

**Subject: *Straight Talk about Real Believers***

**Scripture: *1 John 5:18-21***

We come to the final part of this epistle. John concludes with a reality check. He is the apostle of certainty. John's one aim is to reveal the difference between what is true and what is false, between what is real and what is fake.

Several years ago the Coca-Cola Company introduced a product they called "New Coke." That caused a big uproar and so they reintroduced the old Coke and called it "Coke Classic." People wanted the real thing, and for years the company used that as their slogan: "Coke: It's the Real Thing."

Well folks, we're not talking about a soft drink or an ad campaign. We're talking about something far more important: a real God, a real Savior, and the real Christian life He gives. We're talking about real believers who have real assurance. We're talking about spiritual reality. We're talking about Heaven and Hell, life and death, believers and make-believers. At the close of this letter John reminds us of four important marks of real believers:

### **1. Real believers are born of God**

This is not the first time John described believers as being born of God or born again.

- **1 John 2:29** *If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.*
- **1 John 3:9** *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*
- **1 John 4:7** *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*
- **1 John 5:1** *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.*
- **1 John 5:4** *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

This emphasis on the new birth of believers is also found in the Gospel of John.

- **John 1:12-13** <sup>12</sup> *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: <sup>13</sup> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*
- **John 3:5-8** <sup>5</sup> *Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. <sup>8</sup> The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

Real believers are literally "born from above" or born of God. We can't actually see the new birth take place, but we know when it happens. We can see the evidence, the changes that happen in a person's life. With new birth comes new life, a new heart, a new mind, new

desires, a new direction, new goals, new choices. Everything becomes new. Believers are not just nice people; they are new creatures. Nothing else will take the place of being born again.

- **2 Corinthians 5:17** *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*
- **2 Peter 1:4** *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

## **2. Real believers overcome sin and Satan**

This is not the first time John described believers overcoming sin and Satan.

- **1 John 2:14** *I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*
- **1 John 3:9** *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*

If you are a real believer, one who is born of God, one who is a partaker of the divine nature, you will not go on living in an unbroken pattern of sin. This doesn't mean a believer reaches a point in life where he never sins. People who make that claim are liars (1 Jn. 1:8, 10). The point is that believers have a pattern of holiness and righteousness whereas unbelievers have a pattern of sin and unrighteousness. This is God's purpose in saving us. He saves us from the penalty of sin (justification), from the power of sin (sanctification), and from the presence of sin (glorification).

- **Galatians 1:4** *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:*

Scripture says that the power of sin over believers has been broken and it can't dominate their lives (Rom. 6:17-22).

## **3. Real believers know the true God and His Son Jesus**

As John finishes the letter, he comes full circle. He began by stating that Jesus came as the Word of life and now he closes by stating that Jesus has come so we can know God and have eternal life. What could be more important? The word "true" means genuine or real in contrast to what is phony or counterfeit. Real believers have an understanding that we may know Christ and be in Christ. That means we have a personal knowledge of Christ and personal union with Him. It is the very thing that Jesus described in His priestly prayer.

- **John 17:3** *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. This is the greatest and highest privilege any person on earth can have.*
- **Jeremiah 9:23-24**<sup>23</sup> *Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:*<sup>24</sup> *But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*

#### **4. Real believers reject all false gods**

What did John mean in verse 21, and how does it apply to us today? It is likely that John wrote this letter from Ephesus, a city where he served as pastor and the city known as the main center for the worship of the goddess Diana. Some years earlier Paul came to Ephesus and challenged this idol worship by preaching the gospel of Christ.

Idolatry was common in the New Testament world and it is still widespread. An idol is a false god, a substitute, a replacement for the one true God. An idol is anything or anyone you worship, trust, or serve instead of the one true God. An idol can be material possessions or money.

- **Ephesians 5:5** *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

Sometimes idols took the form of images made of wood or stone. Sometimes they were carved in the form of men or animals. An idol may be a physical object made to represent God. When Aaron made the golden calf when Moses was on Mt. Sinai, it was designed to represent God.

Another kind of idol is one made in a person's mind, not with his hands. Any false ideas about God and Jesus Christ become an idol or false god. For this reason we must stay in the Word and see how God reveals Himself and how Jesus Christ reveals Himself. We must know and believe and worship the true God and His Son Jesus. No one else will do.

The one true God and His Son Jesus are the only source of eternal life. A person may be religious and have good intentions, but if you don't have the real God and the real Jesus you won't have real salvation and eternal life. It's just like taking a trip and thinking you are going in the right direction. To get to your destination you must be on the right road. If you're on the wrong road, it doesn't matter if you have good intentions or good feelings, it won't change the fact you're on the wrong road. John warns us to keep ourselves from false ideas about God and Jesus Christ. We must have the real God and the real Savior, Jesus Christ. They demand real faith and real repentance, and they promise a real heaven to real believers.