

11. In our day, the testimony of the Spirit includes the \_\_\_\_\_ as well as His testament in the life of Jesus and His presence in our own lives.
12. In order for rationalism to destroy belief in the deity of Jesus it must first destroy the \_\_\_\_\_ of Scripture.
13. The person who does not believe in the deity of Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God has made the Spirit a \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Real victory over the world comes from faith which gives us a constant awareness of \_\_\_\_\_.
15. A great deal of our failure to overcome the world comes from our inability to keep to \_\_\_\_\_.
16. To have victory over the world is to make \_\_\_\_\_ the master and \_\_\_\_\_ the servant.
17. How does our giving to the church aid in our overcoming the world in our personal lives?

## CHAPTER XVI

*HEREBY WE KNOW*

I John 5:13-21

A. *The text*

"These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God. (14) And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; (15) and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. (16) If any man see his brother sinning as sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. (17) All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. (18) We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not. (19) We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one. (20) And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (21) My little children, guard yourselves from idols."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. How does one remove the "maybes" concerning his hope of eternal life?
2. What is the source of confidence in prayer?
3. If no one who is born of God sins, why does John ask that we pray for a brother when we see him sinning?
4. What is "the sin unto death?"
5. Does I John 5:18 support the doctrine of "eternal security?"
6. How is idolatry related to the danger of gnosticism against which this letter was written?

C. *Paraphrase*

"These things have I written unto you—In order that ye may know that ye have Life Age-abiding—Unto you who believe on the name of the Son of God. (14) And this is the boldness which we have towards him: That if anything we ask according to his will He doth hearken unto us. (15) And if we know that he doth hearken unto us Whatsoever we ask We know that we have the things asked Which we have asked of him, (16) If one should see his brother committing a sin not unto death He shall ask and He will grant unto him life, For them who are sinning not unto death There is a sin unto death: Not concerning that am I saying that he should make request. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, And there is a sin not unto death. (18) We know that whosoever hath been born of God Is not committing sin, Nay he that hath been born of God He keepeth him, And the wicked one doth not touch him. (19) We know that of God are we; And the whole world in the wicked one is lying. (20) We know moreover that the Son of God hath come, And hath given us insight So that we are getting to understand him that is Real, And we are in him that is Real, In his Son Jesus Christ. This is the Real God, and life age-abiding. (21) Dear children! Guard yourselves from idols."

D. *Comments*

## 1. Preliminary Remarks

In this paragraph, the author uses the synonym *oida* for *know* with emphatic repetition. He has not previously avoided it; but has used it sparingly; preferring its synonym, *ginosko*.

As was indicated in "Words We Must Understand," and in the comments on I John 2:4, the Greek *ginosko* (know) was a favorite word of the gnostic. As opposed to the word employed here, *oida* (know), it emphasizes the part played by experience in gaining knowledge, whereas, *oida* (know) means to know through reflection, study and mental deduction.

John's repeated use of *oida* (know) here is intended to call the readers' attention to the authority of what he has written. He introduces this section with "These things I wrote that you may *know*."

The Christian's knowledge of his personal salvation is attested to by his experience, and in this sense John may say, "Hereby we know," (*ginosko*). However, it is not *just* our experience upon which the certainty of our eternal life rests. We may know, (*oida*) with the knowledge which comes from study, reflection and mental deduction as we read what is written by inspired writers.

Peter confirms this when he says, ". . . no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:20-21) We are not to reach conclusions concerning the will of God on the basis of our own preconceived notions. Man is not to form his own theological concepts entirely in light of his own "religious experiences." It is the Inspired Word which gives meaning to our experiences, and not *vice versa*.

Paul also supports John in this respect. "Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable . . . that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (II Tim. 3:16-17) The Inspired Record contains all that is needed to assure the person whose life conforms to it that he has indeed passed out of death into life.

## 2. Translation and Comments

### a. Reason for the writing . . . v.13

(13) "These things I wrote to you in order that you may know that you are having eternal life, the ones believing into the name of the Son of God."

As in the Fourth Gospel, so here, John states his reason for writing. There, it is, "in order that you may go on believing that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and in order that believing you may go on having life in His name." (John 20:31) This verse is an echo of the same inspired motive. John is here concerned, in the face of the gnostic

controversy, that his readers not only have life eternal through faith in Jesus as the Christ. He desires also for them the certain knowledge that they do in fact possess this life.

The Gospel of John was written to present the evidence by which to strengthen the faith of believers, and thereby insure their continued life. The First Epistle of John was written to provide certain knowledge that this life does indeed continue in those who remain in Him.

A word needs to be said about "eternal life." It is far more than "forever existence." Because man is essentially in the nature of God, man can never cease to be.

This in and of itself is no blessing. In fact it can become the greatest possible curse. It is this same inspired writer who warns us of the danger of being "tormented day and night forever and ever." (Rev. 20:10)

Eternal life is the *kind* of life that finds its fullest expression in God Himself. It is His life, and men come to it through Jesus, and no other way. (John 14:6)

It is this to which Paul refers when he says we "were raised with Him to walk in a new kind of life." (Rom. 6:4)

That life which is limited by time and space and weakness, which is subject to the corrosion of the elements and the desires of the flesh is changed in Christ for something new and glorious. (I Cor. 15:42-ff) That which produces from within itself "fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like;" is changed in Him for that which results in "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." (Cf. Gal. 5:20-ff)

Eternal life is the kind of life that vibrates in the very being of God and which, as Jesus demonstrated, cannot be held by death. In the believer it is a present reality and not merely a doctrine of the future.

John has written in this epistle, and now reminds his readers, that eternal life is characterized by certain qualities and that one who has those qualities may know with certainty that he has eternal life. Such a person will accept divinely revealed truth in preference to human philosophy. This is especially true as revealed truth is concerned with personal morality, human relationships, and the identity of the Son of God. Such a person will practice righteousness, will love God's children, and will have a great deal of personal confidence in Jesus Christ.

Believing into the name of the Son of God means personal surrender to Him that answers to total commitment, and a reliance upon Him which amounts to complete trust for life itself.

b. Assurance in and limitation of prayer . . . v.14-15

(14) "And this is the confidence which we are having toward Him, that if we should ask something according to His will He is hearing us.

(15) And if we have known that He is hearing us the thing we may ask, we have known that we are having the request which we have asked from Him."

The reality of eternal life in the individual is measured by the freedom with which he prays! If praying aloud in the privacy of ones own prayer closet sounds foolish, it is time to re-examine one's entire relationship to God. If praying aloud in public results in stage fright to the extent that it becomes impossible, the same need is apparent.

Perhaps the first thing that needs to be examined is our understanding of prayer itself. John, in the Fourth Gospel, and in this epistle, has given us five limitations which God has placed upon prayer. Perhaps we would have a great deal more inclination to pray if we understood these limitations:

*First*, all prayer is to be in accordance with God's will, the eternal grand design for which man was created and redeemed. This limitation was even evident in the praying of Jesus Himself. (John 17:25-26, compare with Matthew 26:42)

Probably the greatest mistake we make in prayer is the expectance, unvoiced but present, that earnest prayer can alter the will of God. This simply is not true. Prayer is not the means of getting God to do our own rather arbitrary desires. It is an earnest seeking after His will as a given circumstance may relate to the grand design. With this lesson learned, we will ask in prayer for those things which expedite the bringing of His will to earth, rather than for those things which can only result from getting our will done in Heaven!

Prayer can be no more profound than "Show me thy will in these circumstances, and provide what is needful for its accomplishment!"

*Second*, prayer is to be "in His name". That is, committed completely to Jesus alone, and fully dependant upon Him. It is true that we have access to God directly; that no man can intervene or intercede. But we cannot pray effectively until we realize also that our access to God was paid for by the Suffering Servant, Christ. Jesus Himself placed this limitation upon prayer. (John 14:14)

"In His name" is not a formula with which to close a prayer, nor an easy way to let the congregation know the prayer is ended. It is very possible to pray "in His name" and never pronounce the formula. It is equally possible to pronounce the formula and not really pray "in His name."

An intimate relationship to Him is necessary for prayer to be made in His name. There is no statement in the Bible that sinners ought not pray. Cornelius' experience may be taken as evidence that such praying ought to be encouraged. However, the *promise* of answered prayer is only to those whose personal commitment to Jesus Christ is such that they can pray "in His name."

*Third*, answered prayer is for those who are "remaining" in Christ; whose commitment is constant. (John 15:7) John has gone to great lengths in I John to present the tests by which we may know we are remaining in Him, and He in us. (Cf. I John 2:10, 27)

Just praying "in the name of Christ" because we were at one time baptized into Him, (Gal. 3:27), is not enough. Our remaining in Him is to be the constant continuing course of our lives.

To remain in Him so is to daily live in the awareness that we are part of His body. That which brought Him into the world, continued through His commission to us, must be our ever present and over-riding concern. All else fades into relative insignificance. The person who treats the church, Christ's body, as merely a place to go or an extra-curricular activity, has no right nor reason to expect God to hear, much less answer his prayers! Answered prayer is for those who are personally involved in the steadfast continuing of "the apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the Bread, and the prayers." (Cf. Acts 2:42)

*Fourth*, answered prayer is directly related to personal obedience. (See above on I John 3:22) Obedience is the outward expression of the attitude expressed in "Thy will be done".

Every sin that has ever been committed can be summed up in two words, "I want". This is the opposite of obedience. The person who *will* not obey, *can* not pray!

*Fifth*, we seldom think of awareness of God's hearing as a condition of prayer. John affirms, however, that we may ask; "if we have known that He is hearing". (I John 5:15[a])

Prayer is meaningless unless we are aware that we are talking to God; a transcendent, all-wise, all-powerful living God, Who by virtue of the gift of His own Son has become our Father.

Many have tried to reduce prayer to a mere psychological exercise, a sort of mental gymnastic in which we talk to our own best selves. John will not allow this. It is only when we are conscious that God is hearing us that what we say may properly be called prayer at all.

With these conditions met, we may go to God in prayer in the certain assurance that we have that for which we ask! John does not say that we may be sure we shall *get* what we ask for, but that we *already possess* it.

Perhaps this may be illustrated simply like this: If I have money in the bank, I have it, even though it is not yet in my pocket. To get it I must meet certain requirements. It is available to me on certain conditions. When the conditions are met, I will then have the money in my hand.

So it is with the assurance we have in prayer. On certain conditions I possess what I have asked from God, even though it may not yet actually be in my hand.

What I will then possess is not some bauble of my own choosing, but the will of God.

c. The exception . . . v. 16-17

(16) "If any man should see his brother sinning sin not toward death; he is to ask and He will give him life, the one sinning not toward death. There is sin toward death; Not concerning this am I saying that he should ask. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, but there is sin not toward death."

These verses create an insurmountable problem for those who say that a child of God is not able to sin at all. So far as John, and indeed the other New Testament writers, are concerned, there is a constant possibility and a danger that we will in fact sin.

Paul has something to say about the attitude of a Christian toward his brother who is found in sin. As we might expect, what Paul says, is in complete harmony with this statement by John. Paul writes, "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1)

John gives us, in prayer, the practical means of "restoring such a one." He also sets forth a limitation. We are not to expect an answer when we pray for the life of one who is sinning "unto death." Even in this extreme case, however, John does not say we should not pray.

The attitude of both Paul and John is a far cry from the common reaction of one church member toward another who has fallen. Those who fancy themselves to be spiritual, often seem much more apt to talk to God in the sinner's behalf.

Condemnation of one's brother is itself a sin, and the one committing it must be prayed for!

Before we decide to pray or not to pray for someone on the basis of our arbitrary judgment of what he has done, we will do well to keep these two verses strictly in their context. John is not primarily concerned here with the one who is "caught in the act" of sinning.

The total context of I John is concerned with the assurance of his own life by a child of God, and with the tests by which one may know certainly that he is himself a child of God. John is suggesting that the fact of answered prayer is evidence of such sonship. However, there is a condition in which one's prayer may not be answered. There is an exception to the certainty of prayer.

John now, in verses 16-17, identifies that exception. He does not do so in order to prevent us from praying for anyone. Rather he does so in order that we will not doubt our own divine sonship when this particular prayer is not answered. If we pray for one who is sinning toward death, (and John explicitly says he isn't telling us to do so), we are not to be surprised when "nothing happens."

The most frequent question asked in response to these verses is "what is the unpardonable sin?"

Asked against the backdrop of the whole gist of I John, and particularly in the context of this fifth chapter, the question is superfluous. It is so much so that John doesn't identify what he refers to as "sin toward death."

The first step toward possible clarification of the wide-spread confusion in this matter is the realization that the Bible nowhere uses the term "the unpardonable sin." John has something more in mind than a single unrighteous act.

Jesus did not use this phrase, "the unpardonable sin," although He is generally credited with it. A careful reading of the synoptic references usually cited in support of the doctrine of "the unpardonable sin" will prove enlightening. These references are Mark 3:29, Matthew 12:32, and Luke 12:10.

Mark 3:29 quotes Jesus as saying ". . . whosoever shall blaspheme



against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin . . .”

Matthew's version of the same quotation is, “. . . but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven . . . whosoever shall speak against the Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32)

Luke has “. . . but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven.” (Luke 12:10)

On the surface, and in the context of Jesus' statement, the most obvious conclusion is that attributing to Satan the work of the Spirit is unforgiven. However, as we pursue the matter deeper into the New Testament, we discover there is a great deal more to it than merely stating that Satan has done some work which is in fact the work of the Holy Spirit.

That such blasphemy is not to expect pardon will no doubt prove true, but we ought not suppose that the making of the statement *per se*, pre-empts all possibility of subsequent salvation.

It has been suggested that denial of the deity of Jesus, since it, in effect, calls the Holy Spirit a liar, is the sin referred to here. If we are to identify sin toward death as one particular act, the denial of Christ probably comes closer to the truth than any other single sin.

John has just said that the testimony of the Holy Spirit supports the incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus. (I John 5:7-11) To call Him a liar certainly comes under the heading of blasphemy. However, the absence of a definite article, “the”, with sin in I John 5:16-17, suggests the probability that John is not speaking of one single act of sin.

The denial of Jesus by those who have come to know Him, as opposed to the denial that is made by others who have never confessed Him, has been suggested as the sin unto death. Hebrews 6:4-6 would seem to support this conclusion. However, when read in the original language, even these verses do not close the door forever upon the one who has fallen away. It is true “it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.” (Hebrews 6:6), but there is no indication that they cannot *themselves* repent.

The Hebrew writer comes back to this same vein in Hebrews 10:26. A literal translation of that verse would read “For we, going on sinning deliberately after we have received the knowledge of the truth, not concerning sins is there left a sacrifice.”

Such literal renderings in English are always awkward reading, but often very helpful. The key word here is the participle translated "*going on sinning*" modified by the adverb translated "*deliberately*."

"Going on sinning" describes a continuing *state*, rather than a single misdeed. "Deliberately" underscores that *state* as one of choice.

One can violate the will of God out of ignorance, compulsion, inability to resist some strong temptation, or he can violate the will of God as a matter of deliberate choice. In the case of the former he will probably hate the sin, both during and after its commission, and even hate himself for his weakness. He will shrink in horror at the thought of repeating the disobedience to God, and yet may yield again to the same temptation.

So long as he is honest in the revulsion, fundamentally sorry for the guilt, and faces his own responsibility for it as well as the reality of it, the blood of Christ is equal to cleansing it. (See on I John 1:8-22)

On the other hand, when one violates the will of God cold-bloodedly, aware of his transgression but determined to have his own way regardless of God's will and delighting in his sin, he has removed himself from the reach of the cross. *To continue in such a state is to "sin toward death."*

The overt act committed outwardly may be the same in both cases. Sin toward death is not necessarily measured by the deed done. It is the state of a man who has heard the call of sin and has decided to serve it rather than God. He has listened to falsehood and decided to accept it rather than truth. He will readily commit any and every act that has ever been identified with "the unpardonable sin," and do so without remorse.

Such a person cannot be said to walk in the light. The light reveals the nature of sin and the personal guilt involved in it, and he has preferred to live in sin; possibly even to deny guilt. The light has revealed the eternal nature of the things of God, but he has chosen the love of the things of the world; to be a materialist. The light has revealed Jesus to be God's Son and he has chosen to deny Him. He "has loved darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil." (John 3:19) His life will not meet any of the tests presented in I John.

One who has made this final choice has forfeited all hope of divine forgiveness. Consequently, the child of God is not expected to pray for him, and if one does pray for such a person, he is not to take the absence of an answer as a slur against the reality of his own eternal life.

## d. Three Christian certainties . . . v. 18-20

(18) "We are knowing that everyone having been begotten from God does not keep on sinning, but the One Who was begotten from Him is keeping him and the evil one is not touching him. (19) We are knowing that we are from God, and the whole world is living in the evil one. (20) And we are knowing that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding that we may know the True One and we are in the True One in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and life eternal."

Nothing is more needful to Christians in the face of pseudo-intellectual attacks on the faith than divine assurance. The need is not new, but it is probably more pronounced today than at any time since the first century. For his reason, I John needs to be read and re-read in today's churches.

It is very popular among modern liberal "scholars" to say, "nothing is absolute." Not only the present-day church, but twentieth century society in general has slipped the moorings of divine certainty. One cannot watch the televised congressional investigations of long-range government policy without sensing the bewildered lack of any certain base. Our world is teetering on the brink of total race suicide, and no one seems to know any more than any one else where the "handle" is by which it can be steadied.

Perhaps such befuddled uncertainty is to be expected in the world, which denies the existence of objective truth or error, but the worse tragedy of all is the evidence of similar confusion among Christians. The naive statement that "it doesn't really matter what one believes, as long as he is sincere," is a verbalizing of spiritual uncertainty and confusion.

John will have none of this irresolute wavering. No writer of scripture has earned the title, "Apostle of Love", as has this "disciple whom Jesus loved," but his statements regarding revealed truth are among the most dogmatic in the Bible.

There is no contradiction between love and insistence upon truth. Compromise with error at the expense of another's eternal life cannot be excused on the ground of high sounding "tolerance" or the teaching of a sacerine spiritual pablum.

"The Apostle of Love" closes his epistle with the reiteration of three distinct certainties upon which the child of God can literally stake his life. *Hereby we know!*

*First*, we know that righteousness is the normal course of life for the child of God. Nowhere does John, or any other Biblical author indicate that it is impossible for a Christian to commit a sin. In fact, the triple insistence of this epistle in respect to sin is that we are to recognize the reality of it and depend upon Christ Jesus for cleansing from it.

However, we may be assured that the constant attitude of God's children toward sin is to avoid it. The marked distinction between the Christian and the worldling in respect to righteousness is that the worldling accepts sin as the normal pattern of behavior, while the Christian is constantly on the alert to avoid sinning.

The reason a Christian instinctively avoids sin, even though he may on occasion commit sins, is that "the One Who was begotten from God is keeping him, and the evil one is not touching him." We are not alone in the battle for good. The hymn writer has captured the truth beautifully,

"Jesus keep me near the cross  
There a precious fountain  
Free to all a healing stream  
Flows from Calvary's mountain."

A Christian is not a person who never sins; he is a person who does the very best he can to avoid sin, because of an inner revulsion against it, and who recognizes his efforts must be sustained by One Who is mightier than himself. He not only does his own best, he relies on Christ Jesus to make up the difference between what his behavior is and what it ought to be.

John's statement that "the evil one is not touching him" means literally that the evil one is not touching with harmful results. The Devil cannot snatch away from Christ one who remains trustfully aware that he is, in Christ, a son of God. (Cf. John 6:38-ff)

*Second*, "we are knowing that we are from God, and the whole world is lying in the evil one." This again is absolute knowledge. The cleavage between the sons of God and sons of Satan is sharp and sure.

It is presently very popular to preach tolerance, to say that all men are the sons of God. This is diametrically opposed to everything John has written! There are, no doubt, many "men of good will" outside of

Christ. It is true that the Christian Gospel for nearly twenty centuries has served as salt and leaven in western civilization. The moral and ethical standards that are the unwritten mores of our ethic as well as the foundation of our written legal code are essentially Christian. But the rapidity with which these standards are being abandoned in our time is evidence alone that there is still evil in the world. Satan is still very much alive and at work.

The child of God who makes a determined effort to meet the tests of life set down in I John is going to find himself part of a "peculiar people".

*Third*, "we are knowing that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding . . ." Of all the areas of conflict between the certain assurance of the Christian and befuddled bewilderment of the world, the most marked is in relationship to Jesus as the incarnate Christ.

The self-centered agnosticism which permeates modern Protestantism denies the inspiration of the Scriptures. This is followed, quite logically, by denial of the incarnation of the Word. Since the New Testament is the only source book by which we know of God's visit to earth as a man, the person who cannot accept the New Testament as reliable has no ground upon which to base a belief in Jesus as the Christ.

The practical result of modern agnosticism is identical to that of the gnosticism which called forth John's writings. John's claim is that he personally witnessed the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. Anyone who denies the fact of the incarnation makes John a liar, just as he makes God a liar.

Once a person has succeeded in convincing himself that the Bible is unreliable, and the incarnation a myth, he cannot take the problem of sin seriously. He may get carried away in the broad torrent of civil demonstrations. He may spend his time and energy fighting social injustice and insisting upon the rights of minority groups, but he cannot be concerned seriously with the fact of *personal*, social and moral responsibility to God.

But God's children are not confused. We *know* that the Son of God *has* come. He has given us an understanding of life which the world cannot grasp. Just as He opened the minds of the twelve that "they might understand the scriptures," (Luke 24:44-ff) so he has given us the divine approach to reality.

The world tests reality in terms of materialism and human reason. To the world the only reality is that which can be explained in terms of three dimensional matter. The only sound conclusions are those which can be demonstrated within the closed system of cause and effect which is called science. The only recognizable criterion by which to form opinions and determine the course of our actions, says the world, is the deductive power of the human mind.

The Christian, on the other hand, judges reality in the light of the incarnation. God's visit to this planet in the person of Jesus Christ is seen as the single all-determining gauge of truth. It is the "fullness" of all preceding time (Gal. 4:4) and the meaning of all that has followed. (Col. 1:16-20) In Christ alone we reach the ultimate reality which is God Himself. (John 14:6)

In saying that Christ has given us understanding in order that we may *know* God, John again returns to *ginosko*, the knowledge of experience. The world wonders if there is a God, the philosophers have speculated as to what God is like, and the modern fool has decided "God is dead!" (Cf. Psalm 14:1) But the child of God has experienced the reality of God in his own life. One who daily walks and talks with Him can scarcely be persuaded God is dead!

God's child has seen demonstrated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth that God is. (John 14:9) He has come to know what God is like through the cross of Christ, and through the daily living of the eternal life bought for him there; especially in the practice of life-giving love. The Christian's life takes its source in his divine begetting and re-birth. He has been begotten of God.

The daily experience of facing his own guilt as well as the blessed cleansing from it, the practice of loving his brother in tangible demonstrable ways, and the personal confidence which he daily places in his atoning Friend . . . these are the certainties which come from experience. It is in these experiences that we know God is and that all else is "but refuse". (Phil. 3:1-11)

e. The final plea . . . v.21

(21) "Little children, guard yourselves from idolatry."

Ephesus, the cultural and religious center of influence in the area of Asia Minor, where John's readers lived, was the temple keeper of Diana. The whole tenor of the society was flavored by the presence of idols everywhere.

Since most of those John addresses as "dear children" had come out of such pagan background, there was the ever present danger of lapsing back into it. Gnosticism could easily form the catalyst that would make the lapsing even easier. It was, after all, a mixture of paganism with Christian philosophy.

The warning of verse 21 was more readily applicable to life in the first century than in our own time. That is not to say that it was any more needed then than now. Idolatry is a threat to the Gospel in any age. It happens that in our age of scientific sophistication the threat is more subtle than in past ages. However, this fact in itself makes the danger more deadly.

The word *eidolon* (idol) is from the root word *eid* meaning see. It is concerned with that which is seen, as opposed to that which is invisible. The making and worship of graven images is the most gross expression of life that is concerned primarily with the created rather than the Creator.

Romans 1:18-23 traces vividly the downward progression which results from refusal to have God in our knowledge or to glorify Him as Deity. The end result is the worship of "the likeness of an image".

We ought not think, however, that because our sciences have done away with the worship of stone gods that we are no longer subject to the fundamental threat of idolatry. The foot note on I John 5:21 in the *Oxford Annotated Bible*, (H. G. May and B. M. Metzger, Oxford Press, New York, New York, 1952) observes that idolatry is, "any rival of God".

I Cor. 10:14 seems to confirm this observation. The words of this Pauline passage are identical to those of our present text. Paul issues this warning immediately following the sweeping statement, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear, etc". This certainly includes "any rival of God".

From this it is easy to support the present preoccupation with rationalism, materialism, existentialism, scientism and humanism are, at their root, highly refined forms of idolatry. Just as did the worship of graven images, so have these modern philosophies "exchanged the truth (reality) of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . ." (Rom. 1:25)

Idolatry is essentially self-worship. It may take the form of some

animal associated symbolically with a particular lust. It may take the form of some good or evil in self. These are the gods of the Greeks and Romans.

Self-worship in modern times is more apt to be expressed in the worship of man's achievements and possessions. It is idolatry, nevertheless.

### E. *Questions for Review*

1. In addition to our experience in Christian living, we also may rely upon \_\_\_\_\_ to confirm the certainty of eternal life.
2. What is John's reason for writing I John, as stated in his own words?
3. How does this reason for writing correspond with his reason for writing the fourth Gospel?
4. Because man is created in the image of God and so can never cease to be, eternal life is more than mere \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Eternal life is that *kind* of life that finds its fullest expression in \_\_\_\_\_.
6. While life identified with this present world produces \_\_\_\_\_, eternal life produces \_\_\_\_\_. (Cf. Gal. 3:20-ff)
7. Believing into the name of the Son of God means \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Name five limitations which John places upon prayer \_\_\_\_\_.
9. What is the single exception to the certainty of prayer which meets these limitations?
10. Why does John discuss the certainty of prayer in this letter which deals with the evidences of eternal life?
11. Condemnation of a brother taken in sin is itself \_\_\_\_\_.
12. What significance do you attach to the fact the Bible never uses the term "unpardonable sin?"
13. What does John mean by "sinning sin toward death?"
14. "Going on sinning" describes a \_\_\_\_\_ rather than a \_\_\_\_\_.
15. List three distinct certainties upon which the child of God can stake his eternal life.
16. What is meant by "understanding" in I John 5:20?
17. A Christian not only does his best to avoid sin, he relies upon \_\_\_\_\_ to make up the differences between what he does and what he ought to do.



## SECOND JOHN

18. How is the danger of idolatry as present, and even more dangerous now than when John wrote?

### PART V II and III John

#### CHAPTER XVII

#### LETTER TO "THE ELECT LADY AND HER CHILDREN"

#### II John

##### A. *Background*

##### 1. Who wrote II John?

The majority of modern scholarship agrees that II John, as well as III John, is written by the author of the Fourth Gospel and I John. This is so obvious that many early scribes included second and third John as part of first John in their manuscripts. The term "the elder" with which the author addresses himself to his reader neither confirms nor denies this.

##### 2. To whom is it written?

The destination of the letter, initially, is not so well agreed upon. Theissen lists five views concerning the original recipient of Second John.

Jerome held that the letter is addressed to the whole church. Lightfoot, Brooke and Zahn contend that it is addressed to some particular local congregation. Wordsworth believed it was intended primarily for the church in Babylon. Others have held that it was addressed to some notable lady.

Among those who hold this latter view, there is disagreement. Law says it is addressed to one Lady Electa. Bengel believes that the Greek *kuria* (usually rendered "lady" in II John) is the Hellenistic form of the Hebrew Martha.

It is possible that Second John is a personal letter addressed to a Christian woman of some influence who was a personal friend and co-