



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 5:18-21

"The Indispensability of the Son of God"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] ... apostle was thinking about and some of the things that he believed, because it seemed reasonable to think, to me, that the last of the apostles would have the finest and greatest influence for the church of Jesus Christ. We are all interested in all of the authors of Scripture of course, but what they were saying at the end of the period of divine revelation, which we have in the Johannine writings, so far as we can tell, would let us know exactly what the Christian faith would have been seen to be by them. That seems sensible to me, and I must say it still seems sensible to me. The only problem is I don't think I have thoroughly canvassed that particular idea. I think it should be done. And I would like to do more of it, but tonight I want to look at the last few verses of the first epistle of John. So if you have your Bible, your New Testament, turn to 1 John chapter 5, verse 18 through verse 21, because here are some of the last words that the last apostle has written to us, and it will give us an idea, I think, confirm our ideas I hope of what the Christian church really stands for. In verse 18 the apostle writes,

"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin. (Now let me just interject something here. "Does not sin" the sense of that means does not go on sinning, that's the

sense of the original text here in the present tense of the verb.) We know that whoever is born of God does not go on sinning, but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway* of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, (That's a word for you) Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (And the apostle adds a final) Amen."

John's final paragraph in this epistle is a condensed summary of the things that he has already said. It's the capstone set upon the edifice of the apostolic theology by the last survivor of the twelve. And in that sense it seems to me it's important for us. The last living apostle, what did he actually believe? Well, fortunately so far as 1 John is concerned, and I'm not sure that 2 John and 3 John really make much difference, 1 John lets us know in these last few verses that the apostle was thinking about what is in one sense the capstone of the edifice. You'll notice in verse 18 he says, "We know." In verse 19 he says, "We know." And verse 20 he also says, "We know." Kind of a condensed summary then it would seem of the things that characterize the apostolic thinking. The confession, this is a kind of confession, we know, we know, we know. It even sounds a little bit like a confession. And it consists of a creed of three articles. And of these truths Christians have a sure knowledge, we know, we know, and we know. And mind you the apostle is a man who had companied with out Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who was and is very God of very God. And so when he says we know, it seems to me we should pay attention to what he says.

And it's a simple creed, three articles. I'm not suggesting that's all we need to know, mind you, but nevertheless it's a little summary of things that are very significant for us. The first in verse 18, God's begotten do not go on sinning. We can put it in

another way. We can say, I believe in holiness as someone has paraphrased his words, giving their essential meaning, "I believe in hominess." God's begotten do not go on sinning. Now notice, of course, he doesn't say do not sin, but do not go on sinning. He is talking about that which is continuous; the text makes it very plain that he's talking about continuing in sin. Turning it around, I believe, in holiness.

The second thing he says in verse 19 is "We know that we are of God and the whole world is under the sway of the wicked one." And what that would seem to say to me is, secondly, God's begotten firstly they do not sin, but secondly we are not worldly. Being born of God we are not under the sway of the wicked one. We are of God. The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. We are not worldlings.

Now earlier in the epistle I think he also confirms that fact and we could say that what John is saying. First doctrine, I believe in holiness, God's begotten do not sin. The second doctrine, I believe in the new birth. Born of God we are not worldlings. The third of his points, and that lets us know of course that John was a preacher, doesn't it? He's got three points. And the fact that he's got three points near the end of his ministry, to some people that might be even significant. But I don't think we should pay too much attention to that. What he says in his third point is the Son of God has come bringing the knowledge and communion of God. Verse 20, "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true and we are in him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." I believe in the incarnate Son's or the incarnate God's mission. So we sum it up then and say his little confession here may be set forth in three points. I believe in holiness. I believe in the new birth. I believe in the incarnate God's mission, those three points. Here are things we know. You'll notice he's not in any doubt about it. We know these things, they are certainties. They are not characterized by the gray mists of indecision and indefiniteness, to use an expression by one of the commentators. We know the real God.

And of the striking things about it is how the apostle does not do what I would do, embellish what he's going to say, trying to make his audience responsive to what he's going to say. He simply says, "We know, we know, we know." These are certainties that the apostle band regarded as the truths that were central to the faith that they had. So what I'd like to do in the remaining time that we have is just to look at some of the things that come to my mind when we think about the things that we should know if we are going to follow the apostles. And let me call verse 18 the "We know" of the security of holiness. "We know that whoever is born of God does not go on sinning, but he who has been born of God keeps himself and the wicked one does not touch him." The regressive order, experience not doctrine up the stream to the source is followed by the apostle. But we won't make much of that. "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin."

Now, if you read something like this you immediately ask a question. Perhaps I'm not in the family of God, because I sin. I know that I sin. He says, "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin." This is the text that the Christian church that speaks English has used for a long time. It certainly is surprising to read, "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin." Whoever has had the experience of the new birth does not sin. Now, I don't think in Believers Chapel I'd have to say anything much more than to say we know that this "does not sin" does not mean does not ever sin. The text in the present time, the verb particularly is in its context and also according to Greek grammar and syntax, it means, "does not practice sin." That's the force of the present tense, "does not go on sinning." So the apostle is not claiming that we know that whoever is born of God does not ever sin. He's saying simply he does not live in sin. He does not continue to sin.

But he also goes on to say "He who has been born of God keeps himself and the wicked one does not touch him." The uncertainty of the text here, and we cannot go into the detail, leads to two interpretations. What the apostle is saying is the One Begotten, capital B, our Lord; the One Begotten keeps the begotten ones, the little B's. "We know

that whoever is born of God does not go on sinning, but he who has been born of God keeps himself and the wicked one does not touch him." Well the one begotten keeps himself. It's a very difficult expression, but what the apostle, I think, is saying is we know that whoever has experienced the new birth does not practice sin. "But he who has been born of God keeps himself and the wicked one does not touch him." The One Begotten keeps the begotten is one of the, and by the One Begotten is capitalized, the One Begotten keeps the begotten, the little B's, that's one way it should be understood, or the One Begotten keeps himself.

The security involved is the point that the apostle is interested in, "and the wicked one does not touch him." The evil one assaults us. The evil one attacks us, but he fails to get a hold upon the genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. Does not the apostle say in John 10:28 giving the words of our Lord, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand." So whoever is born of God does not go on sinning, but one who has been born of God keeps himself and the wicked one does not touch him," does not gain a hold upon him.

In verse 19 he further says, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway* of the wicked one." This is a general truth to the personal truth. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway* of the wicked one." Notice the apostle's quite certain of the things that he's telling us, we know, we know, we know. There's no doubt about it in the apostle's mind. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway* of the wicked one." We're in the family. WE know that we are of God. We who, as the apostle has said, believes that Jesus is the Christ belongs to the family of believers. He began this chapter by saying, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." So here, we know that we are of God and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. We are in the family. We have made the transition from the torpidity of the lack of understanding of spiritual truth and the life in sin and all of the things that characterize sin, to the life of purity, the

apostle is claiming. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway* of the wicked one." So we are in the family.

The plight of the world is, of course, serious to the apostle and he says, "The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." The whole world is helplessly in the arms of the arms of the evil one. It would suggest to me that what the apostle would believe is that there are two places to dwell. One is to dwell in Christ, and the other is to dwell in the world. So that those who have not believed in our Lord and do not belong to him live in one world, and those who have believed in him and belong to the family of God live in another world. Do you believe that's true? Well, there's no doubt about it, it is true. If you have experienced the new birth, it's not long before you and your family know that you live in a different world. You actually live in a different world. You are living in Christ. That's a different world. It's impossible really to be in Christ and in the world in the true sense. They do not match. Those two things are different. If you are in Christ there will be necessarily a difference in your life. That's what the new birth isn't it? If a person is born again he has a new life. He lives in a different world. That's the experience of all of these whom the apostle refers to as we. We are of God. We shouldn't be embarrassed about that. It's part of our make up. We are in the family. We have moved from one family to another family.

The apostle then, in the final verses says, in verse 20 and 21 says, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." The "and" of verse 20 introduces the conclusion. It's almost like he has a little history of the mission of the Son of God. We know that the Son of God has come and he's given us an understanding that we may know him that his true, revelation in the Son's incarnation, his expiation, propitiation that he has accomplished, and the communication of all that belongs to the eternal Son of God are suggested by some of these things. "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an

understanding, that we may know Him who is true." This again is something we know. We know that the Son of God has come.

The thing that has struck me today as I've thought about it are these three we know. I looked at my notes that I had with reference to it, and I had already emphasized them twenty years ago. But nevertheless looking at it again they strike me again. Here is the apostle, the last of the apostles so far as we know, the remainder of them who had the personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ and he is telling us and his friends with whom he's corresponding, we know, we know, we know. And then I think of the way in which you and I regard the things that we read in the Bible. One of the fundamental differences it seems to me between the apostolic company and the present company is that we have lost the sense of certainty that is communicated by the Spirit of God in the new birth. And we are constantly trying to answer objections. We are constantly disturbed by the difficulties that we have. And the result is that the great positives of the Christian faith, the great positives of your faith do not often shine through, whereas the apostle without any explanation says we know, we know, we know.

He knew, of course, in a sense in which you and I do not know. That is true. But he doesn't say I know. He says we know, we know, we Christians know. He, of course, handled the word of Life. He heard his voice. He listened to him preach. He knew him personally. He knew him sleeping by his side and the ways in which they went over the land of Palestine. He knew him in ways that you and I cannot know him, of course. But nevertheless it's we know, that note of certainty comes through from the apostle.

Now, I want to tell you something. As an old man who is facing soon the presence of the Lord, that is great encouragement. That is truly great encouragement to hear an apostle say, who knew the facts, we know, we know, we know. In fact that's enough for a message right there, just simply the fact that we know. The apostle is communicating to us out of his own experience and out of the marvelous things that he's

written, the certainty of the truth about which he's talking. We know the history of the mission. We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we may know him who is true.

The revelation contained in the Son's historical incarnation, his expiation, his propitiation of the Father, the communication of life by him, the apostle says we know that. And we know, of course, that this is something that has been given to us. It is something that is not our by merit, it is by divine grace. We've laid stress upon the fact, in the three little talks I've given to you. I hesitate to call them a message, they're talks, that what the apostle lays great stress upon is the propitiation which the Son of God has accomplished. You remember, right in the beginning of the epistle he talked about the propitiation in chapter 2, verse 2. "He himself is the propitiation for our sins." Propitiations, satisfaction; he is the one who has paid the price, the satisfaction for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. And then later on the apostle uses again the word propitiation when he talks about the ministry of our Lord, which he has accomplished. Verse 10 of chapter 4 says after saying, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That means satisfaction.

He is the one who has offered the sacrifice that is sufficient for our sins. It is a satisfaction for our sins. Now you know when I say for our sins I don't mean everybody's sins. Because if he was the satisfaction for everybody's sin then everybody would be saved, that's very obvious. If he is a satisfaction for everyone's sin, notice he doesn't say he can be or he might be, but he is the satisfaction for our sins. If he means that he is the satisfaction for our sins, then he has paid the price. I know what people like to say. They say, "But I must believe." Is unbelief a sin? Well of course it's a sin. Well if he's the satisfaction for our sins, he's the satisfaction for our unbelief. There is no sin for which he is not the satisfaction if he's the satisfaction for our sins. Now I wouldn't want to say that

if it were the Lord's mind to save everybody that the Son of God's death would not be sufficient for their salvation. Of course it would, it has infinite value. But the point is to whom is this work directed? For whom does our Lord suffer?

Well the New Testament makes it very plain it's us. Let me change that, correct the grammar, it is we. It's for us. I don't deny, nor does any believer in the Bible deny that what he did is not sufficient for all the sins of all the people that every lived, because it's of infinite value. The point is for whom was the work of Christ accomplished? To whom was it directed? For whom did he suffer and give an atonement? It is for us. So we know that he has come. "We know that he has give us an understanding that we may know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." So no one would ever deny if the saving work of Christ is of infinite value that it is not sufficient for everybody. Not only for everyone who has ever lived to this point. But for anyone who ever will live before the Lord's return. It is sufficient. It is of infinite value.

We preach an atonement of infinite value. "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." The genuine God, this knowledge is Christianity's bedrock. There's no more groping after the eternal God. We know the eternal God is triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And so as he says in verse 20, he has given us an understanding that we may know him who is true and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ, this is the true God and eternal life." The true God, the true one, the Father, and we know him and are in him, since we are in the Son is John's point. These are very interesting words in verse 20. "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ." This is the genuine God in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the genuine God, "and eternal life."

Well the strong admonition that concludes is very much in the Spirit of the apostle, "Little children," that includes all us, doesn't it? Well maybe not all of us, but that's the desire of us here, that all are among the company described as little children. So we'll assume that you all are little children. So "Little children," John concludes, "keep yourselves from idols. Amen." Strong admonition against idols concludes. This is the last of the epistle's contrasts, the true God versus the idols. Guard yourself from every counterfeit gospel, every imaginary vision, every experience of the divine with no fruit in holiness. Little children keep yourself from shams, from the idols. This is John's final protest against the Cerinthians, because they were troubling him in the area of Ephesus, and probably one of the reasons that the apostle wrote this particular epistle, because Cerinthianism characterized those in that area. And most of the New Testament scholars believe that the Johannine literature is written with Cerinthus in mind, with whom the apostle supposedly had even had some personal connection. What he wanted to say to them is Jesus is no creature. He is the eternal God, the Son, and he concludes by asking us to guard ourselves from every counterfeit gospel, every imaginary vision, every experience of the divine that is not scripturally based, and particularly all experiences that have no fruit in holiness. Little children keep yourself from shames.

So finally, let us rest our life and destiny on John's great certainties. The mission of the Son of God, our new birth, and holy submission to his holy will. Let us exalt in the redeeming love that has brought reality to it all. Coke's not the real thing. This is the real thing. This is the real, the thing that has to do with genuine eternal life. I had a little note, I'm not sure I can find it in my Bible, in which John Fletcher speaks about the boundless love. But I better not try to find something. It will take me a little while, so we'll have to leave it at that.

As I think over my own thoughts with reference to what the apostle was thinking, the thing that really strikes me is that he Apostle John, in the last of his writings so far as we can tell, the thing that he was concerned about most of all was the heart of the

Christian faith, which is the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which reaches its climax in the propitiation, the satisfaction. That's what the word means, the satisfaction that our Lord has rendered by the shedding of his blood, which is sufficient in value in heaven's currency for all of our sins. What a marvelous thing it is to me to hear the last of the apostles still talking about the fact that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins, not only once but twice, emphasizing how important they felt the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was, in thorough harmony, of course, with what the Apostle Paul says when he said that he determined not to know anything among us save Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Apostle Paul, talking about the necessity of the death of Christ and that it is sufficient for all of the scriptural knowledge we might command or want. "I determine not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." And the last of the apostles talking about propitiation which is precisely what that is.

It would seem to me from this that in our preaching of the gospel of Christ, at the center of what we preach is the saving propitiation which our Lord accomplished in his sacrifice on the cross. I think I've overstepped my time. And incidentally I haven't given you the message I planned to give you. I've found part of being old is that I start out and I realize I'm not going to be able to say everything I want to say. And so then I like to just kind of talk. So I apologize for doing that. And I hope that in the midst of my little colloquies or soliloquies that some things that are kind of significant may come to you. They are significant to me. Let's bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this privilege of being here. We thank Thee for the ministry of the word of God in Believers Chapel. We pray Thy blessing upon it, upon all who teach and preach, especially upon Dan. And we pray for the Sunday School teachers. We pray for the elders and the deacons and the others who carry on the Lord's work here and we ask that the sense of the significance of the eternal truths which we talk about may grip us...

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[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]