

LESSON 11

THE MEANING OF SONSHIP

1 John 2:28-5:21

Introduction

The first two chapters of 1 John focus on the concept of fellowship, but the emphasis changes after 2:27. Some commentaries make the division at 2:29 and others at 3:1. This latter section of the book emphasizes the believers' filial relation to God. The expressions "begotten of God" and "children of God" become prominent in the last three chapters of the Epistle.

John used the term *tekna* for children rather than *huios* (son) which was frequently used by Paul. *Tekna* stresses birth, origin, and oneness of nature, while *huios* denotes dignity, status, and position. Paul's word is in keeping with the idea of adoption, and John's term is more in keeping with the idea of regeneration.¹

The Meaning of Being God's Children

2:28-3:10

Verse 28 is transitional and continues the thought in verse 27 of abiding in Christ. The expression "abide in him" is a command (imperative mood). It means that we are to centre our lives in the will of God which was set forth in the truth Christ taught. It also means that even as the branch is dependent on the vine, so we draw our strength for spiritual service from Christ. The reason for abiding in Christ is to avoid shame and disappointment when Christ comes again (v.28). Those who do not dwell in Christ will not have the spiritual strength to resist temptation even though they recognize their responsibility to be righteous (v.29).

God's children are to be righteous because of their divine origin (v. 29). God is righteous, and those who do righteousness are identified as His begotten children. To be born of God means that spiritual life comes from God. Righteousness is the evidence of this birth. Verse 29 does not mean that a person becomes a Christian by attempting to do right but that a person is enabled to do right because of his birth from above. Self-achieved righteousness will not stand up under divine scrutiny. Man apart from Christ can imitate divine righteousness to a degree, but only the

¹Curtis Vaughan, *1, 2, 3 John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 72.

The emphasis of the first two chapters of 1 John is the concept of _____.

The last three chapters emphasize the believers' relation

to _____

as _____.

(fellowship, God, children)

The command "abide in him" means to centre one's life in the _____ of _____ and depend on _____ for strength for service.

(will, God, Christ)

person who possesses divine spiritual resources lives a life for God rather than for self. Man can treat his neighbour fairly for selfish reasons. A person is willing to give his life in service for others only if he is controlled by divine love. Divine love is manifested through the righteous deeds which become the ruling principle of one's life.

The experiencing of God's love is evidence of being admitted to the family of God (3:1). The love of God was utterly amazing to John. He did not take it for granted but recognized that man does not deserve to be called a son of God. The bestowing of divine love means to be born of God in sonship. It is a great privilege to be called God's children. Those who are born of Him are not only called His children but really are His children. The children of God cannot expect the world to recognize them because it did not recognize Jesus as God's Son. The world's failure to make this recognition does not change reality: "Now are we the sons of God" (v.2).

The heritage of God's sons cannot be fully comprehended. God's children are marked by righteousness, but they also will be changed physically to be like Jesus. The full glory of the nature of the change will not be manifested until the return of Christ (v.2). John and the other disciples did not understand fully the nature of the resurrected body of Christ, but they were given the promise that in the resurrection or transformation they would be made like Him. Encouragement for living the Christian life is based on the hope of being like Christ when He returns (v.3). He is the Son of God, and we, as sons of God, will share with Him in victory over death and in fellowship with the Father. This confident expectation causes the child of God to separate himself from all that defiles him. Separation is accomplished by continuous moral and spiritual cleansing. Moral purification is not something that man can accomplish in his own strength, but he can appropriate the forgiveness and cleansing of Christ through His shed blood. The motive for Christian righteousness is hope in the return of Christ.

Righteousness is characteristic of those born of God, but life apart from Christ is characterized by sin which is defined as transgression of the law (v.4). The expression "committeth sin" is in the present tense and means the constant practice of sin. The root of the word for sin means "missing the mark," but John defined it as lawlessness. Lawlessness is rebellion against God. A person misses the mark in life by rebelling against the will of God. The person who is born of God centres his life in the will and plan of God.

Christ was sent into the world to take away our sins which means "to lift them up and carry them from us" (v.5). His death as a sacrifice for sins is the means by which they are removed from us. The Apostle John used both the singular and plural forms of the word sin. The plural form refers to the acts of sin. The singular form refers to man's sinful nature which produces wrong actions. Christ was manifested

Match the following:

- ___ 1. self-achieved righteousness
- ___ 2. divine righteousness
- a. willingness to give one's life in service for others
- b. just treatment of one's neighbour for selfish reasons

(b-1, a-2)

The basis of encouragement for living the Christian life is the _____ of being like _____ when _____ returns.

(hope, Christ, He)

What is the characteristic of—
those born of God? _____
those who live apart from Christ? _____

(righteousness, sin)

to remove the guilt of our sinful acts and to cause the believer to cease from being controlled by the nature of sin. Righteousness results when Christ controls one's life because "in him is no sin" (v.5). In other words, Christ was not controlled by sin. When He is allowed to control our lives, He does not guide us into sin (v.6).

Whoever practises sin obviously is not controlled by Christ who did not sin. The statement that a person who "abideth in him sinneth not" does not mean that no act of sin is ever committed. John had already stated that if anyone claims not to have committed an act of sin, he is a liar (1:10). On the other hand, the life of one in whom Christ abides is not characterized by continuous sin because that life is controlled by the sinless Christ.

Apparently some false teachers were stating that acts of sin were insignificant. They were deceiving some of the Christians into thinking that the spirit is not affected by the wrongs done by the flesh. John contradicted that teaching and insisted that one who is righteous in spirit (internal righteousness) is righteous in external conduct (v.7). Christ taught that righteousness was of the heart, but He also taught that the deeds of a man's life were consistent with his internal nature: "Ye shall know them by their fruits.... A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt.7:16,18). When Christ is given control of a person's life, his conduct is consistent with the righteous conduct of Christ (v.7).

He who commits sin continually is of the devil (v.8), which means to be controlled and used by him. The devil's nature is evil, and this nature is expressed in sinful deeds. He controls man by appealing to his sinful nature and by deceiving him into thinking that the satisfaction of lustful desires brings fullness of life. The devil has followed this approach from the beginning. He deceived Eve and Adam into thinking that seeking to satisfy their appetites was more important than obeying the Word of God. The Son of God was manifested to expose the fallacy of the devil's temptations. As the incarnate Word, Jesus revealed God's plan and demonstrated that to centre one's life in the will of God brings eternal life in place of condemnation.

Verse 9 appears to contradict what John stated in 1:8, 10. John said that if we deny having the nature or principle of sin we deceive ourselves (1:8). If we deny specific acts of sin, we are liars (1:10). In 3:9 John stated that the one who is born of God does not habitually practise sin (3:9). This does not mean that occasional acts of sin are never committed. John said that those occasional acts are taken care of by Jesus Christ who is our Advocate (2:1ff.). The person born of God cannot live a life characterized by sin because the seed of God (the Holy Spirit) abides within him and controls his life in doing the will of God (v.9). The habitual practice of sin becomes an impossibility because in conversion a person yields his

READ 1 JOHN 3:6.

Whoever abides in Christ does not _____ sin
although he may commit an _____ sin.

(practise, occasional)

Compare the following verses.

1 John 1:8--If we deny having the _____
of sin, we deceive ourselves.

1 John 1:10--If we deny committing specific
_____ of sin, we are liars.

1 John 3:9--If we are controlled by Christ,
we do not habitually _____
sin, but we may commit an occa-
sional _____ of sin.

(nature, acts, practise, act)

life to the control of the indwelling Christ who commits no sin. Paul tells us that the old man of sin continues to abide within the believer and may occasionally regain control, but he is not permitted to maintain control.

John's emphasis is that a person who has been renewed spiritually will not continue sinful outward acts. The Gnostic doctrine that the flesh is evil within itself but does not affect the spirit is in error. A person's external activities cannot be separated from his internal nature. The children of God and the children of the devil are known by their conduct (v.10). Righteous conduct is evidence that a person is a child of God. Unrighteous conduct is evidence that a person is a child of the devil. Love is the standard by which conduct is measured (v.10).

The Mark of God's Children

3:11-18

John's teachings concerning righteousness led him to define righteousness in terms of love. Love must be understood as the opposite of selfishness and hatred. Love is the strong concern for those in need and the expression of that concern in sacrificial giving. Selfishness takes advantage of the other person for one's personal gain. To love one another is to do charitable deeds in meeting the needs of one another (v.11). Cain was an example of one who is filled with hatred or selfishness rather than love. He was not concerned about the welfare of his brother but was controlled by jealousy and selfishness (v.12). The wicked one usurped Cain's natural instinct of self-preservation and pride and gained control of him. Rather than rejoicing in the good fortune which came to his brother Abel, Cain became enraged and slew him (v.12). His actions revealed that he was controlled by the wicked one who attempts to destroy works of righteousness.

Christians who live righteous lives can expect opposition from the world which is under the control of the wicked one (v.13). Love for the brethren attests that we have passed from the world which is under the condemnation of death into fellowship with God which is eternal life (v.14). Physical death is separation of the spirit from the body; spiritual death is separation of man from God. Created life is dependent on God, and man separated from God does not have life but a death-kind of existence. Whoever hates his brother remains in the realm of death and under the condemnation of God. A person knows that he loves and has life when he is willing to sacrifice to meet the needs of others. He knows he does not have love when his prevailing desire is to take from others. This kind of life is described as hating one's brother and is equated with murder in verse 15. A murderer cannot claim to have eternal life.

What is the standard by which love is measured? _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

A life in fellowship with God is characterized by _____.

A death-kind of existence in separation from God is characterized by _____.

(love, hatred)

The nature of love was demonstrated by Christ who laid down His life for us (v.16). The cross was not an act of selfishness in which Christ attempted to dominate the world for His own gain, but it was the giving of Himself for the benefit of the world. Since the Christian's conduct reveals whether he is of God, he ought to lay down his life for others (v.16). Christians are indebted to Christ and should follow His example. Self-giving love may not require physical death, but it does require a life of service for others. God who created man also created material provisions to meet his needs. These goods are to be shared with all and not hoarded by a few. If one has accumulated material possessions and sees someone in need, the love of God dwelling within compels that person to share with the needy (v.17). God's love is not merely a feeling within. Neither is it genuine when expressed only in words (v.18). True love must be expressed by meeting the needs of the other person. Love expressed in action is the mark of God's children.

The Assurance of our Standing with God

3:19-4:6

When we do the will of God instead of our own will, we know by experience that we are of the truth (v.19).

The truth is God's will revealed in the teachings of Jesus. An obedient child is not fearful to face his father; his conscience assures him when he accomplishes what his father has commanded. A person with a good conscience does not fear to stand before his heavenly Father (v.20). A person whose heart convicts him because he has not loved in deed according to the will of God can expect an even more severe indictment from the omniscient God (v.20). If a man's conscience lets him know he is guilty, he can be sure that God knows even more than his conscience.

The person who has done the will of God and whose heart does not condemn him can approach God with confidence (v.21). This boldness enables him to make requests of the Father without any hesitation (v.22). He knows that he will receive what he requests because his life is controlled by God's will or commandments. The person whose life is controlled by God asks for those things which are pleasing to God (v.22).

John pointed out again that God's commandment is twofold: believing on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and loving one another (v.23). To believe on the name of Christ as the Son of God means to accept His teachings that He is the Messiah. The Messiah is the King who rules over His subjects; therefore, to believe on Him means to be ruled by Him. To be controlled by Christ leads to loving others, for He has revealed Himself as love which is expressed through His reign. Whoever believes in Jesus as Christ in obedience to God's commandment abides in Christ, and

God's love is not merely a _____,
nor is it expressed only in _____.
God's love must be expressed in _____.

(feeling, words, action)

An obedient Christian can approach God with _____.
An obedient Christian's petitions will be in accord with God's _____.

(confidence, will)

the resurrected Christ dwells in him (v.24). Christ dwells within us through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us in the birth from above (see John 3:3,5).

The indwelling Spirit does not control a believer apart from his understanding and commitment of his will. The Spirit of truth is essential for man to understand the words and will of God. There are false spirits who also attempt to control man's thinking. They guide the false prophets who go about teaching error (4:1). Since spirits are invisible, they cannot be recognized physically. Their identity can be determined, however, by what they teach (v.2). The Spirit of truth and the spirits of the deceiver manifest their teachings through prophets. If the prophets proclaim that Jesus is the Christ (divine Son of God) who has come in human flesh, they are guided by the Spirit of God (v.2). If they claim that the fleshly body of Jesus Christ was only an appearance, they are not of God (v.3). The teachers who disseminate this information are antichrists who are controlled by the spirit of the devil. Antichrists were expected to appear before the return of Christ, and John stated that they were already present (v.3). The attitude of the prophets towards Jesus Christ identifies the spirit which works in their lives.

The origin of the belief that antichrists would appear before the return of Christ is obscure. The Jews believed that the Messiah would be sent at a critical time when the people of God were facing destruction by their enemies. Jesus predicted that before His second advent there would be many false messiahs and false prophets. He cautioned the disciples not to be deceived. He stated that wars, famines, tribulations, and persecutions which threaten the existence of the people of God would not be signs regarding His return. Paul spoke of a falling away, a defection of Christians, prior to the return of Christ. A man of lawlessness would appear as the son of perdition. He would take his seat in the temple of God and claim to be God himself. He would be empowered by Satan and would be able to perform signs and wonders, deceiving those who were about to perish. The coming of Christ would reveal the man of lawlessness and slay him with the breath of His mouth.

At the end of the first century, the Testament of Hezekiah presented a fully developed antichrist tradition. It spoke of a falling away and much disorder in the Church in the last days. The demonic ruler of this world was called Beliar. He appeared in human likeness as the lawless king (Nero) who killed his mother. He persecuted the Church and put to death one of the Twelve. He called himself god and performed miracles and wonders. Many were deceived by him and followed him during his three and a half years' rule, but others faithfully awaited the Lord's return. When Christ appeared with His angels and heavenly army, He defeated Beliar and his armies and consigned them to Gehenna (hell). The theme of false Christs and antichrists appears also in the Book of Revelation.

Is this statement true or false?

The Spirit of God controls a believer only when the believer consciously commits his will to the Spirit. _____

(true)

CONTINUE READING THROUGH THE NEXT PARAGRAPH OF THE TEXT BEFORE DOING THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE.

Match the following types of deceivers with their characteristics.

- ___ 1. antichrists
- ___ 2. false messiahs
- ___ 3. man of lawlessness

- a. would perform signs and wonders through Satan's power
- b. deny the fleshly body of Christ
- c. claim to be deliverers

(b-1, c-2, a-3)

Although the little children to whom John wrote were weak and immature, they had no reason to fear the false teachers or antichrists. They had been able to resist the deceptive teachings of the antichrists because of the Spirit of God which dwelt within them; however, the struggle against error was not over. The victory would continue to be certain since the indwelling Spirit of truth was stronger than the spirits that were given to the false prophets by Satan. He who is in the Christian is the Spirit of God, and he who is in the world is the spirit of Satan (v.4). The spirit of Satan indwells false prophets and causes them to speak of the world, and those who remain in the world listen to false prophets (v.5). Teachers who are guided by the Spirit of God can be sure that those who know God will accept the truths taught by them (v.6). Since the world hears and follows the false prophet, the size of the crowd is no indication of whether or not the prophet is of God or of the devil.

In the present time as in the day of John's writing, the struggle against _____ continues.

(error)

The content of the message proclaimed and the character of the audience attracted indicate whether the prophet is an antichrist or a teacher guided by the Spirit of truth (v.6). Both the Spirit of truth and the spirits of error use men as their instruments. Those who confess Christ as the incarnate Son of God give evidence that they speak under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and by His power. Those who deny that Christ, the Son of God, came in the flesh, give evidence that they are inspired by the spirits of Satan.

The Source of Christian Love

4:7-12

John had spoken previously of love as the great commandment which is required of one in fellowship with God. He returned to the subject in a passage which stands along with the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel and 1 Corinthians 13 as the loftiest passages in the New Testament. In this passage, he developed the subject of love more fully. He spoke of the love of God for man, of man for God, and of man for his brother.

Three words in the Greek language have been translated love. *Eros* denotes primarily sexual desire. It is not found in the New Testament. *Philia* refers to the affection of friendship. The noun occurs only in James 4:4, but the cognate verb (*phileo*) is found more frequently and is used with reference to family relationships. *Agape* is the most common word for love in the New Testament, but it was seldom used in non-biblical writings. This word and its cognates are used 34 times in the next eighteen verses (1 John 4:7-5:3). It is best defined in its biblical usage as the sacrificial giving of self in meeting needs of others.

John's appeal to the little children to love one another was a request that went beyond human ability (v.7). John affirmed that love is of God; that is, it

Identify the Greek words for love.

- _____ 1. The most common word for love in the New Testament, the sacrificial giving of self
- _____ 2. The affection of friendship and used with reference to family relationships
- _____ 3. Sexual desire

(Compare your answers with the text.)

has its origin and source in God. Only those who are born of God and know God are able to keep this commandment. Those who do not know God are unable to love, but those who know Him are characterized by love, for God is love (v.8). Christians are often distressed by the fact that they are unable to keep this commandment. They try but do not find within themselves the necessary love. What John was saying is that the Christian is able to meet this requirement because God who abides within him is love. The indwelling Christ loves through the life of the believer. Man must recognize his own inability to love and ask God to love through him. The Christian has the assurance that God will honour his prayers because God answers those requests which are pleasing in His sight (3:22). A Christian differs from a man of the world because God who is love abides within him and loves the unlovable through Him.

The cross is the supreme manifestation of love. God loved by sending His Son into the world to die. The Son demonstrated His love by laying down His life for His friends (John 15:13). Paul reminds us that God expressed His love towards us by giving His Son to die for us while we were sinners and His enemies (Rom. 5:8ff.). Love did not originate with man but with God (v.10). We are able to love one another because God originated love and placed it within the lives of the believers (v.11). Our love for one another is evidence that God dwells in us (v.12). Perhaps the statement that God's love is perfected in us means that our living lives of love is how God who is love expresses Himself. The way the people of the world experience God's love is through His Son and through His children.

The Perfection of Love

4:13-21

The indwelling Holy Spirit is the seal and assurance of our union with God (v.13). Our dwelling in Him means that our lives are centred in His will and are sustained by His power. His dwelling in us means that His spiritual presence is housed in our bodies and is the means by which His work is accomplished.

The truth of our union with the Father is based on the experience and testimony of the apostles who had been with Jesus (v.14). They saw His supernatural works which were signs of His relation to the Father, and they heard His teachings that He would die in order to redeem the world from the power of Satan (v.14). The witness of the Spirit that we dwell in God and He in us is supported by the witness of the apostles. This union is brought about by believing and publicly acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God (v.15). To confess Jesus means to say with God that He is the Messiah and the divine Son. The Jews denied this truth because they rejected both His teaching that the Messiah would die and His claim that a human being was the divine Son of God.

Those in whom God abides are characterized by _____, for God is _____.

(love, love)

READ 1 JOHN 4:12 AGAIN.

God's love is expressed through believers who love, and thus His love is _____.

(perfected)

The death of Christ on the cross demonstrated God's love for us (v.16). It not only revealed that God loves us but manifested the very essence of God as love. It is not enough to know that God is love, but we must abide in His love. The divine indwelling makes possible the expression of love.

The reference in verse 17 to the perfection of our love does not mean that anyone loves God perfectly. It does mean that when God's love has been completed in us, we will have no fear in the day of judgement. The person who fears judgement is he who has not been redeemed and sanctified by God's work of love. Those who have been redeemed can claim Christ-likeness in this world. All fear of God who is righteous is replaced by love when we become sons of God (v.18). Fear of judgement brings torment, but God's completed work of love which makes us His sons brings peace within. The redeemed no longer fear because they know that in love God gave His Son as a propitiation for their sins. Fear and sin are removed, and love and peace fill the heart of the believer (v.19).

After pointing out the relation between the indwelling Spirit and love, John emphasized again that it is impossible for a person in whom love has replaced fear to hate his brother (v.20). It is not enough to say that we love the invisible God, but in order for that love to be complete it must be expressed in relation to the visible children of God (v.21). Love is perfected or completed when it is expressed in actions and deeds.

The Necessity of Faith

5:1-12

John's Gospel emphasizes faith or belief that Jesus is the Christ. This teaching is not central in the First Epistle, but it is referred to—faith is that which makes one a child of God (v.1). When Nicodemus asked Jesus what he must do to be born from above, Jesus replied that he must believe His teachings that the Son of Man had come down from heaven, would die on the cross, and would ascend back to heaven. The teaching that the Messiah must die on the cross was a stumbling-block to faith. After the resurrection, the disciples understood that the Messiah could be with them in the flesh only for a limited time. However, He would abide with His disciples in the person of the Holy Spirit after His ascension. The death, resurrection, and ascension had to happen for man to be born of God and to possess divine love.

If one loves God, he will love those whom God has begotten (v.2). Obeying God's commandment to love does not mean that one must put forth effort to do something he despises but that he expresses the love which God has placed in his heart (v.3). The Christian does not succeed in living the Christian life by his own efforts, but he succeeds as a result of

First John 4:18b states that perfect love casts out _____.

(fear)

Jesus taught that—

one is born of God by believing that the Son of Man had come down from _____, that He would die on the _____, and that He would ascend back to _____.

(heaven, cross, heaven)

what has been done for him in regeneration (v. 4). Living the Christian life is not by performance or personal effort but by faith. John had just stated previously that this faith brings about union with God by the indwelling of divine love which is to be expressed; therefore, the commandment to love is fulfilled and the world is overcome. Love overcomes the world because the person controlled by love lives a life that shows concern in sacrificial deeds. Worldliness describes the person who has no concern for others and lives for self. Faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God is the means by which the world is overcome (v. 5).

Since the personal name "Jesus" represents His humanity and the title "Son of God" points to His divinity, faith in Jesus as the Son of God emphasizes the union of humanity and deity in the one person.² In verse 6, John spoke of Jesus Christ. Since the Messianic Scriptures of the Old Testament called the Messiah the Son of God, the two expressions are synonymous.

The meaning of His coming by water and blood is not explained by John and has received various interpretations. Curtis Vaughan's interpretation appears to fit the context of the Epistle more satisfactorily than others. He points out that the heresy being combated by John differentiated between the man Jesus and the divine Christ.³ The Gnostics held that Jesus was a mere man upon whom the divine Christ came when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him at His baptism. They taught also that the divine Christ departed before Jesus died; therefore, divinity did not suffer on the cross. John asserted that Jesus at the time of His baptism and crucifixion was the Christ, the Son of God.

The Spirit of truth bore witness at Jesus' baptism that He is the Son of God (v. 6). As Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit descended on Him in the likeness of a dove and the heavenly voice proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:16f.). The Spirit of prophecy inspired Jesus and Caiaphas to predict His death in order that the disciples would believe when the event came to pass (see John 11:50f.; 12:24-30; 13:19; 19:24, 28-37). Matthew emphasized that the Jews challenged Jesus while He was on the cross to give some evidence that He was the Son of God. Matthew saw significance in the three hours of darkness, the renting of the temple veil, the earthquake, and the opening of the graves at the time of Jesus' death (27:43-53).

Evidence that Jesus was the Christ was given by three heavenly witnesses: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit (v. 7). The voice at the baptism was that of the heavenly Father. The Word which taught that the Messiah must die had come down from heaven,

²Curtis Vaughan, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 118.

³Ibid., p. 119.

How is the world overcome? _____

(through faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God)

Compare the Gnostic view and John's teaching concerning Jesus' divinity.

Gnostic - _____

John - _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

and the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven. These three heavenly witnesses were related to earthly experiences which said the same thing about Jesus: the Spirit (Pentecost), the water (baptism), and the blood (crucifixion—v. 8). Jesus had promised that when He ascended to the Father He would send the Holy Spirit. The disciples' experience of receiving the Spirit on the day of Pentecost gave evidence that the Son had ascended back to the Father. At Jesus' baptism (the water), earthly witness was given of Jesus by the descending visible Spirit and the audible heavenly voice which proclaimed Him to be the Son of God. Jesus had predicted His crucifixion (the blood) and had taught that it was according to God's will. The fulfilment of His prediction and the demonstration of divine approval of His life and death by the resurrection gave evidence that Jesus was of God. The disciples had seen the resurrected Christ. The earthly experiences of the disciples along with the heavenly witnesses left no doubt that Jesus was the Son of God.

Using the key words below, list three earthly experiences which give evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.

1. Pentecost - _____
2. Jesus' baptism - _____
3. The crucifixion - _____

(1. Receiving of the Holy Spirit by the disciples, 2. The visible Spirit and audible voice proclaimed Jesus the Son of God, 3. The fulfilment of Jesus' own prediction)

According to Jewish Law, two witnesses were required to establish truth. Since the witness of God is greater than that of men, there could be no question that Jesus was the Son of God (v.9). The legal requirement of two had been surpassed in number and value by the three earthly and heavenly witnesses.

The coming of the Spirit to dwell within the believer means also the _____ and the _____ are present.

(Son, Father)

In addition to the heavenly and earthly witnesses, whoever believes on the Son of God experiences an internal witness (v.10). This internal witness is the gift of eternal life which comes through the forgiveness of sins and birth by the Spirit. To refuse to believe the witness God has given is to declare God a liar by one's actions. The eternal life which is given to those who believe is defined as having the Son (v.12). According to John's Gospel, the coming of the Spirit to dwell within the believer means that the Son and the Father are present. He who does not believe is not united with the Son of God; therefore, he does not have eternal life.

Assurance for Those Who Believe

5:13-21

The emphasis of this passage is assurance of salvation. The word "know" is used seven times. Six times it is a translation of the Greek word *oida*, which means to know intuitively in contrast to knowing through experience. John stated that he wrote this Epistle in order that his readers would know intuitively that they had eternal life (v.13). It is possible for every regenerate man to have an inner knowledge of his relationship to God. "To know that you have eternal life" describes an abiding conviction which rests on known facts. Only those who believe in the name of the Son of God have access to this assurance. The Fourth Gospel was written that its readers might receive eternal life, but the Epistle was written to those

who had believed in order that they would have assurance of eternal life.

John indicated that he had mentioned several things in the Epistle which give assurance of salvation. He indicated in 2:3 and 5 that keeping God's commandments and words is essential for assurance. He said in 3:6-10 that God's indwelling seed guides a life to do righteousness and gives assurance of salvation. Love expressed in deeds for one's brothers is essential (3:14-21). Believing on the Son of God brings assurance because of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit (5:10). Although some hold that a person cannot have eternal life without knowing it, verse 13 implies that one may be a believer and may have eternal life without having definite assurance about the matter.

Another assurance of salvation was added in verse 14. Confidence with reference to eternal life leads to confidence in prayer. The believer knows that his life is in accord with God's will and that God is able to bring about His will; therefore, he knows that his prayers are heard. Since the believer knows that God hears whatever he asks, he knows further that God will grant the petitions made (v.15). One specific example of praying according to God's will is prayer for a brother who sins (v.16). Such prayer will be so effective that the offending brother will be given life. Eternal life is more than existence. It is a relationship of bliss with the heavenly Father. Sin robs man of the joy in the Christian life. Petition for the sinning brother who has lost the joy of his salvation will lead to his restoration.

John makes a distinction between sins which deprive of joy in the Christian life and sins which bring condemnation and death. A person who rejects Jesus as the Son of God is guilty of sin unto death. A Christian who disobeys God by failing to love his brother or to do the will of God loses the joy of his salvation. John encouraged Christians to pray for offending brothers, but he did not encourage prayer for those who deny that Jesus is the Christ. However, he did not prohibit prayer for them. Apparently John discouraged praying for those who had been taught that Jesus is the Son of God but had denied "the Father and the Son" (see 2:22).

All unrighteousness is serious (v.17). Disobedience deprives the Christian of joy in God's presence, but rejection separates a person from God's presence. A person separated from God is assigned to the realm of the wicked one. A person who has been regenerated does not practise sin habitually (v.18). The use of the present tense of the verb does not deny that an occasional sin is committed, but it does deny that the regenerate person can sin continually, for God keeps him (v.18). The Greek text which states that God keeps a person and the evil one does not touch him is preferred to another which says that the person keeps himself from the evil one. The person whose life is in God through faith is controlled by Christ and does not live a life characterized by sin. The wicked one cannot regain control of his life.

READ THIS PARAGRAPH AND THE NEXT OF THE TEXT BEFORE DOING THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE.

A believer has assurance of his salvation by:

1. *keeping God's _____,*
2. *living _____ under the Spirit's _____,*
3. *loving his _____,*
4. *experiencing the internal witness of the _____,*
5. *having confidence in _____.*

(1. commandments; 2. righteously, guidance; 3. brothers; 4. Spirit; 5. prayer)

State the result for each of the following:

A Christian who sins— _____

A person who rejects Jesus as the Son of God— _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

John divided people into two realms: those who belong to God and those who belong to the wicked one (v.19). Since man is a creature, he does not live independently but under the control of either God or Satan. The fact that man is a rational being means that supernatural control over him involves either truth or falsehood. The Son of God has come to give man an understanding of God who is the truth (v.20). Satan or the devil is the adversary of God and the deceiver of man. Satan controls rational man by deceiving him, but God guides him by revealing to him the truth. Gnostics claimed a knowledge of the truth, but actually they were deceived since they denied that Jesus was the Christ who had come in the flesh. The coming of Christ made possible a true knowledge of God through an experiential relationship with His Son. This knowledge is genuine as opposed to the counterfeit knowledge claimed by the Gnostics. True knowledge brings man into a vital union with God the Father through union with His Son (v.20). To be in Christ is to be in God. The God made known in Christ is the true God who is the source of eternal life.

God controls man by revealing to him the _____.

Satan controls man by _____ him.

(truth, deceiving)

Conclusion

5:21

John had set forth the assurance of salvation through faith in Jesus the Son of God. His concluding exhortation was to guard against idolatry which possibly embraced all false conceptions of God. Concepts of God outside of Christ do not bring true knowledge of God and eternal life.

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. How does the emphasis of 1 John change after chapter 2? _____

2. Explain how one abides in Christ. _____

3. Distinguish between self-achieved righteousness and divine righteousness. _____

4. What relation does Christian hope have to righteousness? _____

5. Interpret 3:6. _____

6. Reconcile John 3:9 with 1:8, 10. _____

7. How can a person know that he has passed from death unto life? _____

8. How are a Christian's petitions affected by obedience? _____

9. How does the indwelling Spirit control a believer? _____

10. Name three types of deceivers through whom the devil will work before the return of Christ.

11. Distinguish between the three Greek words for love. _____

12. What is the source of Christian love? _____

13. What is the meaning of the perfection of our love? _____

14. How is one born of God? _____

15. Interpret 5:6. _____

16. What three earthly experiences give witness to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God? _____

17. List five ways a person can know that he is saved. _____

18. Interpret 5:16. _____

19. How do Satan and God control rational man? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). Read pages 74-136 in Alexander and answer the following questions.

1. According to Alexander, why did John use children of God rather than sons of God when referring to Christians?
2. What Gnostic beliefs did John refute in 3:1-10?
3. Outline John's teachings on love in 3:11-19.
4. How are false prophets identified?
5. Outline the section on God is Love in 4:7-5:4.

Advanced activity (Level 3)

1. What are the activities of the Holy Spirit in 1 John 3-5?
2. Explain the apparent contradiction in 1 John 3:9 and 1:8-10.

Seminar Discussion

1. According to 1 John 3:9, does a Christian sin? Explain.
2. Define the concept of hate and love as set forth in 1 John.
3. What are the bases of Christian assurance?
4. How does a Christian love?
5. How is love made perfect?
6. Explain 1 John 5:4.
7. To what do water and blood refer, and what are the three heavenly and three earthly witnesses that Jesus is the Christ?
8. What is the sin unto death?