has given to us.

Now, there is no contradiction between those two things. If you ask me how to explain every dot and every I, I would say to you, "I cannot do that," because in spite of some foolish things that some people say to preachers, I am human. Being human, I am finite. Being finite, there is a limit to my power, there is a limit to my knowledge, there is a limit to everything good. God is the only one who is infinite; he is the only one who understands reality in all of its character, ultimately. And so when I see a truth in the word of God that is plainly taught by the exegesis in interpretation of the text and I see another text that is plainly taught by the exegesis in interpretation of the text, and I haven't yet, through the study of the word of God, been able to harmonize them in my own mind, I do not opt for one as over or against the other. They both are taught plainly in the word of God, so I hold them and I ask the Lord, "Give me some relief from my confusion, if possible." And I'm sure that there is going to be some relief, finally, when we get to heaven.

Therefore, I say that we are kept by the Lord. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. They will not be plucked out of the Father's hand." We are kept. "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him," the apostle states. And as a matter of fact, this apostle says, in chapter 3, in verse 3, "And every man who has this hope of the second coming in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

You might say, "How can a person say 'purify himself' when the Bible says we cannot purify ourselves?" Well in the sense in which God has called us in human responsibility to respond to the word of God, purify thyself with the help of God, the Holy Spirit, who indwells you and the life that God has given to you. In chapter 5, in verse 22 of 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul states, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." So if John meant "and he that is begotten of God keepeth himself," when I get to heaven and John says, "That's what I really meant, Lewis."

I'll say, "Well that's perfectly all right, that's biblical teaching just as the other is, he that was born of God keepeth him." I'll say, "John, it's true. I know I'm supposed to keep myself by the power of God within me, but I also know that, ultimately, the Lord Jesus Christ gives life to his saints and he keeps them in that life." I'm not confused, I hope you're not. That's the teaching of the word of God. These are things plainly taught in the word of God. "I know," John says, "the security of holiness."

And as a result of the keeping power of the Lord Jesus we read in the last line of that statement, "and that wicked one toucheth us not." He assaults us, he seeks to take us, he seeks to overthrow us, he seeks to extract the life that God has given to us from us, but he cannot do it because there is someone stronger than he. As the psalmist expressed it, using the very same word that is used here, in the great translation of the Old Testament, he said, "Do not touch my anointed ones, and do not do evil to my servants." Because of the power of God, that wicked one, Satan, does not touch us to take us under his control. What a magnificent article of faith that is. "We know

that whosoever is born of God does not persist in sin; but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and that wicked one toucheth him not." John, who has been talking about this through his epistle, sums it up here.

The second article of faith, in the 19th verse says, "We know our Father and deliverance from the world; we know we are of God." You notice, incidentally that he is now speaking personally, not generally. He has said in verse 18, "In whosoever is born of God." He says, "We know that we are of God," personally. Now, we are in the family. We are of God. We belong to the Lord. We have moved from the wickedness and the chaos and the turbidity of the life before we knew the Lord to the purity of life in Christ. "We know we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one."

O the plight of the world around us. And why should believers love the world? Why should we love the world? Why should we be impressed by the world? Why should we be interested in the materialism of the world, and the thoughts of the world, and the philosophy of the world in the life of the world? The world lies in the arms of the wicked one, the whole world, helplessly in the arms of Satan. There are only two places for people to dwell; they may dwell in God, through Christ, or they dwell in the wicked one. Those two places, that's all. We have either a dwelling in Christ, or we have a dwelling in the world: "The whole world lies in the wicked one." What marvelous figures are suggested by, "The whole world lies in the wicked one." The picture of a stranded vessel on the sand of the seashore, unable to be moved, stranded, lying in the power of the sand; or a sow, lying in the mud and rejoicing in it; or, Samson in the arms of Delilah, as one of the commentators has suggested, lying in the arms of Delilah. "The whole world lies in the wicked one, the whole world."

We sometimes sing to our Lord's glory of his sovereign power, "The whole wide world lies in his hands." I won't sing it to you, because I sang it a little this morning and out of the tape room came, Hillary Sullivan, and said, "We will be happy to erase from the tape the singing of that particular line or two, "The whole wide world." [Laughter] So I am not going to do any singing, but it's true, of course, the whole wide world lies in his hands, the sovereign power of the Lord God.

But it also can be said, "The whole wide world lies in the wicked one," in the spiritual sense, "the whole world." What a magnificent statement that is. What a warning to Christians, for Christians who love the world, are the enemies of God, so the New Testament also tells us. In Believers Chapel, you could never honestly want to love the world in the sense in which the apostles warn us against the world.

Now we may love and we should love the individuals and desire to be the instrumentality for their deliverance from the plight in which they find themselves. But, as for loving the world, no, no; to love the world is to be an enemy of God. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." We might not think this is important, but this is the second article of the apostles' faith. We know our Father and deliverance from the world. What a magnificent thing that is.

Now, finally, in the 20th verse, he says, "We know the Son's mission and its purpose," this is the conclusion, "and we know that the Son of God has come." Oh, what that tells us about the ministry of the Lord Jesus and how it summons up in our mind some of the magnificent things the apostle has stated.

In chapter 4, in verse 9, he has said, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, to define love, one must include the propitiation Christ offered." "Herein his love," not infinite sentimentality as the world likes to think of the love of God, infinite sentimentality. We are bathed in that by the media constantly and by individuals and in our churches, also. The infinite sentimentality of God, but don't say anything about the propitiation. Don't say anything about the substitutionary atonement. Don't say anything about those things that we cannot understand or which we do not want to understand.

In the ministry of the Son, there's the revelation, historically, of his incarnation. The second person of the Trinity has come, taken to himself human nature, become one of us. A magnificent miracle, greatest thing that has ever happened in the history of this universe when that took place,

only exceeded, if we can call it exceeding, by the cross and the propitiation and resurrection that followed. There comes the light of his historical incarnation, his expiation of sin, his propitiation of the Father. O, do not tell us that it is pagan to think of the propitiation of the Father. It is true, that in the pagan religions, it was thought that one must offer an offering to the Lord God in order to get him to be willing to be nice to us. Well, that isn't the New Testament teaching, and when we talk about propitiation and when we talk about expiation of sin and propitiation of the Father, we're not saying that this is the way in which we get him to be good to us.

We've forgotten the fundamental facts of the Bible. The fundamental fact of the Bible is that it is God, the Father, who gave the propitiatory sacrifice, the Father who sent the Son, and the Son who, voluntarily, with the Father, carried out this ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is not the pagan idea of a sacrifice of an animal to make God be nice to us. That's not the Christian doctrine; that's anything but the Christian doctrine.

One of the sad things, today, is that it is so easy, dangerously easy, when one speaks of the subject of the cross to sound impeccably orthodox and mean nothing. Our churches are filled with individuals who stand behind the pulpit and talk about the cross of Christ, the love of God, the death of Christ, even, but when those great facts are explained, what comes out is not Christian doctrine, but unchristian doctrine, a tampering with the word of God. It was said of one of them of the last century, F. M. Robertson of Brighton in England, a famous preacher who wrote many books.

Robertson believed that Christ did something or other which somehow or other had some connection or other with salvation. [Laughter] One gets the impression as he listens to the theology being preached today that the language is filled with spiritual words but the meaning is vacuous, empty. God is love and he expresses his love in the propitiation, and to understand the propitiation is to understand the love of God. There is no love of God without that propitiation in the biblical and full sense.

One of the most magnificent conversions in the history of the Christian church was the conversion of Charles Simeon. Bishop Boyle said that Simeon's story of his conversion deserves to

rank among our religious classics, side by side with the conversion of men like Augustine, and Luther, and Bunyan, and even David and Paul. He went to school at Eton, like the English do of the upper classes. He was an undergraduate at Cambridge. And he forgot to pay attention to the requirements at Cambridge in his day, and so in the 18th century, near the end of it, when he went there, it was required that every student at King's College, one of the colleges of Cambridge University, should attend the Lord's Supper.

Now, he said, "My conscience told me that Satan was as fit to go as I was." And he resolved that since he must go he must prepare himself for the awful ordeal. He was a man who had wrestled with his sins. He said his sins were "more in number than the hairs of my head or the sands upon the seashore." But when he found that it was compulsory that he had to attend the Lord's Supper, he decided he would do it right. So he got a book on the Lord's Supper, Bishop Wilson's exposition of the Lord's Supper, and in it was the story of the scapegoat and the Day of Atonement. He was fascinated by that. He studied the words concerning the scapegoat and the requirements of the ritual of the Day of Atonement and he said that "I have begun to see in my mind the priest as he laid his hands upon the scapegoat's head," and you'll remember that he was to confess, over the scapegoat, the sins of the children of Israel and that goat would be sent off into the wilderness or into a land not inhabited. The other goat, part of the same offering, would be slain and the blood offered upon the mercy. But he said as he thought of the scapegoat he seemed to see the Jewish priest laying his hands upon the creature's head, confessing over it the transgression of the people, and he watched the scapegoat bearing the guilt inputted to it as it went out to death in the desert. And suddenly, Mr. Simeon said, "The thought rushed to my mind, 'what, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an offering for me that I may lay my sins on his head?' Then God willing, these famous words cited over and over by many people, "God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. I will lay my sins on the sacred head of Jesus."

And that was Easter time, 1779. As the year came around, he celebrated that fact through his whole ministry. He lived on forty years, at least, beyond that. And in his fortieth year he said that

he had a full conviction that he relied upon Jesus Christ alone for his salvation. And even as he did the last of the celebrations he said, "It's now forty years since I found peace through the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. From that time to the present hour, I have never, for a moment, lost my hope and confidence in my adorable Savior." And shortly before he died, he wrote in the margin of his Bible a solemn pledge never to forget Easter Sunday 1779. He had laid his sins upon the scapegoat, upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered the propitiatory sacrifice by which he might be saved.

John goes on to talk about the purpose of his mission. I wish it were possible to expound it in more detail. He says, "He's given us an understanding, the intellectual power to grow in the knowledge of him that is true." I say, grow, because the tense suggests that, "to grow in the knowledge of him that is true," genuine, the Father. And, incidentally, in the New Testament there are two words in the original language, two adjectives that mean, true. One that means, true, as over or against that of which is false. If I were to say in class, some of you kids who learn the multiplication tables, "Eight times seven is fifty-five." You would say, "False, it's fifty-six." But also an adjective very closely related to it, one is *alēthēs*, one is *alēthinos*. You can see how close they are together. This means true in the sense of genuine. That's the one that is used here three times in this paragraph, genuine. So that we may know him that is genuine, the genuine one, the genuine God is over or against the idols who are not genuine so that we may know him who is genuine.

Jesus used this adjective when he said, "Moses gave you the bread from heaven, but he didn't give you the genuine bread from heaven. I'm the genuine bread from heaven, the bread of God." The bread that Moses gave was like Mrs. Baird's bread, but the bread that Jesus gives is the genuine bread, the bread of life, eternal life. So that we may know him that is genuine and we are in him that is genuine. That is, we have become united to him, and John knows this. There is no more groping after him. "We know the real God," John says, "the genuine God." And this is done that we might grow in the knowledge of that great fact, the true one, the Father, to know him and to know that we are in him because we are in his Son. And then he adds, "And this is the true God, and

eternal life." Well, he's mentioned Jesus Christ so we are going to take that sense. It's a difficult sentence, but since that's the nearest antecedent and there are three or four other reasons I don't have time to give you, I maybe lean a bit to thinking that that's what John means. "This," that is the Son Jesus Christ, "is the true God, and eternal life."

I remember a story that I heard many years ago about two fellows who were disputing the deity of Christ. One of them, who argued against it said, "If it were true, it certainly would have been expressed in more clear and unequivocal terms." The other said, "Well admitting that you believed in it, were you authorized to teach in it and allowed to use your home language, how would you express the doctrine to make it indubitable?" And the unbeliever says, "Well I would say that Jesus Christ is the true God." And the Christian says, "Isn't that interesting, you've actually hit upon the very words of Scripture." "This is the true God, and eternal life."

If that's what John means, that certainly is true. But I won't have an argument, in fact I wouldn't be upset if I got to heaven and John tells me, "Lewis, you did a great job of interpreting my epistle. You made a few mistakes, however, and one of them was that this is the true God, and eternal life. I really intended that to be of the Father." I'd say, "I'm satisfied with that doctrine, too. He is the true God, and he is eternal life." Eternal life, not unending life only. My Christian friend, my non-Christian friend, not unending life only, everyone has that kind of life.

Eternal life is unending life in the knowledge of and in communion with the God who is the genuine God. That's eternal life. That's what it means to have eternal life, to have fellowship with the infinite God. We begin it here; we have it now. You may have it now. Many of you, I know, do have it, maybe the majority of you. But you may have it now. This is the beginning. This is the way the acquaintance begins, as Simeon said, "By God's grace, in his power, resting ourselves upon the scapegoat, typically our Lord Jesus Christ, who became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

Our time is up. The apostle concludes with a strong admonition against idols. This is the last of his great contrasts. He's talked about light and darkness, about hate and love, Christ and

antichrist, and a number of other contrasts through the epistle, but this is the last of them, the genuine God and the idols. And when he talks about the idols, while false concepts may be included as an application, I think in Ephesus which was the home of idolatry with that great temple to Diana of the Ephesians which many of you have seen and the idolatry that characterized it. Idols everywhere in Ephesus, where John was, evidentially, when he wrote this epistle, I can understand why he should say, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The history of the Christian church, for the first three or four centuries, is the history of men trying to keep the Christians from falling for the idols. So, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." That includes jaguars and such.

[Laughter] I just wanted to let you know, I do make mistakes of interpretation every now and then.

One of the reasons, of course, John said this is he's been talking about the Corinthian Gnostics and the Ebionites who deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. So when he says, "This is the genuine God, and eternal life," in the light of the fact that they considered him only a creature and not a God, he warns them, "Keep yourselves from the idols." The things that they talk about as their Gods, our God is no creature. He is a genuine God, and eternal life. So guard yourselves, believers from every counterfeit gospel, every imaginary vision, every experience of the divine with no fruit in holiness. That's the test, the fruit in holiness.

So much of what we have seen in our society over the past five years has been great professions of faith in Jesus Christ and great professions of experiences and visions, but the fruit in holiness, is it there? John would look for that. "My little children," John would say, "keep yourselves from shams." That's what we are exposed to today: the shams. The shams, even within the professing Christian church, even within some believers, true believers, have taken up with the shams. Little children, keep yourselves from them.

And finally, let us rest our lives and our destiny on John's great certainties. His mission, our new birth, holy submission to his holy will. And let us exalt in the redeeming love that has brought reality to it all. Oh my Christian friends, Coke is not the real thing, he is the true God who is eternal life.

John Fletcher was Arminian, and I always feel a little bad about giving Arminian illustrations, but then it serves a purpose. Arminians can be saved, too. I would like for them to be more consistent in their theology. They would like me to be a little different, too. John Fletcher was a saintly Arminian, a Methodist preacher. Mr. Fletcher gave his life for the people of God. As a matter of fact, he finally caught the disease that he ministered among for so long and ultimately it was his death. Mr. Fletcher, on his deathbed, expressed very strongly, some of the things that he had begun to feel. He talked about the love of God, and he once, as he was nearing the end of his life, he called upon his wife and the maidservant to sing and shout of the vastness and the splendor of the love of God. "God is love," he cried out from his deathbed, "sing of it, shout of it, both of you," asking them to sing of the love of God.

His wife, knowing that he loved some of John Wesley, another Arminian, some of John Wesley's great hymns, she knew he loved the lines, "Mercy's full power I soon shall prove loved with an everlasting love." And in the course of the bedside recital, she repeated the words from Wesley's hymn, "While Jesus' blood, through earth and skies, mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries." Mr. Fletcher, a little later on with that obviously upon his mind, raised his hands and exclaimed, shouting out, "Boundless, boundless, boundless," and then died. What a magnificent way to go in the love of God.

If you are here today and you have never believed in Christ, we invite you to come to know the boundless love of Christ. It's available for sinners, for men like Simeon, who's sins, as he said, were as many as the sands upon the seashore, who felt the burden of it. Come to him. Rest upon him, the great scapegoat, the great sacrifice, the great Day of Atonement, means of expiation and propitiation. May God help you to come. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for these magnificent words from the apostle of love, divine love, propitiatory love, the love that expiates sin, that satisfies the Father's holiness, that makes it possible for sinners...

“The Triple Mark of Christian Affirmation” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]