



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 5:18-21

"A Place for Truth"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're turning to 1 John chapter 5 and verse 18 through verse 21. If it is true as some feel that 1 John is the latest of the books of the New Testament, even written before the revelation, then this is an interesting little section because it's last word of the last apostle; the Apostle John. It may give you something of the flavor of what the church -- its leadership at least -- felt as the last apostle approaches death.

John writes, "We know that no one who is born of God sins." Now we understand that, of course, to mean "goes on sinning" because all of us upon occasion do sin. But he uses a tense that suggests durative action. And so we think of it as "goes on sinning". That is, sin as a bed of life is not the Christian life. And so if it is true that individuals' lives are characterized by sin -- if that's the bed of their life then there's reason for that individual to question, if he thinks he belongs to the Lord, that testimony.

The 19th verse reads, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." And now verse 20, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us understanding in order that we might know him." This "know" suggest also durative action and therefore it suggest growing knowledge of him, which is

generally speaking the Christian experience as time goes on. "Know him who is true; we are in him who is true, in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

Now it is possible to take that last expression as a reference to the Father. And it's possible to take it as a reference to the son. This text suggests that it should be taken of the son. And since "in his son Jesus Christ" is the nearest antecedent that doesn't settle the question but it suggests that - that this then probably refers to him. And so we should think as we read it "Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols." That world incidentally is a literal idol. It's not a figurative idol. But the text has its application to other things that really become our God. And so, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols," is not a text that applies only to Ephesus from which the apostle probably wrote this epistle, which was a city filled with idols. But it is inclusive of the literal idols and those other things that we make idols, placing them in the place of God in our lives. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the exhortations that come from the word of God. And we're indeed grateful for the apostle who wrote these last words of the New Testament, and reminds us as the period of divine revelation comes to its end that those great fundamental truths, the mission of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are the truths that are truly meaningful for us all through the centuries that have followed.

We are grateful, Lord, and we praise Thee for the provision that Thou has made for us in the Holy Scriptures. And we thank Thee that they are sufficient for our life, for eternity, they are sufficient for our life while we are still upon the earth in this body that has been given to us. We praise Thee that they have their usefulness to us even today, so many centuries after these marvelous words were written. For we know Lord that they are essentially the word of God and therefore they have their own inherit power in the lives of those who respond to them through the ministry of the divine spirit.

We pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon this church and its leadership, upon the whole church of Jesus Christ scattered over the face of the earth. And we also pray for that ministry as it traverses this earth. Bless it richly and undertake for the word of God. Supply the needs that exist here in Believers Chapels. And we pray for our elders, and deacons, the members, and the friends and the visitors who have come into today. For each one of them we pray.

And Lord we would not forget to pray as the apostle has exhorted us to pray for our leaders. We pray for those who've requested our prayers especially. Lord we remember them. We pray that Thou wilt strengthen them, encourage them, comfort them, give healing in accordance with Thy perfect will. And give us, Lord, the kind of rest in trust in Thee that honors Thy name.

Now we ask Thy blessing upon the hymn that we sing, upon the ministry of the word of God, and upon each on present especially. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] I want to confess right at the beginning that the title for the message this morning is partially stolen from a book that I've been reading over the past few days. David Wells is the author and it's entitled *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* In my opinion, it's a very significant book. Dr. Wells is the Andrew Mutch, Professor of Systematic Theology and Historical Theology at Gordon Conwell Seminary in Winnie, Massachusetts, a very significant Evangelical Christian thinker. Incidentally, that school is the school where Greg Field, who grew up in Believers Chapel now is one of the professors of New Testament.

Dr. Wells' book *No Place for Truth* is a very disturbing and distressing book. It's very distressing because it's so true, the things that he says. It's the story of a shrunken, fast becoming weightless Evangelicalism, which has lost its love for truth. I do not think I'm being overly critical in saying that Evangelicalism has lost its love for truth. Now, obviously there are people who have not. Dan Duncan is one who hasn't lost his love for

the truth and there are many others that we could say they have not lost their love for truth. Dr. Wells is surely one of them.

But what we are talking about is in general in Evangelicalism, which a generation or two ago had a great and high regard for truth, is losing its grip upon truth. Now, we're not saying that Evangelicalism -- I'm not saying that they believe the truth. In fact, it's difficult to find an Evangelical who would not say, "I believe the truth." But the belief of the truth is not really always belief in the truth in the sense that there is profession of belief in the truth characteristic of all who enter an Evangelical Church. I grew up in the Presbyterian Church. If you ask a person in the church did he believe the Westminster Confession of Faith 98 percent would say, "We believe the Westminster Confession of Faith." But the history of the church was that they really didn't believe it. They professed it. Evangelicals profess belief in the truth.

Dr. Wells writes, "The reason quite simply is that while these items of belief are professed they are increasingly being removed from the center of Evangelical life where they defined what that life was. And they are now being relegated to the periphery where their power to define what Evangelical life should be is lost." Now, he's talking about the historic parts of the Christian faith.

So if you went in among evangelicals, the churches in this city for example, and said, "Do you believe the truth?" They would acknowledge, "Yes. Of course we believe the truth." But in the final analysis it's Evangelical practice rather than profession that reveals true belief in the truth. Is the truth preached constantly? Is the stress upon the truth? The doctrines of the word of God? Is that the message that goes forth from the pulpit and from the teaching desks throughout the Sunday school? These are the important things. Is it really there?

James Davidson Hunter wrote a book about five years ago called *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*. Professor Hunter is a highly regarded researcher on the faculty of, at one time, the University of Virginia. I don't know whether he's still there or not. I

didn't check again. But he analyzed evangelical college and seminary students. And what he found in his examination of them and wrote in this book, this well researched book, was that traditional views of the authority of the word of God, the divine creation by the Lord God in heaven, the uniqueness of Christian salvation were all doctrines together with others that were being modified. That the young people who have graduated from college just a year or two ago are people in whom these modifications exist and they will have influence on the church that is to come.

Leadership Magazine is a highly successful journal designed for the clergy. I've never been a member of the clergy. The reason is that I really don't see anything in the New Testament that suggests there is such a thing as a clergy. But nevertheless, we know what we mean when we say that.

This magazine or periodical was produced by *Christianity Today*, which produces the widest read Christian periodical *Christianity Today*. Dr. Wells does the research. It's interesting to see what happened in leadership from 1980 when it was launched to 1988. Listen to these figures. This is a periodical for ministers of the word of God supposedly. Eighty percent of the journal's material was devoted to "personal crises, perplexities, and challenges encountered by the clergy". Thirteen percent of the material was concerned with techniques for managing the church. "While it is," Dr. Wells says, "quite stunning to observe that less than one percent made any clear reference to Scripture, still less to any idea that is theological.

This is a magazine that has a wide readership and is respected and read by many who would call themselves evangelicals who have place for the truth, at least in their profession. Furthermore Dr. Wells goes on to point out something that we all have known, that the seminaries have bought into this also and now have a degree that they call the Doctor of Ministry degree. "The Doctor of Ministry degree," Saul William Willamon, "an outstanding Methodist man said, "was a degree that was created because of financial aid that it might give the schools that have it. Now almost all the seminaries

have a Doctor of Ministry degree. It's supposed to be a professional degree. It's supposed to be the degree for the minister that would correspond to the law degree and the doctor degree for the physicians and the lawyers. But unfortunately, it does not possess the rigor in its classroom that those degrees have and therefore it is not highly respected.

Dr. Wells says, "It's a case of professional elevation. Not by accomplishment, but by linguistic inflation." And what we also know, and I know from experience because when I was at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School that degree was being given by the school and it's given by all of the seminaries now, the one here at Dallas as well. The courses for that degree are as he says, "a little more than a set of refresher courses for individuals who'd been out in the ministry for a few years and all so often have more experience in the ministry than their professors have."

It's almost, as I remember someone used to say and it was inclined to be a joke in those days. One goes up to another, one preacher goes up to another preacher and says, "Have you heard? There's an evangelist out preaching who doesn't have a Doctor's degree." So what we have seen is a rather startling kind of thing. What we are seeing is a shift from emphasis upon the objective to emphasis upon the subjective. And that, as Dr. Wells say, may be called the psychology of self, which permeates our schools now and the result is that the dominant 20th century type seems to be what we've called psychological man.

The emotional subjective side of man is the important part of man. And if you sit in ministry in our Evangelical churches today you will see that that is the pattern that exists within them. Dr. Wells says, "There are three faults with the psychologizing of life." First of all, it destroys evangelical identity since it's grounded in the self-movements doctrine of the perfectibility of human nature. And secondly, it undermines the desire and capacity to think without which theology is obviously impossible. Simply put, psychologizing of the faith is destroying the Christian mind. Why? Well, because we're

not interested in the objective facts of the faith, we're interested in ourselves. We're interested in ourselves psychologically and so we talk about just what we read a minute ago by *Christianity Today* about personal crises, perplexities and challenges instead of dwelling upon the Christian faith and the strength that the Christian faith gives us in any kind of crisis into which we are placed.

And thirdly, he said, it vitiates the theological agenda. That is the things that theologians are interested in properly. And our apostles and prophets were the first of the theologians because it severs interest in the outside world, and the truth of the word of God is broad enough to cover the whole world from beginning to end. This is God's world and the divine purpose covers all parts of it. But if we're always thinking about ourselves the things that have to do with what God is doing in the world that are so significant for us are forgotten, dismissed or not regarded.

Daniel Yankelovich, who has done some scientific testing and has a high reputation, say that eighty percent of the nation now is engaged in the search for new rules premised on the search for and discovery of the self. Now, if you don't think that this is true of Evangelicalism listen to the music that is sung in Evangelicalism in this city. What do they stress? The great historic hymns of the Christian faith in which the great doctrines of the faith are proclaimed? No. They don't even have hymn books that reflect that too well. Ours is not a perfect hymn book. There are many of the great hymns of the faith that we should be singing, in my opinion, were not found in this book. But if you go in so many Evangelical churches today, do you know what they're singing? I found this out since I stopped preaching regularly at Believers Chapel. I've been in three or four of these churches. And what do they sing? Vacuous choruses. Not once, twice, three times. Repeated. And it doesn't have any significant truth in it at all to start with. This is what we find our churches.

Now, I'm not talking about the unusual church. I'm talking about the usual kind of evangelical Church. And in their meetings this is what they sing. Now, that's a

reflection of their interest. They're not interested in the great truths of the Christian faith. And so it's true. Dr. Wells, it's true. In many of our evangelical churches there is no place for truth. In the study he points out the evangelical pastor is now the CEO. In the pulpit the pastor is a psychologist whose task is to engineer good relations and warm feelings.

Now, I defy you to read the New Testament and find this as the teaching of the apostles and of our Lord. It's not there. It has been constructed. It's not there. Now, let's look at our passage in the light of that. I know that's a lengthy introduction. It could have been a whole hour, but we don't have time for that and I don't want to engage in things that would deny just exactly what I think, and that is that truth is more important.

Our passage is a cradle-like confession. You notice "we know, we know, we know". But what is significant about this, my Christian friend, is that John is writing remember as our last word from the apostles, the last word of the New Testament so to speak, the last word of the Holy Spirit who inspired him about the things that are really important. So in a since this is the capstone of apostolic theology by the last survivor of the twelve. What is going to write about? Psychology? Anything but that. The confession is introduced by "we know" and what we have is a creed of three articles. "Of these truths," he says, "we have a sure knowledge."

Let me put it this way. First of the creeds, "God's begotten are preserved in holiness by the only begotten one. We know that no one who is born of God goes on sinning, but he who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him." John, may we sum it up and say that the first creed is, "I believe in holiness." We know that no one who is born of God goes on sinning. Secondly, God's son are not worldlings. Verse 19, "We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

John would say my second of the credal points is, "I believe in a new birth that separates us from the world." We know we are of God and the whole world lies in the

power of the evil one. And the third point of the creed, verse 20, God's Son has come and we know the genuine God. Listen, "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding in order that we might know Him who is true, and we're in Him who is true in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

What stands here is obvious. Isn't it? We know, we know, we know. There are people who tell us that not anything is really certain in this life. In Meredith a long time ago one of the Earls of Linton once said, "There's nothing certain in man's life but this: that he must lose it." And that's certainly true up to this point. Benjamin Franklin made the famous statement, "But in this world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes." Mr. Adler said, "Certainly even with regard to the essential dogmas certainty appears to be impossible." And Schnitzler said, "Our life is wrought of dreams and waking fused of truth and lies. There lives no certitudes." And we could say, "Mr. Schnitzler there is a certitude or two."

Now, I want you to also observe the manner in which these assertions are made. Not "we suppose". Not "we hope". Not even "we think". And surely not "we should like to believe". There's no wistful tone common to a kind of clouded faith that so characterizes some Evangelicals today. But this is something that we know.. Here is the genuine apostolic note. There is nothing wrong in saying, "We know." You shouldn't say it if you don't really know, of course. But there's nothing wrong in saying, "We know." That's the way we should feel about the Christian faith, and we should know deep in our hearts that the Holy Spirit has brought conviction that these truths are the truths of God. And so John speaks with what the apostles call full assurance. He speaks with what the apostles call boldness. He speaks like a man who's put his foot upon a rock and he knows that that rock is sound, and solid and it will hold him as he stands upon it.

These truths that we're talking about are truths that come immediately from God. They do not come through careful rationalizing of evidence presented to us from this world. These are things that come immediately from God through the mouth of the

apostle and they carry their verification within themselves. The man who reads and ponders the word of God and opens his heart as he ponders and reads will come to the conviction, "This is a book that comes from God. And these events of which the apostles and others writes are events that are brought to us. The report of them and the truth of them are brought to us by the divine testimony."

Every Christian deep down in his heart is given the conviction by the Holy Spirit of the truth of the word of God, even at times when he's too embarrassed to speak up about it or too cowardly to admit to his friends. Deep down in his heart if he belongs to the Lord, that conviction has been brought to him in his heart. So these assertions are not supposings. These are truths the apostle knows. There was place for truth among them.

Now, let me carefully mention a few things in connection with them. And first of all, verse 18, "We know the certitude of preservation." It's kind of a regressive order. Perhaps you've noticed this also that he begins with experience and moves up to the doctrine that undergirds it in verse 20.. You would have thought he would start with, "We know the Son of God is come" And then, "We know that we are of God and that we know then that if you're born of God you won't go on sinning." That seems to be the proper order; doctrine, experience. But he moves from experience to doctrine here. And I'm not going to make anything out of that. It's just a different way of doing it.

But he begins then with the statement, "We know no one who is born of God goes on sinning, but he who was born of God," now notice carefully the words. I'm just going to say this is true to the original text. "But we know that no one who has been born of God goes on sinning, but he who was born of God or the begotten one." Who was the begotten one? Well, I'm talking about the only begotten one. The only begotten Son of God. That's what he refers to. "But he who was the only begotten of God (or begotten of God) keeps him." Keeps whom? Keeps the one who has been born of God. "Keeps him and the evil one does not touch him."

The reason you and I are preserved from sin is not because of the strength that lies within us, even after we become a Christian. Read Romans 7 and Paul will point out to you very plainly that a new believer possessed of the new nature is unable to handle the evil that is around him. And so he finally cries out in the 7th chapter of Romans for deliverance from the body of sin in which he finds himself.

The one who delivers us the Lord himself. And so as he says here, "We know that no one goes on sinning, but he that was born of God, the Lord Jesus keeps him and the evil one does not touch him." The evil one assaults him but he does not touch him. That word is the word that was used by our Lord for grasping him. So the evil one does not grasp him. He assaults us constantly, but he's unable to grasp us and hold us. You read John 20:17 and you'll see what he's talking about.

Now, what's interesting about this is because right at the beginning he talks about the existence of sin. Do we have to talk about that? Yes, we do today. There are people who claim that they are Christians. They make profession of faith who make it part of their doctrine to avoid the mention of sin. That's unpopular. Robert Schuller is a good illustration. Schuller's ministry might be thought to be a comedy where it not by Mr. Schuller to be thought to be very serious to think that a Christian professing church professing the facts of the Christian faith doesn't want the term sin to be mentioned in the messages. That's a joke. Can you just imagine what someone might do on a platform to make a comedy of Christianity? Here are people who have said that they are saved from their sins, but we must not mention sin. It's so ridiculous. The problem, Mr. Schuller believes, is that we do not esteem ourselves enough. I thought, "My goodness, the people with whom I come, they esteem themselves too much." [Laughter]

Pride is characteristic of human nature. That's what self-esteem is. It's ultimately pride. The Christian is the one who has true self-esteem because his self-esteem is lodged in what God has done for him in Christ. He has the greatest of self-esteem. He doesn't need anybody to tell him he needs self-esteem. We have self-esteem. And the very fact

that people tell us we need self-esteem is evidence they don't have it which God gives in Christ.

Well, we're not talking, of course, about what we are. If I looked at myself I'm a sinner, a miserable sinner. Even Martha doesn't know how bad a sinner I am. Although, she can wax rather eloquent on the many facets of my weakness. [Laughter] If you don't think that sin is important and if you don't think it matters then have an experience like mine.

I had a friend. His name was Herman Sleepy Morgan. Coach at SMU. Recruiter for many years, recruited some great students there who became NFL men and coaches. Forest Gregg is one of them that Herman recruited for SMU. He died about 10 days ago and I was asked by his wife to have the funeral because we live next to the Morgan's in two places and knew them very well. So I had them a funeral in McFarlan auditorium on the SMU campus. And due to the situation in the - in McFarlan-- the memorial service there -- it was necessary for us to place the casket out in the hall as you came in and the casket was open at the family's desire. So I went over and I had not seen Herman in a few years. And I walked over and looked at him, and he was a magnificent looking man. He was about 6'2. As I remember he was a great running back for East Texas many many years ago, an athlete. And to look at the body however, the body was shrunken, pale, with the signs of death on it. But wait a minute. Signs of death? Yes. What is death? The wages of sin.

He was a believing man. We witnessed to him. I mean we a number of people, including my first wife and others, and his wife who was converted miraculously like a person should be converted. And then they lost their only son in an accident. That was a great blow to them and Herman began reading the Bible. Read all the way through it. I recommend that. Read all the way through it and kept reading it. His wife told me he read it everyday of his life as long as he lived after that. I know he was a Christian man. When he gave a little speech when Forest Gregg was made the athletic director at SMU I

saw that he wrote his speech on the back of an envelope on both sides. And the last word were, "Jesus Christ is the only person who can raise a person from the dead. And Forest Greg is one of the few coaches that I know who could raise a football program from the death." That was his recommendation for Greg to take over after SMU was penalized for two years for cheating. Death and sin are very real.

And so here the apostle says, "We know the certitude of preservation and the security of having of the Lord Jesus as the one who keeps us from the evil one so that he does not touch us." In verse 19 he says, "We know the certitude of a heavenly Father. We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." We know that we are of God. We know that we have been born of God. This is that which the Holy Spirit has wrought in our hearts as he has brought us to faith in Christ and the life is the life that comes from God. We know the heavenly birth.

I must say that I'm going to keep you about five minutes over this morning. I hope any of you don't have important engagements to go to. If you do you're free to get up and leave. [Laughter] About three weeks ago I was talking to a friend of mine down at the seminary and he told me an interesting story about Donald Grey Barnhouse which I didn't know. C. Everett Koop, who was a Surgeon General for a lengthy period of time, was an elder in the Tenth Presbyterian Church and I think is still an elder in the church in which Dr. Barnhouse was. And many years ago when I used to go up and preach in that church from time to time I met Dr. Koop when he was a much younger man.

But Dr. Barnhouse was operated on by Dr. Koop and some others, at least he was part of the operating team. And when he was in his room after the operation and was able to talk, Dr. Koop came in and he said, "Well, the operation was, I think, a success." And he said, "Incidentally, Dr. Barnhouse do you know that during this operation I held your heart in my hand?" And Dr. Barnhouse replied, "Could you see that it was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?" [Laughter] Well, that of course is what the heart is according to Jeremiah. But fortunately, we know the certitude of a heavenly

Father. We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Isn't that a striking statement? Lies in the power of the evil one.

I think that's so significant because it suggests a number of things to me. Lying in the power of the evil one. What does it suggest to you? Well, I think it suggests to me a stranded vessel lying embedded in the sand somewhere. Well, like Exxon's ship at Valdez in Alaska, a ship that cannot move. The whole world lies in the wicked one. It suggests, someone else has said, the lost sheep lying engulfed in the treacherous swamp or a pig contented to lie wallowing in the mire. And this one very fitting, I think, of Sampson lying bewitched in Delilah's lap. These are the images of "the whole world lies in the wicked one."

I'm reminded in a kind of perverse way of a chorus sung by the Christian church. "He's got the whole world in his hands." But the he has to be defined. Oh, it's true of course in one sense the Lord has the whole world in his hands. But John says the whole world lies in the wicked one's hands. Being sin, in sin, controlled by sin, under the condemnation of the sin we lie in the wicked one and we need deliverance. And that's what he talks about when he says, "We know that we are of God and we know that the one who has truly believed doesn't go on sinning. But he who was born of God keeps him." So we need a Savior and we need someone who will keep us. That the truth of the Gospel promises us.

And finally in verse 20, here he say, finally he comes to the doctrine that explains it all. We know the certitude of the son's mission and the purpose of it. The and introduces the conclusion. "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding in order that we might know him who is genuine." The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is that which gives us insight. In what way does it give us insight? Well, of course, it gives us insight when we think about the incarnation. Have you ever thought about the incarnation. Let's suppose there is no incarnation. Let's suppose there

is no God who has come down, taken to himself another nature, and lived his life out and at the conclusion dies for the sins of sinners such as you are and I am.

What would be the consequences if Jesus Christ were not God? The liberals tell us no consequences. We don't really need that. We just know God's a loving God. Well, let me say this. If what Jesus Christ claims to do and what the apostles claims to do in forgiving sin is not what God does then it's not finally valid. We have no proof. That is, it is finally valid. Oh, people can say it's true but we have no real proof of it. And if we do not know that Jesus Christ was God we don't have that. Not only that, if it was not God himself incarnate who suffered for us on the cross to make atonement, to die with a death that would have infinite value to cover all of us, and all who've ever breathed, and all who ever will breathe so far as objective atonement is concerned then the sacrifice of Christ has no ultimate or final validity. We're still in our sins. So the atonement is not really an atonement after all.

And finally, and what is worse in once sense, if Jesus Christ and God are not of one and the same being, essence, nature -- if they are not of one and the same being then we really don't know God. We don't know him. We don't have any true word of God. There may be some inscrutable deity back behind our Lord Jesus Christ, but we don't know him. If we do not have a true revelation of God in the godman we don't know God. That's why it's important that Jesus Christ be acknowledged to be the incarnate Son of God. Do you get the point? Do you get the point? Do you see how much depends upon truth? And how much upon the statement that there must be a place for truth first of all in the Christian church? And if he's not truly man then of course the great bridge thrown across from God to man in Jesus Christ the godman, that bridge is broken and there's no foundation on our side of the gulf. He cannot be our substitute if he's not truly man.

Well, I don't have time to talk about propitiation, but it's obvious that that would be tremendously important too. We do know that the propitiation, the satisfaction of the

holiness and righteousness of God in the blood shed on Calvary's cross for our sins has been done. We know that he made a propitiation and we know that the Bible says he loves us. In fact, the Bible says his love is defined by his propitiation and his propitiation is explained as the act of his love. Those two points are made by this same apostle in this first epistle.

Liberals like to say to us, "But God is love. He doesn't need propitiation. He doesn't need someone to die because he loves people. And so there's no need for someone to die for our sins," because it's obvious a person like that doesn't understand what sin is and doesn't understand that sin must be paid for if there is to be moral order in this universe. Otherwise, we'd have total chaos if a person could sin and no judgment is faced by it. That's what the Iraqis would like and that's what more civilized countries would like too often. But there is judgment and God is careful to make that point in the word of God.

No one, young person, older person, important person, unimportant person ever sins, violates the law of God and there is not judgment. You young people, there is judgment. You may not recognize it. You will someday. May God bring it early in your life. Judgment accompanies sin.

Well, the liberal says, "God's love doesn't need any propitiation." What John tells us is, "Yes, God is love. But because he's love and he's also just there must be a propitiation and he provides the propitiation. Not we. He provides. He loves and he provides the propitiation in the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Why did he come? Well, he came that we might know him that is true. Have the intellectual power to reason in the truth of God, to know him and to grow into that knowledge, that's Christianity's bedrock. There is no groping up for God among Christians. They know him. They know their God and he's the real God just like Mrs. Bear's bread is the real bread so we're told. Well, he's the genuine article, the Lord God the triune God. The true one is the Father and we know him and in him we are since we know the son.

The last statement, "This is the true God and eternal life," we don't have time to talk about that exegetically. But it can be referred to the Father. It can be referred to the son. There are some reasons that lead me to think that it is the reference to the son. But Christian theology is not affected by it for many other passages point out the true deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. But our authority says this. That is, the person he's just mentioned, "in his son Jesus Christ this is the true God and eternal life."

There's a famous story which I have used in years past but some of you probably will have forgotten it, and I'm happy you have forgotten it. A story of two people who were debating the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and after they had had some argument over the matter one of them finally said, "Well, if you," the believing person, "well, if you really were a writer of the Gospel and you wanted to make it sure that people believed that Jesus Christ was God what would you write then?" He said, "Well, I'd just say, 'This is the true God.'" And the believing man said, "Isn't that interesting? You have hit upon the precise words of Scripture." "This is the true God, the genuine God and eternal life," a reference to the Lord Jesus.

Well, we close with the exhortation, "Little children, guard yourself from idols." A very strong admonition against the idols. He's talking about the literal idols. But there is application of them. We can, I think, make legitimate application to other things. But first of all, Ephesus was filled with idols. You go there today and you'll still see evidence of that. It was a city that was filled with idols. From Dina of the Ephesians on to many many others. And so it's not surprising that he should say, "Little children, guard yourself from idols." But if a church should suggest that we worship the virgin Mary is that idolatry? Well, John didn't write about that. He didn't know what was going to transpire, but that's a legitimate application. If you think for one moment that the virgin Mary has power to forgive sins and you worship her as one who has power to forgive sins, you've engaged in idolatry.

Well, let us say if you devote your whole life to the accumulation of affluence. Well, your idol is not a personal idol. It's an impersonal one. But that's your idol. As a matter of fact, self-esteem is the idol of a lot of people. That is modern understanding of self-esteem.

This is John's final protest. This is the true God and eternal life against the Cyrenthian gnostics, against the Ebionites, and others because they said Jesus Christ is not God, he's just a creature. May I adopt the tone of Senator Bentsen speaking to the revered Dan Quayle? I like Dan Quayle, still like him. I can just imagine one of these Cyrenthian gnostics and Ebionites coming up to John and saying, "Your Jesus, he's just a creature." And John would fix upon him his eyes upon him not like Bentsen who looked off. Anyway, he would fix his eye upon him and say, "Look, I have seen him. I have touched him. I've held him," as he says in the first verse of this epistle. "I've handled him and I want to say to you Jesus Christ is no creature. He is no creature. This is the eternal God, the true God and eternal life."

So my Christian friends, guard yourself from every counterfeit gospel, every imaginary vision that people are telling you about today, every experience of the divine that does not check with the word of God, every experience that has no fruit in holiness. Little children, keep yourselves from shams. That's John's word.

Look, if you're looking for psychology as a help you're on the wrong word. The Apostle Paul has dealt a mortal blow to psychology in the 4th chapter of his epistle to the Philippians. Listen to these words. He said, "Be anxious for nothing." That's you and me. "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Oh, I know. I do that all that time. I do that. But did you read what he promises? "And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." That's sufficient for me and it's a lot less expensive. [Laughter] To turn things over to

him, that's the Biblical psychology. Trust the word of God. Trust the one who's brought you into the new life. Give yourself to him. Keep yourselves from idols.

Let us rest our life and destiny on John's great magnificent certainties, his mission, our birth and a holy submission to his will. And let us exalt in the redeeming love that has brought reality to it all. There is a very needed place in Believers Chapel for truth. May God help us to give truth its proper place.

If you're here today and you've never believed in our Lord we invite you to turn to him. It's very simple. The apostle gave the word to the Phillipian jailer. He said an answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Not simply something that is totally a profession, but a genuine movement of the heart toward our Lord and what he has done for sinners and thou shalt be saved. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Now, may the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself in that great ministry of incarnation and cross, the love of God the Father who gave us the son, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit whom the son has given to us

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]