



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 4:13-16

“The Marks of an Authentic Believer”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] There's already a rumor, Howard, that the reason they're no more is because several who were dissatisfied have confiscated and absconded with the rest of them. [Laughter] There are two things I would like to say in comfort to those of you who've seen your picture. [Laughter] For those who have not seen the picture, well, just wait a while and then you will appreciate what I'm going to say. But if you just bear in mind when you look at your picture Psalm 55 verse 22, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, [Laughter] he shall sustain thee and he will never suffer the righteous to be moved." So [Laughter] you can comfort yourself with that.

The second point, I almost forgot my second point, preachers never forget their points, but I almost forgot them. It says, "Directory 1989." It's not how you look now it's how you're going to look next year, [Laughter] so comfort yourself with that also. [Laughter] Don't do what I did this morning. Don't tell your friend, "I've seen your picture and it's terrible," [Laughter] because you might cause a heart attack. [Laughter]

For the Scripture reading today we're turning again to 1 John chapter 4 verse 13 through verse 16. The apostle is still in the context of the doctrine of divine love and he writes in the thirteenth verse,

"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, again we give Thee thanks for this marvelous opportunity to gather on the Lord's day, the first day of the week, reminding us again of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and that he is alive, to worship him, and to give thanks to his name, to listen to Thy word and to [be] built up in our faith.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the blessings of life. We praise Thee particularly that in the sovereign mercy that characterizes our triune God, Thou didst cause us through the Holy Spirit to see ourselves as we truly are as sinners, as rebellious, as those who have turned away from Thee. And at the same time Thou hast, Lord, in that same mercy shown us the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in the death that he died for sinners on the cross at Golgotha. We thank Thee that by Thy grace the spirit has illumined us, and enabled us to understand, and has moved us to commit our life in time and eternity to him who loved us and gave himself for us.

We thank Thee for the whole church of Jesus Christ and pray Thy blessing up on the entire body, all who have believed regardless of the local communion in which they serve and worship, Lord, may Thy blessing be upon them. Build us all up and enable us to grow and to serve Thee faithfully until our Lord comes, or until we see his face.

We thank Thee for Believers Chapel and for its ministries, for the elders, and the deacons, and the members, and friends who regularly attend. And especially we pray for the visitors who are here today and ask Lord that Thou wilt through the word of God minister to them and to us.

We pray for the sick. We especially pray for those who've requested our prayers. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt minister to them physically, give healing in accordance with Thy will and undertake for the families of those who are ill. And for the physicians who minister to them, we pray for them wisdom and guidance.

Father, we pray for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon President Reagan and also Vice President Bush, the president elect. We pray that Thy hand and providential guidance may be upon this country for our physical good.

We thank Thee, Lord, for the blessings of life, for the privilege of singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving. And we give Thee thanks for the season of the year, which for many people is an opportunity again, and to discuss the things of our Lord Jesus Christ with our friends. We pray that through the Christmas season there may be an acknowledgement of the Son of God who has come as the propitiation for the sins of sinners. Be with us now as we sing, as we hear the word of God and then later as we at the Lord's table reflect upon his death for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] The subject today as we turn again to John's first epistle is "The Marks of an Authentic Believer". Current events have made a burning issue of the question, "What is authentic Christian faith?" We, of course, in the last year or so have had the well-known illustrations of TV evangelists and the scandals connected with them. And each of these men, such as Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart, are individuals who profess a strong Christian faith and yet the scandals have certainly raised the question of the authenticity of the faith that they have been professing. It's probably not so well-known that these two individuals that I just mentioned are just one of many. And it probably is not well-known that there are many of the smaller fry who consistently carry on the same kind of ministry that these individuals have.

For example, do you know Jim Whittington? Jim Whittington is one of the minor evangelists out of the glare of TV but who has a major flock. In one of the articles in the *Wall Street Journal* in October the article was devoted to a survey of some of the minor evangelists, all

characterized by rather strange types of preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ supposedly. Interrupting a sermon on the evils of a nearby flea market, Jim Whittington according to the article, offers the audience a deal, a special blessing, and a shred of his handkerchief in return for donations of one hundred dollars. "It's a limited one-time offer. Only forty can get in on this," he says, "not forty-one." The author of the article says, "Considering that many of his followers appear impoverished, the evangelist faith in their resources at first seemed stretched. It prompted by an initial 'gift'," that gift is in quotes, "'gift' by one of Mr. Whittington's employees. Thirty-nine other donors quickly come forward and the blessing is sold out, thirty-nine hundred dollars right there. Like many minor league evangelists," the article continues, "Mr. Whittington is a modern day anachronism. Scratching away in the sawdust trail tradition of Elmer Gantry, Sinclair Lewis' worldly preacher of sixty years ago, he and others like him crisscrossed the nation offering their followers solace but also a chance to become a little poorer."

Now, I won't go into all the details of this article but he is just one. Now, I know probably most of you've never heard of Francis Hunter. And she has a husband named Charles and they carry on a ministry. Incidentally, Mr. Whittington at the end of the year banks about a million dollars, so he confesses, from his work. Francis Hunter is a person who claims that God has given her new organs, has blessed her with a new heart. I think maybe I'd like to have that blessing, but [laughter] new pancreas, and also a new thyroid gland.

And Willard Fuller who claims his touch fills teeth with gold, he has been a blessing too. There's another fellow named John Three Sixteen Cook. And he's called John Three Sixteen Cook for obvious reasons. And these individuals are going up and down the circuit.

In the reference to the Hunters, they last year banked about three and a half million from their activities. He's sixty-eight, she's seventy-two, their trademark is always dressing in matching bright colors. They cheerfully concede their inability to document their faith healing record. There isn't a documented healing in the Bible either, Mr. Hunter insists. But they're relentlessly methodic when twisting arms toward the offering plate. "Until God gets your money," Mrs. Hunter says, "he

doesn't get you." And so speaking to one thousand people in healing explosions she talks about how God has implanted her new organs when she was ill in 1974, and taking up offerings, and making a lot of money.

"Jim Whittington is the son of a Pentecostal preacher from Cleveland, Tennessee. But his father was a legitimate preacher." And we must remember, too, there are many Pentecostal preachers that are legitimately godly people. "And his father was a legitimate godly preacher. He was devote and poor," so the article said. Those two words kind of sound nice together don't they, [Laughter] devote and poor. It sort of gives you the idea there may be some genuineness there. "But the son has long craved wealth," so the article continues. "As a fourth grader he borrowed the costume diamond ring of a classmate. Today he wears two real diamonds of more than six carets each. 'Liberachi owned this one,' he says proudly displaying the ring. He tells people he's laid hands on thousands of people for healing. 'Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.' he says. 'They shouldn't quit seeing doctors.'" That's wise. "He shunned seminary, shunned ordination, shuns the local church. He says he was sent by God to the world. 'I don't ask anyone's endorsement. Throw me into any town and I'll survive.' Paid cash for a big house near his Fountain of Life Incorporated headquarters in Greenville, North Carolina. He says his Rose Royce, his Cadillac, his Lincoln are paid for, so are his forty-two thousand dollar tent and three hundred and fifty thousand dollar customized motor home in which he is chaffered to revivals. He bought it, he said, after he saw the O'Jay's rock group riding in one. 'Why criticize me over a few diamonds when the streets of heaven are paved with gold?,' he logically (or illogically) says."

Well, the article is rather interesting because there's a number of others who belong to the same thing. And you can see there is one trend through it all. There are just a lot of dumb people out there who will respond to any kind of appeal that has the name of Jesus Christ attached to it. And furthermore, they will respond even when it's not. As Ron Chapman of KVIL proved, you can get a quarter of a million dollars by just going on there and say, "Please send me money." And he was astonished. I heard the other day he got two hundred and fifty thousand dollars by just saying,

"Send me money." And I want you to know I [laughter] have so far been able to resist the temptation. [Laughter] I'm not planning on going on KVIL. But you know, seriously my good Christian friends, it raises a lot of questions about what goes on in evangelicalism today for there are those with a bit more integrity, but not much more biblical backing, than these individuals who also are slyly doing much the same thing.

Christianity suffers. Christianity really suffers when the world gets the idea that we are after their money. The things of Christ suffer. The glory of Lord Jesus Christ suffers. The glory of the gospel suffers. And my secret desire and petition to God often is that things might change. Of course, the question of who's an authentic believer does not simply touch the TV evangelists. We have in our city in a main line denomination in one of our largest churches questions raised about the Christianity preached there because of the activities of individuals who stand behind the pulpit.

The apostles Paul and John have important things to say on the point of authentic Christianity. When the Apostle Paul talks about authentic Christianity, as he understands it, he talks about the Gospel in these terms writing to the Romans. And in the first chapter of that great epistle giving us what most conclude as the theme of that epistle the apostle says,

"I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. It's the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greeks, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written the just shall live by faith."

And then in the fourth chapter again setting a great emphasis on the way by which we enter into the blessing provided by the triune God through the saving work of Christ he says, "But to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, is faith is counted to him for righteousness." John says the same thing. The apostles talk about what Christ has done. When the apostle concludes his great Gospel of John, he states,

"Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name."

And in 1 John 4, the chapter that we're studying now he has said in the second verse, "Hereby know ye the spirit of God, every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."

Now, Jim Whittington, and Francis and Charles Fuller, and others would say Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. But what John means, and I do not know their personal faith, I cannot testify to that. I can only say the things that they do are certainly a reproach to the gospel of Christ. But what John means when he says, "Whosoever confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." He means confess in the sense really confess, genuinely confess, genuinely acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He's not talking about anything that is not genuine, simply words upon lips. He's talking about that which is genuine. He states in the tenth verse, "Herein is love not that we love but that He loved us [and] gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That is the essence of the Gospel of Christ.

We live in a day in which, as I said last week or the week before that when I was last here that we have false ideas of the love of God. The love of God is generally a term among Christians that means something rather sentimental, that God has sentimental love or romantic type of love for us. In fact, "God is love," is something that generally speaking among evangelicals doesn't have any theological content. It's just, "God is affectionate." God receives everybody on their terms. God is like our grandfather or like Santa Claus, that type of individual. But the Bible is so much different from that. You should never and you can never speak of the love of God in its true meaning if you do not speak of the propitiation that Christ has accomplished in his death.

And furthermore, you cannot speak of propitiation, what Christ accomplished in his death, without using the expression, "God is love," for the love is seen in the propitiation and the

propitiation reveals the love. You cannot talk about love without talking about propitiation and you cannot talk about propitiation without talking about love. That's the kind of love that the Bible means when it says, "God is love." This is the chapter in which the expression occurs twice. And it's the same chapter in which John identifies that love. He says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In other words, it's the sovereign love of God for sinners that is the meaning, the definition, the description of the term, "God is love." Let us never forget that.

In fact, to say James Denny has so beautifully stated it and I've repeated it two or three times, to say, "God is love," is exactly the same as to say, "God has in His Son made atonement for the sins of the world." That's, "God is love." When we say, "God has in His Son made atonement for the sin of the world," we're saying "God is love." So those two terms, "God is love," and, "God in His Son has made atonement for the sins of the world," those two expressions mean the same thing. And you cannot talk about, "God is love," without talking about the shedding of blood on Cavalry's cross for sinners. I hope in Believers Chapel that when I'm gone you will remember he said, "God is love," means the same as, "God in His Son Jesus Christ has made atonement for the sin of the world." That's what that means.

Now, we turn to our text after that rather lengthy introduction. The apostle's still speaking of God's love in Christ throughout the section. And now, in verse 13, 14, 15, and 16 he summarizes how we may be sure we are included in his love. The result is the marks of an authentic believer. We should ask ourselves the question after each of these marks, "Am I really an authentic believer?"

First, in verse 13 he talks about the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the illumination that he provides. He states in verse 13, "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." The ground of this illumination by which we know, as he says, that we dwell in him and he in us is the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have received of his Spirit.

Now, the Bible in other places says, "We have received the spirit." And we have remembered that the way in which we receive the Spirit and the extent to which we have the Spirit at

the moment is not the same extent to which the Son has the Holy Spirit. We have the person presence of the Holy Spirit but he had the personal presence of the Holy Spirit without any measure. But we're not trying to discount in any way what we do have. The Holy Spirit has come to indwell every true authentic believing Christian. In fact Paul says, "He that hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of his." That's the way you tell a Christian internally. So you have a right to say to me and I have a right to say to you, if we are asking are we believers, "Do you possess the Holy Spirit?"

The apostle says, "Because we have been given of the Spirit," that for those of you that study Greek is partitive expression, to be "given of the Spirit". Those who have the Spirit as he says, they know that we dwell in God and God dwells in us. The knowledge is the product of the Spirit who dwells within. In other words, that interior witness of the Holy Spirit is something every Christian, authentic Christian, should have validly. He should have that internal, interior witness of the Spirit. It is the immediate, it's the spontaneous, it's the unanalyzable in the sense that it is beyond our full understanding awareness of the divine presence in our lives. And true Christians know deep down within they belong to him. God has implanted his own testimony there. No testimony is higher than that for it's the testimony of God.

Now, that's very important. In fact, that's how we come to know divine truth, the working of the Holy Spirit. In fact, if we did not have the ministry of the Holy Spirit in conviction, and regeneration, and faith we wouldn't understand anything about the Lord God.

What does he enable us to know? We'll John says, "We know that we dwell in Him and He in us." We dwell in God, God dwells in us. There is a union between the Father in heaven, the Son in heaven, the Spirit in heaven, and the believer upon the earth. We call it covenantal union. It's by virtue of the blessing of the new covenant which the Lord Jesus ratified in the blood that he shed on Cavalry's cross and we are brought into the union that exist between God and the saints. As the Lord Jesus said to his apostles in the Upper Room in John chapter 14 and verse 20 speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost he said these magnificent words, "At that day, ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." "Ye in me, and I in you," that's

experiential Christianity. To know the presence of the Lord God in our hearts and to know our identification with him, the union, the covenantal union by virtue of the blood of the cross. That's the first of the mark of an authentic Christian.

Now secondly, after speaking of the interior witness he talks about historical testimony. He states in verse 14 and 15, "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." This is a further mark, adherence, to the apostolic faith. That's the compliment of an interior witness in external testimony.

Now, you'll notice the first that he says in verse 14, "We have seen [and] testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world," is a reference to the mediatorial mission of salvation accomplished by the Lord Jesus. The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. When he says, "We have seen and do testify," he probably is speaking of the apostles first but then those with whom the apostles identify the Christian church so that the "we" is a reference to the apostles in the Christian society that they have come to represent. And when he states is something of a summary of the Gospel, some of said, "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." It surely is the guiding principle of John's life and ministry, "The Father sent the Son to be Savior of the world."

Now, notice the apostle says, "The Father sent the Son." We sometimes have theologians, who ought to know better, tell us that the idea of a God who must be propitiated is revolting. To think of a God who does not love unless he has been propitiated, unless an offering has been offered to him, is to degrade the love of God. That's very common. Many of our liberal theologians still proclaim that kind of Gospel. Do you notice what John says? He says, "The Father sent the Son." It's not we who offer up an offering to the Father to placate him. It's the Father who sent the Son to be the savior of the world. A loving God does require propitiation but he supplies the propitiation that satisfies him. That's what Scripture says.

The Father sent the Son, so that the gratitude that we have -- because we've come to know the Lord Jesus as Savior -- is not a gratitude that should stop at Christ. It should go on, as our Lord taught us, to embrace the Father who sent the Son. In fact, the Lord Jesus says, that everything he did was done at the command and the will of the Father. Listen to him in John chapter 6 and verse 38. He says, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." So the Lord Jesus acted for the Father. He carried out the Father's will. Everything that he said, he said he sent because he heard the Father saying these things and he said them. And as far as going to the cross is concerned, it's the Father who led him to the cross. In other words, what I'm saying my Christian friend is that the Lord Jesus Christ is full of the love that the Father sent him to carry out toward us. Never forget that.

He sent him. This is the abiding purpose and result of the ministry of the Father through the Son. He speaks of the design of the incarnation in verse 9, "He sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him." Listen, if he had come as only an incarnate Son of God that would have been a great blessing. We could have understood at least in some measure what God was like even though we rebelled against him. And as sinners we men on the face of this earth, both Jew and Gentiles, put him to death. We would have had a revelation of God but he didn't send him simply to be an incarnate God in our midst. That wouldn't have helped us at all as far as salvation is concerned, but "He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," as the tenth verse goes on to add.

And now, in the fourteenth verse for the third time he says, "The Father sent the Son to be Savior of the world." So he sent the Son with the design of the incarnation. He sent the Son to do the work that represents the atoning work. He also sent the Son with this goal that he should be the Savior of the world. And he sent the Son. He didn't send some angel. He didn't send some inferior being. He sent the Son. He sent the second person of the divine trinity. He sent one who had the nature of God, the Son of God. And don't think it wasn't a real surrender.

We theologians talk about the impassibility of God that is the fact that God cannot suffer. But what is meant by that doctrine is not that God does not suffer but he cannot be forced to suffer. That when he suffers it's a voluntary suffering and it's my belief that when he gave up the Son there was a real surrender on the part of the Father in heaven. In other words, the parting was really experienced by the Father and the Son. After all, for the ages of eternity the Son resting in the bosom of the Father had enjoyed the perfection of communion with the Father and the Father with the Son in the Holy Spirit also. And now the Son is sent to perform a redeeming work. One cannot but feel that this is a real surrender on the part of the Lord God.

In the Bible, when we read in Genesis chapter 22 that Abraham is told by the Lord God to offer up Isaac his son, all student of the Bible recognize that to be typical, an illustration of what would ultimately come to pass when the Father gave up the Son. It's striking that when the Apostle Paul states in Romans chapter 8 and verse 32, one of the great texts of the Bible, "He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things," uses language derived from the Greek translation of Genesis chapter 22, "He that spared not his own Son." Go back and read Genesis chapter 22 in your own translation. You'll recognize the fact that the apostle has used that language. In other words, what he says in Romans eight is, the Father giving up the Son is like an example illustrated by Abraham giving up Isaac. So it was a real surrender. He gave up the Son and he gave up the Son as he says, "to be the Savior of the world through atoning sacrifice." That's plain from verse 10, "He sent the Son to be the propitiation for our sins." So he sent the Son to be the savior by the propitiation, by the suffering on the cross, and he sent him to be the savior of the world.

Think of that for one moment. Think of the world and the character of the world, the character of you folks out there. What are you? You're part of the world. What is the world? It's a sinful society. It's an estranged society. So far as God is concerned it's rebellious against him. It is so rebellious that the Jews and Gentiles together crucified the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the history of the human race has been a history of sin and rebellion and corruption ever since the

fall in the Garden of Eden. But the Father sent his Son to be the savior of the world. Think of it. Just think of it. The sinful estranged society.

Now, you know I wouldn't pass by a statement like this without saying something about the meaning of world. Whenever you see "all", "world", in the Bible you have to ask yourself the question, "Does this mean everyone without distinction or everyone without exception?" I think I'll put that on my tombstone. "He said to note difference between everyone without distinction and everyone without exception." It wouldn't be a bad tombstone. You know?

And I saw James Henley Thornwell's, the great southern theologian from South Carolina, and on his tomb it's just got his name. Nothing else. James Henley Thornwell. He didn't want to say anything. He didn't want anything said about him. Well, I wouldn't mind putting on mine, "He said to note the difference between loving everyone without distinction and everyone without exception." Look, if this means everyone without exception, my Christian friend, think for a moment. He failed. He failed. He's not the savior of the world. He's not the savior of everyone without exception. He's not the savior. But he is the savior of everyone without distinction. Jews, Gentiles, white, black, whatever, they're candidates for salvation, candidates for the Gospel. We preach the gospel to all. He's the savior of the world. It doesn't embrace simply Israel and the Jews. It embraces the whole world, Gentiles as well. Hallelujah if you're a Gentile because there is room for you in the Abrahamic promises.

You'll remember that Jesus himself acknowledged this. He was talking to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 and he said, "Woman, believe me the hour cometh when you shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what." We know what we worship for salvation is of the Jews. Comes from the Jews, comes from the preeminent Jew, the Lord Jesus Christ our savior.

Now, I want to ask you a little question. The expression savior of the world occurs one other time in the New Testament. Where does it occur? My Bible student friends you attend Believers Chapel, you ought to know little simple questions like that. It's a good trivia question isn't

it? Where is the other expression savior of the world? Well, if you open your Bible to John 4 you didn't have to turn because that's exactly where it's found. After the Lord has ministered to the Samaritan women and we read,

"Many more believe because of his own words. The Samaritans had come to him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Why did they say that? Because they learned this simple truth, the salvation that Christ preached and provided is not simply for Jews. It's for Samaritans, that mixed race. And it's for Gentiles. That's why they call him the savior of the world. That's precisely what he is. He didn't fail in his task. That's what he sought to be, a savior for the world. That's what John is talking about here. He wrote that gospel. He wrote this epistle. That's what he means. If people would just read and study the Scriptures and not just look at it as if were some article written by George Will or some other commentator in our newspapers. I said George Will out of desire not to offend any of you because I know that the great majority of you are nice good conservatives like you ought to be, of course. But nevertheless, [laughter] read the Bible differently. Study the Scriptures.

So now in verse 15, he says that one must confess not simply the messianic mediation of the Lord Jesus but our Lord as the Son of God. He states, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." Confess, that is really confess, confess in reality that Jesus, that is the historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, he, nobody else, he is the Son of God. The Son of God, the divine person walked this earth where we are. "Confess that Jesus is the Son of God," that's a confession of reality. So when a person turns to the Lord God and says, "Lord I confess, really, that Jesus is the Son of God," that person has come to New Testament faith. That's

the mark of a Christian, that he has confessed the Son of God therefore God dwells in him and he in God.

Luther was a man whose emotions went up and down, up and down. I don't know what Luther would have done if he had all of the modern means by which you can live on a level keel. He would have had probably all kinds of bottles in his bathroom, taking pills, perhaps. I say that without any Scriptural authority. But he was a man who was up and down. But every now and then when he was down he would say as he got real down and thought about his life and reflected upon the doubts that he occasionally had, a great man. He said he would look to the Lord God and he would say, "I was baptized. I was baptized." And what he meant by that was that there had been a fundamental decision of Christ and it was reflected in his baptism. "I was baptized." Underline the was, "I was baptized." Well, I think it's even better to say if you have those doubts, "Lord, I have confessed that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore on your word I dwell in you and you, my Lord and God, dwell in me, the divine son."

John's opponents were obviously in mind because they thought of the Lord Jesus Christ as being just a human individual who at the baptism there came upon him the divine power that enabled to carry out his messianic ministry. But then as he came to the cross the power departed from him and he died just as a desolate man. "My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?" John has all of that in mind. He says, "Jesus is the Son of God." Now simply a man upon whom the power of God came for a time. He's the Son of God. This may be the chief of the tests by which we measure up to the marks of a true believer.

Now, I think there's one other thing that we ought to say at this point with reference to it and that is that when we talk about confessing that Jesus is the Son of God it's important to realize that we are confessing that Jesus is the Son of God who offered that propitiation. There is no way by which we could possibly explain the New Testament by saying that the New Testament presents things concerning Christ that are false and that we should not think of God as a God who requires a propitiation. On the other hand the Scripture reveal him to be a just God and therefore all sinners

would be punished with eternal separation from God. No one could possibly attain to the gift of eternal life if he sought to win it by his own works. No works could bring a man into the possession of eternal life. It can only come through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But if, like so many, we affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is not what he was, the Son of God, what are we really doing? Well we are, first of all, robbing God. We are robbing God of the glory of his love because the glory of his love comprehends the gift of someone who was the divine person. If he's just an ordinary person it might be an expression of affection, it might be even called love by human standards. But it's not divine love if the gift that God gave is not the divine second person of the trinity possessed of a divine and human nature, the Son of God as we know him. So we would rob God of the glory of his love. And we would not simply rob God. We would rob man of the one belief that generates a perfect love in him that God has given his Son, the eternal Son, to be our Savior.

And it would rob, of course, Christ of his godhead. So what a terrible thing it is for an individual to say that the Son of God is not really the divine Son. He's just really an exalted man, as some tell us. Read the books of Christian theology today, professing theology. Over and over again you run across statements just like that. But think about it for a moment what you're doing to the gospel of Christ when you say that Jesus Christ is not the divine Son. So you rob God of his glory, you rob man of sense of the greatness of God's love, and the Christian faith is weakened. Whenever you weaken faith you deaden love. As someone has pointed out, so the whole church suffers, and in fact, in time becomes not even a church.

I have a good friend, he's a former student of mine. He's now a man spent many years as a minister of the gospel to Jewish people. He listens to our tapes all the time. He's retired now. He's one of my students. He's retired. [Laughter] A very godly man, he's had health problems. But he keeps in touch and he sent me some books and in one of them I hadn't read and some others I had. He told me, "If you've got these put them in your church library." And so some of them are going in our church library. But they are books written by a converted Jewish doctor, a radiologist. In one of

the books I was reading this week about Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield. Disraeli, as many of you probably know, was one of Queen Victoria's prime ministers but he was a Jewish convert to Christian.

Disraeli once said, "Perhaps, too, in this enlightened age, as his mind expands and as he takes a comprehensive view of this period of 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 magnificent statement. And also, Disraeli said, "Christians may continue to persecute Jews and Jews may persist in disbelieving Christians but who can deny that Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of the most high God is the eternal glory of the Jewish race." It's this one who died for our sins, this prince of the house of David, the prince of the house of David who gave himself for us. The divine human union is the result of this proper confession. The man who makes this confession, "God dwells in him and he dwells in God." That's our confidence.

And finally, he says the mark of authentic Christian is faithful abiding in eternal love. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Listen, my Christian friend, our time is up but I want to say this to you. This doesn't mean sit and reflect on God as a sentimental lover. It doesn't mean that. You can see from the context above what he means when he says, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." He means we have known and we have believed that Christ came to be a propitiation for our sins. That's what he means. He came to be the savior of our sins. He came and the expression of that love is his death on the cross. "My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?" Having become the sin offering for us and satisfying a holy and eternal God by the sacrifice of himself. That's what meant by the Lord of God and that's what he means when he says, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." And, "God is love," that kind of love defined in that way, "and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." So what does it mean, my Christian friend, to dwell in love? It means to dwell in the propitiation, to dwell in the cross, to dwell in the

satisfaction, to dwell in that great event and all that it means for we'll never exhaust it. To dwell in that is to have communion with God because that's what fills the heart of God always.

At the baptism the Father said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased." At the baptism when our Lord went down into the water and came out of the water ultimately to be fulfilled when he went in to the cross, went in to death at the cross of Calvary, went in to the earth, came out on the first day of the week in resurrection glory. So to dwell in the love of God is to dwell in the propitiation.

My Christian friend, don't talk about God as in the sentimental ways in which the world does. We're talking about a different depth of love altogether. That person who dwells in that love is the one who dwells in God and God in him. The love of the open heart of the Godhead Jesus Christ has revealed and to dwell in love is to dwell in that.

May God help us as professing Christians when we get down upon our bedside and turn our hearts to God, may God give us the grace to dwell in that love because then we're at harmony with God. We're in agreement with God for that is the great subject that dominates the heart of God. So to sum it up, the marks of an authentic believer are the presence of the Holy Spirit who illumines us and gives us the knowledge of spiritual truth. We know certain things because we have received of his spirit. We confess the Son, secondly, we abide in the love of God. What a God we have come to know, a God who is love, propitiatory love, the chief outshining of the supreme splendor. As someone has put it, "Love in his nature, love in the atonement, love in Jesus, love in the brethren are all one in the same holy principle related to the cross of Calvary." No our God is no bloodthirsty tyrant who has to be placated by an offering. He's the one who provided the offering by which we may be saved. So he not only permits a substitution, my friends, he provides the substitute, and glory of glories, he is the substitute. The triune God through the second person of the trinity, that's Christianity. That's what we're talking about when we talk about Christianity. Nothing else will measure up to that.

“The Marks of an Authentic Believer” by S. Lewis Johnson
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If you're here today and you've never believed in Christ we invite you to acknowledge your sin, that you need a propitiation, you need a savior. You surely do. And within your heart to give God thanks for what he's done, receive as a free gift eternal life and spend your life dwelling in the love of God. May God in his grace bless you that way. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for the Apostle John who, having lived so many years in the love of God, opened his own heart and enabled us to understand the opened heart of God in a more significant way. Lord,

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]