



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 4:13-16

John Bunyan Conference, Lecture XV

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio Begins] And speak to you very simply. But I think in harmony with the apostle's theology along the subject of the "Marks of an Authentic Believer."

Now, not all of the marks the apostle emphasizes in this brief passage. But some of the marks, some of the important marks of an authentic believer are set forth for us here in these verses. So, let me read 1 John 4, verse 13 through verse 16. The apostle writes,

"By this we know that we abide in Him, because (I'm looking for my glasses. I hope I've read what's there so far. [Laughter]) because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed that the love that God has for us God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

It's not only that we are in the afternoon after a morning message and it's not only because we're in a conference such as we are approaching, but it arises out of the current

events that Christians today are interested in the question of who is really an authentic believer.

Now, our *Dallas Morning News* is a newspaper that frequently has lengthy articles on the nature of Christian theology, some aspect of it. For example, recently a whole page was devoted to the significance of Christ's death. The title above it was "Christians struggle with the meaning of the cross." And then a lengthy article, a lengthy discussion, numerous contributors from around the country and nevertheless at the end of it the point was that Christians are still struggling with the meaning of the cross. I don't think that that's true. I think that Christians know very plainly what the meaning of the cross is. They may not understand some of the fine points that Christian theologians talk about, but they understand the meaning of the cross. It's not difficult to understand. It becomes difficult when we allow unbelievers to introduce their philosophies and their theologies of the cross of Jesus Christ. *The Wall Street Journal*, which I read regularly, not because I have a whole lot of money, [Laughter] but it's very good as a newspaper and very good also, believe it or not, for moral and theological things that are happening in this country because they do effect the business world. But the question of what is the authentic Christian faith is something that arises in the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as in the *Dallas Morning News*.

You know, of course, from evangelicalism how the question has arisen among evangelicals over a lengthy period of time. We have questions from the theology of the evangelists. Questions from the theology of Billy Graham have arisen with respect to the nature of the Christian work which our Lord Jesus Christ has done. I won't go into a list of things, but some of them have stood out in recent days because of the striking fact of encroaching unbelief it might appear.

Billy Graham is making puzzling statements, believe it or not. Many of us know him, have appreciated him and his family, but he has been making some very puzzling statements, shocking to some people, statements that raise serious questions about his

present understanding of Christian theology. In 1997 he was interviewed by Larry King and was asked, "What do you think of the other (that is other churches like Mormonism, Catholicism) other faith within the Christian context?" Graham answered the question, "Oh, I think I have a wonderful fellowship with all of them." For example, King interrupted him at that point, "You are comfortable with Salt Lake City? You are comfortable with the Vatican?" King said, "You like this pope?" Graham answered, "I like him very much. He and I agree on almost everything." Well, how can an evangelical Christian make a statement like that? I'm not denying that Billy is an evangelical. We evangelicals say things of which we are sorry that we made those statements. There are times when our desire to talk raises far beyond our understanding of what Christian theology is and what it should be.

But nevertheless, these are the facts of life and it's important for us to ask ourselves the question constantly "What is an authentic believer in Jesus Christ?" What is it that distinguishes a Christian from other people? The Apostles Paul and John have important things to say on the point. If you want to read the Apostle Paul, read Romans, read Romans 1:16 and 17, read Romans 4:5, read 2 Timothy 1:8-11, for example. For John, read his statement concerning his gospel in chapter 20, verse 30 and verse 31. And here we have in 1 John some statements that I think bear on the point. Listen to the statement in 1 John 4, verse 10. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation, satisfaction, satisfaction by virtue of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for us.

One of the great statements made, in my opinion, was the statement made by James Denney, a Scottish theologian. In his book *The Death of Christ*, which I think every knowledgeable Christian should be acquainted with, he says these words. "St. John rises above all comparisons to an absolute point of view at which propitiation and love become ideas which explain each other, and which have no adequate illustration apart from each other. He not only defines the propitiation (he's speaking of Paul) by relation

to love - God Himself loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins. He defines love by relation to the propitiation - in this have we come to know what love is, that He laid down His life for us. The emphasis in this last sentence," Denney says, "is on the expressly contrasted words 'that one in behalf of us' (he cites the Greek words) 'ekeinos huper hemon'. It is the contrast of what He is and what we are, of the sinless Son of God and the sinful sons of men, in which the nerve of the proposition lies.

So, far from finding any kind of contrast between love and propitiation (or satisfaction), the apostle can convey no idea of love to any one except by pointing to the propitiation - love is what is manifested there; and he can give no account of propitiation but by saying Behold what manner of love. For him to say 'God is love' is the same as to say 'God has in His Son made atonement for the sin of the world.' (Or to put it another way, has made propitiation for our sins. That's what is meant by 'God is love'). If the propitiatory death of Jesus is eliminated from the love of God, it might be unfair to say that the love of God is robbed of all its meaning, but it is certainly robbed of its apostolic meaning. (And that, of course, is what we're interested in, isn't it, in his apostolic meaning). It has no longer that meaning which goes deeper than sin, sorrow, and death, and which recreates life in adoring joy, wonder and purity of the first Epistle of St. John." So, John is speaking and he is known as the Epistle of Love. He's speaking about God's love in Christ. And in these verses which I'm going to try to handle rather briefly - I'm thinking about your nap time - he summarizes how we may be sure we are included in his love. These reveal, I think, the marks of an authentic believer.

And the first mark is the indwelling Spirit's illumination. Verse 13, notice what he says. "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." "By this we know." In the remainder of this chapter he elaborates on a couple of phrases of verse 12, God's indwelling in verse 13 through 16 and perfect love in the latter part of the chapter. But the ground of the illumination, the reception of the Spirit. The interior witness of the Holy Spirit to the fact that we belong to the Son of God

is one of the marks of a true believer. A true believer knows not only from Scripture, primarily from Scripture, first and foremost from Scripture, but also from the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth that he has brought us he knows that he belongs to him. There is the mark of the Spirit's indwelling illumination. And the ground of it is the reception of the Holy Spirit. What theologians and others call the interior witness of the Holy Spirit is that which is implanted in our hearts by means of the new birth. We become new creatures.

Now, he talks about the ground of it in verse 13 and then he says also in the latter part of that verse what it consists of. "He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." So, that the gift of the spirit upon the conversion of the believer brings about a covenantal union between the persons of the trinity and the believing individual.

We may not understand much about that. I know when I was converted listening to Donald Grey Barnhouse preach in Birmingham, Alabama when I was in the insurance business of my father there I didn't realize all that happened to me in the South Highland Presbyterian Church. But nevertheless, it happened and I began to read the Bible and pretty soon I read in the Bible what had happened to me. [Laughter] And this is what had happened to me. The gospel I had received and I had this witness within my heart that that is essentially what had happened. I've learned a great deal about it in the years since and probably have also learned a few feelings that I had were not absolutely from the Apostle Paul, but came from S.L. Johnson. We tried to dispense with them, but nevertheless, the witness of the spirit is the important thing. And the apostle points to that here.

So, if you look for the first mark of a genuine believer, it is that he has the indwelling Spirit's illumination as he reads the word of God. He doesn't understand everything. You go to Bible school or theological seminary to learn a great deal more. You take Greek and Hebrew, and perhaps some other cognate languages in order to learn even more. But fundamentally, the work of illumination has begun when you have

responded to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the indwelling Spirit has been given to you as an inspired teacher, the greatest of all teachers, greater than any human teacher, the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, the second thing that characterizes the believer is the apostolic confession of the Son. And John talks about that too in verse 14 and 15. He doesn't tell us everything, mind you. Long doctrinal statements have been drawn up to give a more complete understanding of Christian theology, but these are the things that are absolutely essential for an authentic believer, a genuine believer. Look at verse 14 and verse 15. "And we have seen and testify that the Father sent the Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." This mark, we'll just call this the further compliment of the interior witness in external testimony. First of all, notice the mediatorial relation of the Son. "We have seen and testify the Father sent the Son as Savior of the world." "We." When he says "we," he means "we apostles," in my opinion. We, the apostles first, and then the Christian society they represent. And what follows is a kind of summary of the gospel.

One of the finest of the New Testament scholars of my day whom I happen to know, but who is now in the presence of the Lord, spoke of this as a summary of the gospel. Notice it. "We have seen (verse 14) and testify the Father sent the Son as the Savior of the world." A loving God does require propitiation. And gratitude does not stop short at simply Jesus Christ. "The Father sent the Son." Let us not forget that. So, the Father sent the Son and the Son acting for God full of the love that sent him has come and has offered the atoning sacrifice whereby we might have the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. The second thing he mentions is "the Father sent the Son."

Now, in verses 9 and 10 we have things that relate to him. "His only begotten Son was sent into the world." He mentions "He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The abiding purpose and result is, of course, the salvation. In verse 9 the design of the incarnation is set forth, in verse 10, the atonement itself, the fact

of it, and verse 14, the goal of it as the Savior of the world. Sent the Son. That was a real surrender on the part of the Son. Like Abraham's surrender of Isaac. In fact, Abraham's surrender of Isaac was intended to show something, some small part of what it meant for the Father to give his Son. In Romans chapter 8 and verse 32 the apostle says something that I think we can at least cite here as referring to it. There the apostle says, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Spared not his Son. And the fact that he did means he will have every thing else. Well, what else do we need besides the gift of the Son? Well, we do need some things. We need conviction of sin. If he gave the Son, he'll give conviction of sin. We need repentance and faith. If he gave the Son, he'll give repentance and faith. All of the other blessings are set forth here. "He that spared not His own Son." What's implicit in this? "He that spared not his own Son for us." For us who are believers. He will not spare us any thing. He will give us every thing. Therefore, I gather from this if an individual is an object of the gospel, he's an object of all of the blessings that belong to the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There are many things we could talk about here, but I'm trying to remember that this is nodding time for some. I haven't noticed anyone yet. I'll point you out to the rest of the [Laughter]. The Father has sent the Son. It was a real surrender on the part of the Son. A parting like Abraham's surrender of Isaac was intended to show. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." And then also he is said here to be a savior; a savior, of course, through the atoning sacrifice. It's impossible for the Son to be a savior apart from the atoning sacrifice. Is it? He was never a savior in the complete sense until he had shed his blood and, in fact, had come forth from the grave as the completed savior with his sacrifice in his hands. The forgiveness of sins for those who are destined to be his. A savior, and of the world, we don't pass by this. "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world."

Now, we don't have any debate whatsoever with Armenian friends about the fact that the world is a sinful estranged society. We just debate which aspect of that sinful estranged society are referred to when we read a statement such as this. "The Father sent the Son as Savior of the world." Did he send the Son as Savior of the world, every single individual who has ever lived or ever will live? Well, then we can only say this. So far as we can tell, he has failed in that task because countless millions have passed into eternity without our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, many of them passing into eternity as enemies of the Gospel of Christ. Maybe it will be of some help. I don't imagine in this congregation you need much help. You've had a lot of preaching on just what is meant by our Lord's death on the cross. But occasionally, a visitor can shed some slight bit of light that may be of help to you.

And I want to ask you to turn with me to John chapter 4 and verse 42. John 4 and verse 42, the apostle writes – perhaps we need to begin to read at verse 39.

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in him because of the word of the woman, who testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans had come to him, they urged him to stay with them: and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; Then they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of what you said: for we ourselves have heard him, and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Isn't it interesting? That expression "the Savior of the world" is the Savior of these individuals who are mentioned in that text.

Now, who were they? In John chapter 4 and verse 42, who were they? The Samaritans. They spoke about our Lord being the Savior of the world. Did they mean every single individual in the world? Of course not. They meant he saves Samaritans, as well as Jewish people. This is a Jewish savior. But he saves Samaritans. "Savior of the

world." What does "Savior of the world" mean? It means savior of all kinds of people, not of every person. You know that. But just looking at Scripture and looking at it from the standpoint of what it says in context. The Samaritans said he's savior of the world. That means he saves Jews and he saves Samaritans. Savior of the world. All kinds of people, but not every single individual. His death is sufficiently valuable to that. But that is not the point. He came with a specific purpose to save his people. That's specifically what he came to do.

So, savior of the world. You know when I've read that in this text I loved that because the Samaritans are saying, "He's savior of the world. He saves even us Samaritans." Yes, he's savior of the world. He saves even a Southerner, now a Texan, even a Texan. [Laughter] The Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And its mediatorial mission is sufficient to encompass all who respond to him. So, furthermore, he goes on to talk in this apostolic confession of the Son in verses 14 and 15 of the divine sonship of our Lord. In verse 15, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." Confess. I think in the context and specifically the context of the Greek statement here and the tense that is used, the reference is to a decisive confession. That is, it's a clear distinct confession. Not like Luther's. There's one place in Luther's writings where he is talking about his own salvation and he is speaking about the fact that he was having a great deal of anguish of soul and tormenting doubt. And he would scroll across his writing table as a kind of defiance of the devil, certain things that were troubling him. And one time he scrolled across his writing table, "I was baptized." That was the way he felt as being the source of his confidence he belonged to the Lord. "I was baptized." Well, if you have the doctrine of baptism that the Roman Catholic Church teaches and still teaches, then, of course, you would understand why Luther said that. Because baptism was their means by which blessings of the atoning work of Jesus Christ become ours. Baptism is essential to salvation.

So, there's been a great deal of discussion over that in recent days between Roman Catholics and evangelicals. But Rome has not changed its position. I don't think they're going to change their position. They'll retain it and it will be theirs. But we don't say, at least I don't say in moments of question about one's faith, if you still have moments of confession about your faith, "I was baptized." As a matter of fact, I was baptized twice. Both methods. I was sprinkled. I was immersed. Neither one worked. [Laughter] But faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ did work. And I was later baptized. I won't tell you which method then because the method had nothing to do with it. So, I'm not like Luther. I wouldn't say, "I was baptized." No, the Lord brought me to faith in him.

Divine sonship, Jesus, the historical figure, the Son of God, the divine Son, John's opponent, or the Docetists. And so, statements to the effect with reference to the divine sonship are very important. Whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. John Stott has a statement about this particular matter. He said "That 'the Father sent the Son' is not only the chief test of doctrinal orthodoxy, but also the supreme evidence of God's love and inspiration of ours. The deity of Christ, God's love for us and our love for God and man cannot be separated. The theology which robs Christ of his Godhead, robs God of the glory of his love, and robs man of the one belief that generates a perfect love within him. 'To weaken faith is to deaden love,'" George Findlay said. "Further, the ability to believe and the ability to love are alike attributable to the Holy Spirit. Thus belief and love seem to be related to the mission of the Son and the indwelling of the Spirit."

So, there're many remarkable illustrations of the ways in which God has worked among men. One of the most remarkable to my mind has always been the conversion of Benjamin Disraeli, otherwise known as Lord Beaconsfield, one of Queen Victoria's prime ministers, a Jewish convert to Christianity who, of course, was high up in her majesty's government. He once said, "Perhaps too in this enlightened age as his mind expands and he takes a comprehensive view of this period in progress the pupil of Moses may ask

himself whether all the princes of the house of David have done so much for the Jews as that prince who was crucified on Calvary?" What a wonderful statement of our Lord's work.

Well, there is one other thing that is a mark of the authentic believer. Not only, of course, the indwelling Spirit's illumination, not only the reference that we've just gone through, but the faithful abiding in eternal love. And the apostle speaks about that in verse 16 where he says, "And we have known and believed the love of God that God has for us, God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." So, these three things mark out the genuine believer in our Lord Jesus Christ: the indwelling Spirit's illumination, the apostolic confession of the Son, "The Father sent the Son as savior of the world," and now the faithful abiding in Christian love. "He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

Now, let me just say this. To abide in love is not to abide in love as defined by Hollywood. To abide in love is to abide in the spirit that mark the Father's gift of the Son. It's the sacrificial spirit that is set forth in Christianity as fundamental to what true spiritual life really is.

The faithful abiding in eternal love; this is the third mark. The historical mission, evidence of the Father's love as well as the Son's deity, this is what the believer who hears the gospel hears and it's in the spirit of the love of that open heart of the Godhead that our Lord Jesus Christ reveals. An answering love reveals our reception of it.

So, let me just sum it up. The marks of the authentic believer are first the illuminating Spirit who has shown into our dark minds and cold hearts. "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." But the illuminating Spirit shines into the hearts, dark hearts, dead hearts, unwilling hearts and creates new life. The cold heart becomes the warm heart, the unloving heart becomes the loving heart characteristic of every single genuine believer in Christ. That is one of the marks, the illuminating Spirit

who has shown into our dark minds and cold, cold hearts. The second is the confession of the Son of God as the one who offered the atoning sacrifice and thirdly, the abiding in the love of God.

What a God we have come to know. What a God is revealed in holy Scripture. To think of the greatness of the Son of God is not only uplifting, it's astounding. And particularly, if you've grown up in an environment in which he was not much there in your earliest days. What a God we have come to know. A God who is love, propitiatory love, which is "the chief outshining of the supreme Splendor," someone was defined it. Love in his nature, love in his atonement, love in our Lord Jesus Christ and love in the brethren all one in the same principle, but not the principle of love that we find in Hollywood or on Broadway. This is something, I won't say entirely different because they go by the same term, but oh how different they are. And particularly when we realize that ultimately it is that love that has brought us into the family of God and has made us one with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I must say one last thing. So, with reference to the fact that the statement says that "Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world." I know that in this congregation you preach a definite atonement. And if there is any one who doesn't, I'm sorry to hear that. But it's very easy that there is such a thing as that. There are Calvinists who may legitimately be called four-point Calvinists. Most of us who are five-point Calvinists at one time labeled over the fourth point for awhile. And so, we understand. But fundamentally, the idea that God saves sinners and that God alone saves sinners is something we don't labor over at all.

One of the nicest things written about a problem that puzzles people was written by William G.T. Shedd. He was speaking about the atonement and he wrote these words. "It follows then that the sovereignty of God with respect to retributive judgement consists in his power and right to satisfy its claims in more than one way. He has a choice of method. He may inflict the full amount of suffering due to sin either upon the sinner or

upon a proper substitute. He may require the complete satisfaction of justice from the transgressor or he may provide for it for him vicariously. 'Divine justice may smite the guilty man or it may smite the man who is God's fellow.'" That's a quote from Zachariah 13:7. That's God's fellow. It is free to do either. But one or the other it must do. God is not obliged either to accept or provide a substituted penalty and in case he does either it is grace and mercy toward the actual transgressor. These two particulars – please get this in our minds if we do not have it already – these two particulars of permitting substitution and providing a substitute furnish the answer to the question "Where is the mercy of God in case justice is strictly satisfied by a vicarious person?" There is mercy in permitting another person to do for the sinner what the sinner is bound to do for himself and still greater in mercy in providing that person and greater still in becoming that person. That's the mercy of the atoning sacrifice. That's, as a matter of fact, the explanation of God is love. That's what is really meant. That's characteristic of the spirit of the living God. The spirit of the Father, the spirit of the Son, the spirit of the Holy Spirit is that giving spirit, but in righteousness.

So, what are the marks of an authentic believer? He possesses the Holy Spirit's illumination, he reads the Bible, he comes to understand. He doesn't understand every thing immediately. Most of us will be happy to tell you that we don't understand every thing. And if you've heard us preach and teach, you know. In fact, you already knew. Often before we find out, many things.

The first mark, the indwelling Spirit's illumination. Second, the apostolic confession of the Son, "The Father sent the Son as Savior of the world." And then, the faithful abiding in eternal love. If, by God's grace, we are standing in something of that position, then we have reason to believe with the indwelling...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]