

EPISTLES OF JOHN

Part 3
(I John 2:25 - 3:19)

A Series of Radio Messages

by

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I John 2:25-29

Christians often find it difficult to tell whether or not a teacher or preacher is a reliable person to follow. Do you ever have the feeling that you will never know who is wrong in the preaching of the Gospel? John writes his first epistle to Christians to help them in this very matter. John reminds them that every sincere Christian has been given an inward guidance that will guide him as he moves forward. I John 2:25t "And this is the promise that he has promised us even eternal life." Eternal life does not mean an unending continuation of our life on and on forever. The human life is not to be everlasting. This term *eternal life* refers to the life of God. The life of God is a new life that is in us in addition to the old life we had as human beings. For instance, when I was a baby, I had the life in me that was in my father and mother. The life that all human beings have, and probably should be called in Scriptural terms, *the life of Adam*, is a sinful life. That mode of existence that I had in me because I was a human being is not in the will of God. I am a naturally, humanly speaking, a sinful person. But when I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive Him as my Savior, God gives me a new life. It is not the old birth again the second time. It is the second birth. It is a new birth. It is a different birth. It is a new life. This word is made different by this term – eternal life. "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." This is what the Lord has promised to us that we would have in us the life of God.

He goes on to say, "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you." He is referring to the antichrist he mentioned in verses 18 and 19. John says they are the kind of People that confuse you, the kind of people that suggest that when you were walking north you should have been walking east.

Look at verse 27, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you." When John uses that word anointing immediately there comes to our mind such a thing as receiving the Holy Spirit. We should not be afraid of the Biblical term, "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." The Lord Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, which is to say that when we become Christians and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive from God the Holy Spirit, who, living in us, will show us the things of Christ and will make us conscious of Him. One of the most wonderful benefits and blessings that follow with the Holy Spirit in our hearts is that we become conscious of the real living Lord Jesus Christ. That is anointing. That is something given to us just like oil poured on ones head. This anointing is given to us from God, and will stay with us. As long as we live we will be conscious of the presence of the living Lord Jesus Christ.

"And ye need not that any man teach you." Why? Because anybody who talks will be compared to Him. If we are conscious of the Lord Jesus Christ and anyone starts talking in our presence we compare him to Christ. If he talks in line with Christ it will be agreeable to us. If he does not talk in line with Him it will not be agreeable to us. Back in the gospel of John in chapters 14, 15 and 16 we have the promise that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things. The Holy Spirit's function is to take the things of Christ and show them unto us. What that amounts to is that as we are shown the things of Christ. We will be conscious of His presence. Nobody can take that away from us. That will be the thing that will enable us to tell whether what we hear is right or whether it is not right.

So he goes on to say, " And now, little children, abide in him." That is, you turn yourselves over willingly to this fellowship with the Lord, and walk in His presence. Learn how to take Him into account in everything you do. "That, when he shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming." This may possibly refer to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment. It may also possibly refer to coming into His presence at any time. Perhaps in a given situation or crisis, you are in trouble of some sort and are wondering what to do. He can come to you at that time. John is saying that if you keep yourselves open to the Lord Jesus Christ so that His Holy Spirit can show you the things of

Christ any time no matter what the situation is you'll be conscious of Christ. Then, John says, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If we keep the conscious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts we will not have to be afraid of what decision we made. As far as knowing right and wrong, whether to go this way or that way, the consciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ will be adequate to take care of us.

John says one more thing, "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him." In other words, this is your measuring stick. You know the way He lived. Everyone that lives the way He lived, does the way He did, says the things He said, will be the kind of person who is coming from Christ and you can listen to him. As far as teachers are concerned, you won't need to be afraid of that kind of thing.

Ask yourself for a moment what the Lord Jesus did insofar as He was righteous. The word righteous is an adjective that means that everything He does is right. What would right be? That means He will do everything in line with the will of God. What would the will of God be? I am going to propose some things that you can have in mind. Jesus Christ had reverence for His Father. He worshipped His Father. He took time to pray, sometimes spending a whole night in prayer. He always obeyed His Father and trusted His Father about everything. You remember how He handled the Scriptures. He said, "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." I don't have the least hesitation in my spirit of judging anybody I hear, judging any book I read, judging anything I ever hear said. If it honors the Scripture, if it takes the Scripture as the Word of God, then I know that person is talking just the way the Lord Jesus Christ talked. If the person is making suggestions that the Bible does not mean what it says, that it has mistakes in it, then I know I am listening to somebody who is not like the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what John means. This is the anointing that I have in me that will enable me to judge anybody I hear.

Think of how the Lord Jesus dealt with men. He respected them. He respected Pilate in the courtroom. He was considerate of people. He was charitable to the poor. If a person is kind to other people, thoughtful of other people, kind to the poor, I know that he is just like the Lord Jesus Christ. How would it be with reference to the world? John had earlier said, "Love not the world." The Lord Jesus Christ did not love the world. He lived in this world and He never gave Himself over to it. I can know that if the person I am listening to is a person who puts things in their place, he is like the Lord Jesus Christ. We could go on from there in every direction. When the person is talking or teaching, whatever he is doing, if that person is acting and doing the way we know the Lord Jesus Christ would act and do we can have reason to believe that it is the Holy Spirit of God that is working in that man.

I John 3:1-2

This letter of I John was written by John to Christian People to help them understand better what it really means to be a Christian. The idea was that they would be able to enter into it more fully. They would have a greater fellowship with the Lord and with each other, because they understood better what is involved in being a Christian. And this would give them greater joy. In the third chapter, the first two verses, John points out that this matter of becoming a Christian is something that starts with being a Christian. Many people think that being a Christian is a sort of a graduation experience . . . that you prepare and train Yourself and pass through a great many things in advance before you get to be a Christian. When you have been good enough, know enough, and you have reached a certain level of performance then you would be good enough to be a Christian. This may sound very laudable. Many think that it is a very humble and proper way to approach, but it is not true. Christian living begins with receiving an endowment from God. We receive an inheritance from God. We do not strive to qualify in order to become Christians. He receives us. In the Gospel of John he writes, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Then having been given the blessing of actually being the children of God, we rejoice, and we wish to please Him who is our Benefactor.

These things are brought out in the first two verses of I John chapter 3, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." We have already talked about the fact that love is a verb of action. It is a verb of doing something. It is doing something for the welfare of another person. The common idea of love makes love an emotion, something you feel inside. This is not the Bible use of the word love. When you speak here of, "the manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," consider the way God has acted toward us. His love in action took this form. John uses the word, "Father". He does not here say "God". He is not saying what manner of love God the creator has bestowed upon all mankind. It is what manner of love the Father . . . and that means the Father of Jesus Christ . . . the Father of the Lord Jesus, hath bestowed upon us who believe in the Lord Jesus, "that we should be called the sons of God," even as the Lord Jesus was the only begotten Son of God. Then he goes on in the remainder of the verse to say, "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." That word *therefore* does not point backward to what went before in that verse, but it points forward to what is following. "Therefore (for this reason) the world knoweth us not." The reason is because it knew Him not.

Let us look a little bit more closely at this again. "Behold what manner of love," consider the way in which God manifests His love for us. "The Father," the Father of Jesus Christ, the Father of all those who put their trust in Him, "hath bestowed upon us," has given to us; we didn't earn it, this is not wages. This is something given to us, "That we should be called the sons of God." He means much more than a name tag that's just hung on us. This word caned has in it the idea that He calls and we respond in obedience. It is not a label on us as the finished product. He does not call us "sons of God" in the sense that we are perfect and complete. This is the designation of a relation- ship to which we are called in Christ Jesus.

You will remember that this Bible phrase about *being called* has been used before. Paul speaks of himself, "called an apostle." It does not mean someone put that name tag on him and called him an apostle in that sense. Given a calf requires obedience. Paul was given a challenge, an urgent exhortation" a call to be an apostle. When Paul writes of the believers, he says, "called saints." It does not mean just the name "saint" put on them, but *called* to be saints. You can put in the little infinitive, "to be." Called to be saints, "that we should be called to be the sons of God." We can properly insert this, and read, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed Upon us that we should be called (to be) the sons of God."

"Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not," which is a way of saying that for

the same reason the world did not appreciate Jesus Christ, it would not appreciate us. Here is a crucial point in our Christian experience that we do not think of ourselves in the sight of God the way the world thinks of us. We are to think of ourselves the way He speaks of us and the way He has it in mind. If we were to act the way the world considers us, we would not think we belong to God. But if we will act the way He says about us, we will know that we belong to God.

Look at the 2nd verse, "Beloved, now are we the sons," The word, *Beloved* brings to our minds that we are the fortunate ones. We are the ones who have received the blessing of God. Now are we the sons of God. The word now is always God's word. It is always the word of the Holy Spirit. "Now are we the sons of God." Notice the emphasis on the verb, "are." It is not a question of some- thing that is already true. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." That is to say, it is not yet obvious what we shall be. "But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." It is not yet obvious to everybody what is going to happen to us, but we can be sure we will be seeing Him in the reality of His being. Paul describes this in n Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." Here in John, "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." As we think about the Lord Jesus Christ and focus our attention Upon Him, by the blessing of God and the Holy Spirit, He will actually transform us into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But this is all ahead of us. This matter of becoming a Christian is something that starts with being a Christian. Because we are Christians, then we go on living it out. I am reminded of the time when I joined the Canadian army in the first World War, when I went into the recruiting office to sign up as a volunteer they filled out all the blanks and I signed my name. When I signed. my name I became a soldier. I began to draw pay from that moment on. A year afterwards I knew a whole lot more about soldiering, but I wasn't any more a soldier. I was a complete soldier when I signed my name on the paper. Or we can think in terms of people getting married. As soon as the preacher says in the service "I pronounce you husband and wife," they are legally, officially, husband and wife. But everybody knows that from that moment on they will grow in these things. They will learn what it means to be a husband, what it means to be a wife. These things will unfold before them, but they started being one.

In other words, becoming a Christian is not a position we earn. It is a position that is given to us and that we enter into. After we are in this position and belong to Him, we look up into His face, as it were, and see that we came into this position because He called us. We were received of God because Christ Jesus died for us. The way of entering into the presence of God was to be forgiven for Christ's sake. As we come into the presence of God, we can see Him on Calvary's Cross dying for us. That is what brings us to Him. That will bless us and incline us toward Him. The Lord God Himself will speak of us, will think of us, will call us to be one of His children. Now, it does not yet appear what we shall be like. We couldn't tell by looking at you what you're going to be like, "but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." This seeing Him as He is may refer to that ultimate time when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven, and everything on earth will be wound up, so to speak, because of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory. But even now while we are in this world it is true that other people do not receive the Christian in us. They do not see particularly that we are Christians. Yet the truth is that if we will worship the Lord Jesus, think about the Lord Jesus Christ, and focus our attention upon the Lord Jesus Christ, we will grow in grace and knowledge and get to be more like Him all the time.

I John 3:3-6

In I John 3:1-2, John makes a strong point of the fact that a Christian's relationship to God is something given to him. He does not earn it. It is given to him all at once and he belongs to God. Then John takes up this question: if a person knows that he already is accepted of God, is this likely to cause him to take advantage of God? Would it not be better to hold out and to threaten him and say, "You might not make it." Do you think you would be a better man if you were kept in the dark so to speak, and did not know for sure? Do you think you would try harder that way? This might affect you as a human being but it is not the way in which God works with you in spiritual things. When I say it will affect you as a human being, you could not make it anyway, but you'll try all the harder the more scared you are. You will try the harder but you will not be able to make it anyway because you will not have it in you to do it. You will be doing everything just to satisfy yourself.

In I John, chapter 3, John points out that no one need ever worry about the effect that it has in the soul if he knows that he is established in his relationship with God, where God is his Father and where he is God's child. Would t a man be inclined to be careless, and feel he need not strive any more? The answer to that is that we need to remember what belonging to Him means. When we enter into this relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ we not realize that something happens to us? that we are changed? Actually we say in accordance with the Scripture that we are born again. Because we have been received and have been born again, there is no longer any urgency to strive to qualify. We already belong. We have been accepted. "As many as receive him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." What this actually means is saying something like this: suppose I had been in a boat which is sinking and I am thrown out into the ocean. I cannot swim much but I am sure I would swim as long as I could. I would be trying to hold myself up above water long enough for People to rescue me. When I am rescued they put me in the lifeboat right close to where the ship sank. What happens? John is saying here that you don't go on swimming. You're in the life boat now. There is a sense in which you are safe. All right, if you are safe, does that mean that you'll be careless? Does that mean that you will be unappreciative? Let's put it like this. As I was naturally in my sins, it would be my disposition to be as lazy as I could get away with. I would be just as careless as I would know how to be, but when I become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. God does something to me, something happens to me. We call it the "new birth." We call it, "receiving the Holy Spirit." We call it "receiving Christ Jesus." Christ Himself comes into my heart. My whole inner disposition is changed to where r want to obey God. I want to please Him. By way of emphasis John is going to discuss this some.

Let us look now at what we have in I John 3:3. John writes this, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." What hope? The hope of seeing Jesus Christ and the hope of being transformed into His presence. It doth not yet appear what we shall be like but "We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." And every man that has this hope in him, that expects to meet the Lord! Jesus Christ face to face, expects to see Him as He is. Every such person purifieth himself as He is pure. The truth, I think, will become more obvious as we read on in verse 4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." This is just a general comment to say that if a person is sinning he is going against the nature of God because the word law here means the law of God which is the nature of God, the way God has of doing things. If a person is committing sin, he is not obeying God. He is not following after God; he is going contrary to it.

Verse 5: "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins" – that is Jesus of Nazareth – came to deliver us from sin. When we receive Him as our Savior the plan is to loose us from our sins and

get us away from our sins. He was manifested to take away our sins and in Him is no sin. Jesus of Nazareth was God in Himself. The nature of God was in His will. So there was no sin in Him. Although He was incarnate in the flesh He was without sin. He would not be doing anything contrary to His own nature. If we have received Him and He is in us He is not going to move us into the way of sin. So, in verse 6, John says, "Whosoever abideth in him." Because we abide in Him we have Christ in us.

Jesus speaks of this relationship in the 15th chapter of John's gospel where He says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . . Abide in me, I in you." He goes on to say that if a man abide in Him as a branch, he will bring forth fruit. This is the whole relationship that is being discussed. "Whosoever abideth in him" – the person who abides in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is to say he commits himself totally over to Christ to live with Him, to have fellowship with Him, to be conscious of Him – such a person is not practicing sin. "Sinneth not" means it will not be his customary way to do the wrong things. "Whosoever sinneth [whosoever does the wrong things naturally and normally and usually] hath not seen him, neither known him." This may sound flat and rather obvious. That is the way John wanted it to sound. John wanted to make it obvious – that if we have received Jesus Christ into our hearts, we will be led in the way of obedience. And if we see a man who is not in the way of obedience, who is practicing sin and doing selfish things, we are looking at somebody who has no relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. "Whosoever sinneth has not seen him, neither known him."

John would want to make it as simple and clear as this. Suppose that the Lord Jesus is walking north. If I am walking with Him which way am I going? I am walking north. If I am walking north what about walking south? If am walking north I am certainly not walking south and this is what John is saying. Whosoever is in the Lord and the Lord in him sinneth not. That is, he is not practicing sin. He may fall into it but it is not his wish and desire, because having received Jesus Christ into his heart and having Christ in him the hope of glory, Christ's purpose is to do the will of His Father. Christ's general attitude toward sin was to repudiate sin. If the Lord Jesus is in me, I will be moved inwardly to repudiate sin. I do not have to make up my mind about it. It will just happen in me. I'll be against it because the Lord Jesus is against it. Using the illustration again, the Lord Jesus is walking north, and I say, I am walking with the Lord Jesus and I am going east. John would say, "No you're not." If the Lord Jesus is walking north and you say you are walking with Him but you are actually going east, then you are not walking with the Lord. No matter what you say, you are not walking with the Lord. Or, another illustration might be of a person who comes to me and says he walked across the yard to see me and he stepped into the water. If he stepped into the water his feet are wet. His shoes are wet. If I look at him and his shoes are dry, then I know he did not tell the truth.

If you are walking north you are not going south. If you are walking with the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be with Him. In this way John is seeking to emphasize the fact that we do not need to be confused. We do not need to be greatly worried about things. We will find, if we actually belong to the Lord, we will be inwardly led to obey Him. This will follow because we belong – not because we want to belong – not in order to qualify – but because we already belong.

Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ purifies from sin because hope in the Lord Jesus Christ purifies "every man that hath this hope in him." The expectation of seeing Jesus Christ is based on the fact that I belong to Him now. What does belonging to Him mean? It means He has my hand in His and where He goes I go. What He does I do. That is the meaning of "abiding in Him." If I am abiding in Him and going with Him the way He goes, when He goes north, I go north. When He goes south, I go south. When He goes east, I go east. When He goes in obedience to God I am in obedience to God. That is what John is bringing out here.

I John 3:7-12

In the first Epistle of John, the writer is talking about the real meaning of true Christian experience. He is doing this because he Wants the Christians to rejoice in their faith. He Wants the Christians to have fellowship with each other and with the Lord and to be filled with joy. It seems that the more we understand about our relationship with the Lord, the more effective it will be and therefore the more joy we will have. He has been discussing the matter of becoming a Christian – that we become a Christian by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as Our Savior. From the very first of Our relationship with Him, we are one of His, We belong to Him. This is not true for everybody on the face of the earth. It is true for "who-soever believeth." Now with reference to spiritual things, and things that have to do with Christian experience, it is very easy to be deceived. It is very easy to get wrong ideas, because everything that pertains to God is out of sight. Everything that pertains to the soul is out of sight. No man hath seen God at any time and nobody has seen the soul. Everything that has to do with spiritual experience is something referring to that which is not seen. Because of that, we can become uncertain, especially when people come along with strange and different ideas and make them sound plausible and good. We humbly feel we certainly are not right ourselves, So We turn all directions and wonder who might possibly be right.

It is rather startling and refreshing to hear John put it very plainly in I John 3:7, "Little children, let no man deceive you. [Don't let anybody kid you. Don't let anybody mislead you.] He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." That sounds rather simple, doesn't it? If anybody is walking north it will be because he is headed north. "He that doeth righteous is righteous, even as he is righteous." Yet right here is something very subtle, it is very profound. What John is saying to us is righteous living – the kind of living that is like the Lord Jesus Christ – that would be acceptable to God – comes out of a righteous heart. You don't do the right thing in order to become a Christian. You become a Christian in order that you might do the right thing. Let no man deceive you by any means. He that doeth righteous – the person who is practicing righteousness – is righteous. That is to say, he is not righteous because he is practicing righteousness. Turn that sentence around. He is practicing righteousness because he is right in the sight of God. Righteousness is by faith, as Abraham found out. It is by believing and trusting in God that God receives and accepts us. Then we can start doing the right thing by the guidance and help of God. What this is actually saying is that if you wanted to be a Christian, the place to start is by being born again. You can be born again just the way a baby is born. There is no effort on his part. The same can be true with you. You receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and to "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Perhaps it could best be explained if I raised a question like this; When is a man a thief? For a long time in my life I would have told you a man is a thief when he steals. Before he steals is he a thief? I would have said, "Oh, no, he's not a thief until he steals." What is he before he steals? If you tell me he is an honest man I will come right back at you and tell you if he had been an honest man he would not have stolen. You see, if a man were honest before he stole, then he would never steal. Then why does he steal? Because he is a thief. He had not had a chance to steal. When the first chance came to steal he took it, because he had that nature and that disposition. "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even if he is righteous."

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one perfectly righteous person. He is the righteous servant mentioned in the Old Testament, the one who was altogether right in the sight of God. Jesus of Nazareth really did the Father's will in every way. When I become a Christian I receive Jesus Christ as my Savior and I receive Him as my Lord. Now when I believe in Him He shares His righteousness with me and I become righteous in the sight of God. That righteousness in me will show up in my conduct. I won't do the right

things in order to *become* a Christian. I'll do the right things because I *am* a Christian. In other words, it takes a child of God to walk in the ways of God. A natural man will not want to do it. An unconverted man will not do it.

Now notice how we read on with this in verse 8: "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." When you see a person who is sinning you know it is not the Lord! Jesus Christ leading him because Christ never sins. He "was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." He lived a perfect life. If I see a person practicing the wrong things, who do you suppose is leading him? The same one that led Eve and led Adam – Satan. He is the author of sin from the very first. He is the one who "sinneth from the beginning" and he is the one who is leading him.

Now you might say with reference to doing right . . . there is doing right toward God and doing right toward man and doing right about the world. When I am doing right toward God, I worship Him and obey Him. When I am doing right toward my fellow man I consider him and I appreciate him. If he is above me I honor him and if he is below me I act with charity toward him. When I am doing right about the world I deny the world. I won't have anything to do with the world. I will not let it gain dominion over me. Consequently, when you see a person practicing the right things, you are looking at a child of God, one in whom Jesus Christ is. Because that's the way of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now he that committeth sin – the person that is practicing the wrong doing – is of the devil. He gets his inspiration of the devil. He is being led of Satan, for the devil sinneth from the beginning. He sinned in the garden of Eden and he has sinned all the time along. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." Now the works of the devil are the operations of the devil. They are the operations that there would be in me. The devil would approach me and would work with me by appealing to my flesh and by appealing to my imagination and by appealing to my vanity. He would be working in me according to my human desires. When the Lord Jesus Christ came He took on Him the form of flesh and He took that flesh to the cross. When He took it there and crucified it so that it would be dead, He had that killed which would be where Satan would work. He destroyed the works of Satan because the flesh in which Satan would operate is reckoned dead.

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." The person who receives God as Father and is the child of God, like Jesus Christ does not practice sin, "for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." The Bible tells us that God cannot lie. If God cannot sin then that which is born in me, cannot sin. That is to say, it does not willingly, willfully turn away from God. John is arguing that if you see me sinning you will know it is not because Christ is in me that I am sinning. Satan is operative in my flesh and my deliverance from sin occurs if I reckon the flesh dead. Then Satan cannot operate in me any longer. In that way Christ Jesus destroys the works of the devil.

"In this the children of God are manifested and the children of the devil." The children of God (the persons that are led by the Holy Spirit) and the children of the devil (the persons that are led thru the flesh) are obvious.

After John has spoken about doing righteousness, he uses a specific incident from the Old Testament which illustrates the importance of love toward one's brother. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

I John 3:13-19

In the first Epistle of John the writer is talking about the actual nature of the Christian life and experience. The Christian life concerns the soul and the spirit. It is something that concerns God. God is invisible; the Spirit is invisible and the soul is invisible. It may be difficult to keep in mind what John is saying since the Christian life is out of sight and yet is very, very real. Being a Christian can be a wonderful thing if we don't get to doubting. But some days things happen to make us wonder whether or not we are born again. Sometimes we doubt because we hear people say different things than what we have ever heard. In our confusion we begin to doubt. In our doubt we actually become weak and when we become weak we don't have the blessing. If we don't have the blessing we don't have the joy and there is no thanksgiving. Then we do not have the life that we could have in Jesus Christ.

John is primarily concerned that we understand the truth of Christian living which is made possible in Jesus Christ. He uses specific illustrations to demonstrate the Christian life. In the third chapter he has been emphasizing the fact that the believing person does the right thing because the Lord Jesus does the right thing. The believing person, having the Spirit in him, is moved to do the right thing. He has made the point in this third chapter that Christians are "Now the sons of God." Believing people are already received as the sons of God. It is not something we earn but something given to us. If I am in the Lord Jesus Christ I will want to do the will of God. If the Lord Jesus Christ is my Lord and His Spirit is in me, I will want to do the things pleasing to my Father. John says, in the 14th verse, that that will be seen when we love the brethren. "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." We can tell that we have actually become new creatures in Christ Jesus and that God is actually living in us when we love the brethren. The Lord Jesus came to love the brethren. If we are in Him, and He is in us, we will love the brethren. "He that loveth not His brother abideth in death." This is just the other side. Loving a person and loving a brother does not mean we approve him. It does not mean we like him. It means we are interested in his welfare and would do anything for him. The person who has no interest in the welfare of other people abideth in death. He is actually living the way he used to be as an unbeliever, in sin. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."

Those are two very strong words and it is hard to fit them in our ordinary use of language. Earlier John uses a number of words to refer to the life that is in God. He says God is light. Darkness is being without God. Then he says God is life and those who have Him have life. The opposite of life is death. When there is no love, there is hate. That is what he means by hate. When John uses the word hate, he does not mean malice. He does not mean that you have anger. He does not mean you are going to go out to do something aggressively against someone. He means you do not love him. It is dark in your soul as far as the other man is concerned and he says that is murder. Why? Because the other man is in need. The other man may be drowning and if I walk away I am leaving him to drown. We would all say that is against the law. I am actually condemning him to death when I leave him out there to drown. So John says if I am not interested in the welfare of other people I am condemning them to death. That makes me a murderer. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer and you know no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." You cannot claim that person has the life of God in him because God sent His own Son on behalf of other people.

Then verse 16 reads, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." You say that God loves us. How? Because He thinks we're nice? That's not true. He thinks we're sweet? That's not true. In what way does He love us? He laid down His life for us. If that is what love is from God, John says, we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren if we belong to Him.

Then in verse 17 he is very practical. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have

need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" How could you say the love of God is in a person who will let another man starve while he has food? How could you call that the love of God? If you and I have that Spirit of God within us we will take of our own and we will give to the person who has need.

Now in verse 18 he says "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." This will truly be the love of God. " And hereby we know we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." If our love is activated into action and we actually can see ourselves giving and doing for other people, we have the evidence that we really do belong to Him.

Loving the brethren means actually helping others, doing things for them. All of this is based on the fact that this is what God would do. God made all men. All men belong to Him. If God is my Father, then they are my Father's people and I have an interest in them. This is true of me not because I am a nice person, not because I am a good person, but because I am in Christ Jesus and Christ Jesus is in me. If I receive Jesus Christ as my Savior, His Holy Spirit will move me to act in certain ways. I will keep His Word. I will listen to Him. I will be obedient to Him. Now John says that if I am obedient to God He will give me concern for my fellow man. I will help him. If Christ is in me I will share with my fellowman. If he does not know where to go, I will show him. If he is in sorrow and distress, I will comfort him. I will put myself out on behalf of the other person . . . not because I am good, but because the Lord Jesus Christ is in me moving me to do these things. When that happens I have the evidence that God is actually working in me and I in Him.

Love In Deed And Truth

The first epistle of John was written by him to believers in order to share with them an understanding of the gospel. This would enable them to have fellowship with God and with each other. In this fellowship they would have joy. He wanted them to be able to rejoice in Christ Jesus. It would give them strength for their daily life. It would fill their hearts with gladness and rejoicing. It would give them thoughts of gratitude and thanksgiving to God and enable them to testify to others of the grace of God that is in Jesus Christ. To this end John was writing. God has this in mind for us today as well as for those early Christians. As you and I understand what God is willing to do in Christ Jesus and how He will do it, we are able to receive that to ourselves and be blessed in it.

God has in mind that we should be blessed. In a world that has in it so much misery, discouragement, frustration, so much actual harm and hurt, there should come peace of heart and mind. There should come quietness. There should be strength. There should be inward confidence in God. There should be an outward peace with men of such a nature that would be a glory to God and a benefit to mankind. This is the purpose of the gospel. It is for this that Christ came.

Christ Jesus did not come into the world to pile up a fortune. He did not come to make a great name for Himself. He did not come to change anything so far as the world is concerned. He made no change in the natural processes such as they are, and He did not exploit them to His own advantage in any way, shape or form. The one thing that the Lord Jesus came into the world to do was to reconcile men to God. He looked out upon mankind, saw that they were scattered as sheep without a shepherd, was moved with compassion upon them and gave His life that they might be saved. And He has put into the heart of His followers, the desire to share this blessing of salvation with other people.

The wonderful truth of the whole Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is that salvation is offered full and free in Christ Jesus. It is full because it is a complete salvation. It is free because He provided it. "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." This salvation of God is to be received by faith on our part. In order to know what we are receiving, we have to know what He offered and that's what is in the Bible. When issues arise in our lives, and decisions have to be made, we can believe in the reality of God. We can believe in the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can believe in the will of God and want to seek to do His will. He will influence us to want to do His will. By constantly believing in Him day after day, we can receive from God the help for daily living. This is the wonderful truth of salvation and it leads normally to action in response to it. After all that God has done for us we are minded to do for Him. We want to be well pleasing in the sight of the Father and we act in the way that we think the Lord Jesus wants us to act. The action makes our faith real and it makes it obvious. We get to where we know we belong because of the things that we do. And other people will see it and will appreciate it and it will be good for other people.

This is the general line of truth which John is seeking to set out in this first epistle. In I John 2:18 he writes, "Little children, it is the last time." Whenever you see that expression "the last time," you can think of harvest time. This is the last period of time in the growing of the crop. You started out with the sowing of the seed, you cultivated, protected, pruned it, and you dealt with it in various ways. But when you come to the last stage, you reap the harvest. When John says here it is the last time, it is harvest time. Some people would possibly understand it even better by saying, "It's the showdown." At this point now you make up your mind. Either you come one way or you come another.

Then he goes on to say that there have been antichrists gone out from them to other people in the world. John seems to be dealing with the fact that you are saved when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ receive Him and yield yourself to Him as your Lord. Then God works in you to produce right conduct

because His will is in you and He works in you by His grace. The whole idea is that you need to be born again. The actual experience is that you deny the flesh and you die unto self but you are raised from the dead by the spirit of God in Christ Jesus. All this becomes an actual reality to the believers so that they live in newness of life and resurrection power. They live with the Lord Jesus Christ. They are delivered from sin because their flesh is considered crucified. Like the apostle Paul we can say, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

However, in John's time there were other people preaching differently. Apparently they were preaching that you get into fellowship with God and have blessing from God by being good, by doing certain things that are the right things to do. They did not talk about being born again. They did not talk about receiving everything in Christ Jesus as the Head and they the members of His body. They talked along the line that Jesus Christ is the teacher and you are to do what He said. He is the example and you are to imitate Him. In general, you already belong to God. The only thing you are now to do is to do the best you can but there was no mention of the new birth, regeneration, the indwelling Christ, or the Holy Spirit because they were going to do these things.

With these differences in mind, John is telling his people that they don't really need to be confused because they have been given a certain anointing from on high, a certain unction from the Holy One. This anointing, or "unction" as it is called here, seems to refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Verse 20, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." And the 27th verse, "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teacheth you: but as that same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." The Holy Spirit of God has been given to believers. So the situation is like this: we have received Jesus Christ as our Savior. We have put our trust in Him. We have committed ourselves to obey Him. When we receive Him as Savior, His Spirit comes into our hearts and the Spirit makes us conscious of the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. He activates the will of the Lord Jesus Christ in us. We are reminded that Christ Jesus died for our sins. We are forgiven and are taken into the fellowship of God as His children. It is believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God that enables us to be sons. It is believing in God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ that makes Him our Father. The Lord Jesus said, "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him." So these Christian people, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and believing in Him as the Son of God, looked upon God as their Father and themselves as His sons. The Holy Spirit is the unction from on high that gave them this constant understanding of the things of God by bringing them into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit makes the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ real.

All of this adds up to this – that Christians are actually in such a relationship with God that God is considered as their Father and they are considered as His children. These words are used because these Christian people have been born again by the Holy Spirit in their hearts. They now are standing before God as people who have in them a new life that is in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God will incline them toward God Himself. This makes them *right*. Being right in the sight of God is doing what He wants us to do. The one thing that God wants us to do is to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. When we put our trust in Him and yield ourselves to Him, we are right in God's sight. When we are right, we will begin to act righteously. We will do the things that we should do.

In the latter part of the second chapter and in the early part of the 3rd chapter John emphasizes the fact that it is the righteous person that "doeth righteousness." If a person wanted to live right, John would say, the thing to do is to start right. If you want to act righteously, John would say, then you should be righteous. If you want to know how to be righteous, he would say, receive the Lord Jesus Christ in your life as your Lord and Savior. He is righteous, and by letting Him have His way in your life, you will be righteous because you will have whatever He had. John says finally that "He that doeth righteousness is righteous." In chapter 3, verse 7, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is

righteous, even as he is righteous." John is not saying that the person who is acting right becomes right, but John is saying that the person who is acting right is acting right because he is right. That is why he is acting that way.

We can say something like this: If I am acting the way the Lord Jesus wants me to act, it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ in me that makes me do that. Jesus Christ was the outstanding case of obedience. He is the One who really did the will of His Father. If the Lord Jesus Christ is in us and His will is in our hearts, then we will be minded to do the will of God and our conduct will be righteous. Now here is one of the big differences between the Christian gospel which John is preaching and an imitation gospel. John himself would call the imitation gospel false and say it is antichrist. The imitation of it would be that you should go out and do the best you can and get a little better all the time. When you finally got good enough and you had done enough you would then consider that you belonged to God and would then be a Christian. John says that is putting it the wrong way around. In other words, if you want to walk godly you have to be godly. If you want to do the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God, you need to be born again to get that kind of a heart and mind that will lead you into the will of God. This is what John is bringing out. He says in I John 3:1, 2, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God . . . Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." John is actually describing the fact that you start out in Christian living by becoming a Christian. You become a Christian by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. When you become a Christian, receive the Lord Jesus Christ, His Spirit will work in you and move you to do the things that God would have you do.

This is a rather important fact – that you have to start out being a Christian before you try to live the Christian life. It is a good deal like saying that before you can really start living like a wife, you need to be married. You start with getting married and then you live like a wife. But you cannot start living like a wife until you have been married. And so with a good many other things.

Take a very common illustration of a man going to drive a car. The first thing you have to do is get a car and sit in it. If you don't get a car and sit in it, you're not going to drive a car. So a person says, "I'm going to live a Christian life." If you're going to live the Christian life, the first thing necessary is to receive Jesus Christ and commit yourself to Him. Then you can live the Christian life. We are very much interested in people teaching the things of the Christian gospel. We talk about teaching the Christian gospel in the Sunday School, in the home and in the church. There is one prerequisite – if you are going to teach the Christian gospel you have to know it. You never heard a person teaching something he did not know. You have to know it first and then you can teach it.

Another illustration is that of a thief. Is a person a thief because he steals or does he steal because he is a thief? If you say that he was not a thief before he stole, I'll ask you, "Well, what was he?" If he was not a thief, was he an honest man? If he had been an honest man would he have stolen? The very fact that he stole shows that he was a thief but it did not show up until he acted that way. In the same way with reference to being Christian, you can become a Christian any time. You can become a Christian when you receive Christ and turn your heart and mind over to God. It is possible that the preaching you have heard has been meager. It is possible you do not understand much about the gospel. It is possible you could receive the Lord Jesus Christ and not at all be conscious or know even what you ought to do now that you belong to Him. But on the other hand, you have the desire within to do the will of God. If you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, you know that He died for you, and that you are free because of Him. It is just a natural thing for you to want to do the things that are pleasing in His sight. Everything you do and every way in which you act will be affected by the fact that you now belong to God. You can't help it. You're going to act like one of His children. That is going to be the kind of behavior that will bring glory to the name of the Lord God Himself. God's wonderful way is to make us His children and then work toward

making tis like Christ by letting us see Him. All this is given to us.

We go on in I John 3:3, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Verse 8 reads, "He that committeth sin is of the devil." And again in the 10th verse, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." John seems to press the fact that there are some people whose lives are affected by God and there are some people who are not affected. If they are not affected that way it would mean that they are doing what they want to do themselves. He points out that those who do what they want to do themselves are the ones that are subject to temptation. Satan himself would stimulate them by suggesting to them things they could do to further their own interests in one way or another. So there are people who naturally want to do the will of God and there are people who naturally want to serve themselves. These are the children of God and the children of the devil. They are both in the world at the same time. But the children of the devil are those who do not have it in their own consciousness to want to do the will of God.

John goes on to say that if you really want to know that you are a Christian then, he says, "act it out." Do not have it only in the mind. Actually act it out. He gives a specific instance. If you are going to act it out, do it with reference to other people. His words are, "Love the brethren." He goes on to say that you can tell when a man is a Christian because he loves the brethren. Loving the brethren is not just a frame of mind. It is not just something that you say. It is when you take what you have and use it to help the other person. Verse 17, "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" In other words, it becomes a matter of just ordinary everyday experience that if you have the love of God in your heart you will want to help other people. We have a wonderful gospel and you and I can share it with other people as we understand more and more how we ought to do the will of God and obey Him.