

Spiritual Victory in a Hostile World

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Welcome to Truth Community Fellowship on this Mother's Day, May 13, 2012. I'm Don Green and as the pastor of Truth Community, I want to welcome all of our regular attenders and all of you visitors that are here on this Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day to you moms out there, and we are delighted to have you with us here today.

We're doing another video and I'm hoping this one goes a little better than the last one we did. We had a few tech glitches as our regulars will remember, but we've made plans to work those out so that we don't have a similar problem in this particular video here today. So we're glad that you're here and it's a great time for you to be here. I'm really excited for you to be with us on today because this is a landmark day in the life of Truth Community Fellowship. We're going to start a new study, a book study in the New Testament that I know is going to have a significant impact on the spiritual life of our Fellowship and on the spiritual lives of our members that are here and as people come and go, I just know that the Lord of the word is going to use his word to accomplish what he desires. Scripture says that the word of God is like rain that comes down from heaven and doesn't return there without accomplishing what God desires and without succeeding in the matter for which he sent it, and here today we're going to open a study on the book of 1 John in the New Testament and it's going to be a book that we'll spend several weeks on, probably even a few months going through verse by verse, and I'm really excited because I know what lies ahead in our lives for the coming months as we go through this wonderful book, this wonderful study. And if you're interested in really letting this have the best impact on you that it possibly can, I'd encourage you to make it a goal over the next few weeks to just read through 1 John every day for four weeks, let's say. Just read it chapter 1 through chapter 5, chapter 1 through chapter 5, day after day, and as you start to imprint that book on your mind and then simultaneously be hearing it expounded Sunday after Sunday, you're going to see the word of God have a tremendous impact on your life that is going to give you joy, it's going to increase your sanctification, and it's going to give you a greater assurance of salvation if you are a true Christian. This is a great spiritual opportunity for us and I'm grateful to the Lord that we can do this together and to be able to look forward to it.

Today what I want to do is introduce the book to you in a very broad overview fashion. I have found over the years that it's helpful when you study a book verse by verse to have the big picture in mind and then let the verse by verse exposition fill in the details

because the biblical writers usually had big themes that they were communicating and then they would fill those themes in with details as they went through in what we now have as verse by verse in our Bibles. Those big themes are what we really want to focus on here this morning out of 1 John and it's going to be a wonderful time together.

This book, 1 John, was a letter that the Apostle John wrote as he was reaching the age of about 90 years old. He was writing in the early 90s A.D. and he was coming to the end of his life and he was writing this letter to help young emerging Christians, emerging in the sense that they were new in the faith and they were coming up and these churches had believers that were struggling. John wrote this as one of the last New Testament books and it's almost an apostolic swansong to the church as John finished these letters and wrote the book of Revelation. Revelation ceased, God's word to men ceased because the Canon was closed and so here in 1 John, one of the last letters written, we have one of the last direct words from God that is recorded in Scripture, chronologically speaking, and so it's a special book from that perspective.

Then along with that, what we have here is that John wrote this apparently as a circular letter. What I mean by that is it was meant to go to several different churches, several different individuals. We believe that because there are no churches mentioned by name in the book like there are in Paul's letters when he wrote to Rome or to the church in Philippi or Colossae or the churches in Galatia. You don't have that in 1 John. You don't have those specific references to churches or geographic locations and so, as such, there's a particularly broad application to this letter. It has general broad principles that are good across time in a way that is going to be useful to us. You see, first century Christians were facing particular problems in their time and culture and the problems that we have today might look on the surface to be different but the truth of the matter is that God's word is timeless and the principles that would help those Christians back in the first century are the same principles that help us in the 21st century 2,000 years later because God's word is timeless and has an enduring value, an enduring power to help the people of God live as God would have them to do. So those principles that worked in the first century are going to help us here in the 21st century as well. The principles at work here in Los Angeles, California are the principles that are going to edify believers in northern Kentucky as well so we love the word of God.

We're delighted to turn to it and with that in mind, if you haven't done so already, I'd encourage you to turn in your Bible to the book of 1 John. The book of 1 John. Now, John as he wrote this letter as we kind of get into the introduction now, John was aware that his readers were facing a hostile environment. The world is a hostile spiritual environment to Christians. This world isn't our home and as you're going to see in the exposition that comes in the next several minutes, the world does not provide an environment that is warm and embracing to us as Christians. That's why we have difficulties, it's because we live in a hostile environment. But the beauty of this book is that John is writing so that his readers and by extension to us today, we would have spiritual victory even though we're living in the midst of this hostile environment that surrounds us.

Here in 1 John, false teachers had confused his readers. They were lacking spiritual clarity. It was impacting their spiritual life. They were discouraged and they were struggling with sin and they were even wondering if they were true Christians at all. They had a lack of assurance of their salvation and that's what always happens when false teachers insinuate themselves into the church of God, the believers who are there suffer. So what God has done in his grace, what he did for them back in the first century and which we bring forward and helps us today is God has given a clear word through the Apostle John that strengthens us and enables us to overcome those hostile forces so that we are able to live the Christian life with a sense of victory, a sense of confidence, and with enduring spiritual growth as we go through our pilgrimage here on this earth. It's really exciting to realize what a treasure we have in God's word, and that should give you hope as we go forward.

I just want to say a word to those of you that are in the audience. I know that there are some of you that just feel and are conscious of the fact that you're just spiritually lost. You don't know where to turn and you're not really certain about the direction of your spiritual life, let alone your earthly life. Well, let me invite you to the word of God this morning as we come here. God has brought you into this audience today, God is opening up his word to us today so that it would help us, so that it would strengthen us. We serve a good God. Our heavenly Father who saved us also wants to assist us in our spiritual growth. It's a wonderful thought, isn't it? Well, the way that he helps us is when we look to his word and see what he has to say. That's where we find our strength. So if you're feeling that sense of lostness and need help, you're in the right place today.

And for those of us that are Christians, let me say something to you that I want you to listen carefully to. If you're a Christian and you have a sense of assurance of your salvation, you still need to be aware of something really important. We do live in a hostile environment. We live in an environment that is not conducive to our spiritual growth. We are in an environment that would hinder our growth and even try to shoot us down and make us fail. Enemy forces work to undermine your joy and confidence. Well look, I want to say that trials and temptations and some of the past history that you may have had with difficult spiritual leaders, all of that is to be understood, that there are these hostile forces that make it difficult for us, but grasp this more important point: God has given provision for us to grow spiritually as we go through this life.

And what I'm going to do here as I introduce the book of 1 John to you, is that we're going to break this overview into two halves really. The first half of the message is going to consider the problem of this world; we're going to look at the problem of this world, what it is about this world that makes it difficult to live the Christian life, what makes it a challenge at times for us to maintain our joy and spiritual growth. We're going to look at that and identify some of the elements of the problem of this world but then secondly, and what John wrote to really encourage us with, is that we're going to see the provision of God. The provision that our Father in heaven has made so that we as his children can overcome the world so that despite these hostile forces, we can live a life of joy and assurance and spiritual growth that brings honor to our Father, joy to our hearts, and

enables us to be an effective testimony for Jesus Christ as we go through this world and so it's an encouraging time to be able to look at these things together.

First point, the problem of this world as we dive into this study of 1 John. What is the first problem of this world that we can identify from reading 1 John together? Well, first of all, I want you to see that one of the problems of this world, this is kind of a sub point of the main first point here, the first problem is that the world hates us. The world hates us. Scripture is very clear about this. The Bible tells us as believers in Christ to expect a hostile environment. The world does not understand us. We look like strangers to it because of the different affections that we have and because we don't join in and all of the while loose living that the world loves and embraces and glories in, when we stand apart from that and seek to live sanctified godly lives, we stand out and the world doesn't understand it. We walk as aliens in its midst and when push comes to shove, when push comes to shove, the world hates true Christians.

Look at 1 John 3:1 as we start to look at the text together. 1 John 3:1. Open it up there on your lap and look down at the word of God that you have in your hands. John says, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God; and we are. For this reason," here it is, "For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." The world doesn't know us. It's not that they don't know our names, I mean, I think the Internal Revenue Service knows our names and knows where to find us, but they don't understand us. They don't understand what motivates us. It's foreign to them and if you came to Christ later in life, you remember what it was like, of looking at Christians and not understanding and having almost a sense of hostility toward them because of the difference in their lives and the conviction that it brought upon your conscience. Well, just realize that you magnify that by 6 billion people in the world and that's the attitude, that's the environment that is created. The world hates us.

Now, you might be thinking, "Don, I think you're overstating it, you know, to say the word 'hate.' That's a pretty strong word. Why are you talking that way?" Well, I'm just using the language of the Bible. Look at verse 13 in chapter 3. John writes to these believers who are struggling, remember. They are confused. They are concerned and John says in chapter 3, verse 13, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." If the world has hostility against you, don't be surprised by that.

And look at chapter 5, verse 19 if you want to see even greater hostility here, making a reference to the devil himself, John says, chapter 5, verse 19, "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." All of the philosophies and the world systems that drive the thinking of the world is energized by Satan himself is what the text says there, and Satan who is the ultimate enemy of Christ, the ultimate enemy of God, energizing a world system that is opposed to Christians with all of its philosophies and sinful ways and all of the things that go with that. What 1 John tells us to step back and look at is, "Look, you're in a hostile environment. You're in an environment where people do not want you around. The unsaved do not want the church of Jesus Christ in existence." They would stamp us out if they could and had the opportunity.

With that in mind, we need to do some serious thinking here and take some great encouragement from the word of God. Understand that this was written back in the first century, long before there was any thought of Christians having any kind of political influence like they have here in America. Christianity was born in a hostile environment. God gave birth to the church in a hostile environment. Remember, they crucified Christ, of course they're going to be hostile to us who follow him. Well, understand that men opposed Jesus in his ministry. As you read through the Gospels, you see the constant opposition that the Pharisees and the scribes gave to our Lord Jesus Christ. Then when push came to shove, they crucified him. And then the apostles carried on and 11 of them, after Judas, they went on in their ministry, 10 of those men, 10 of those 11 we're told were also martyred. Peter was one crucified upside down. Only the Apostle John escaped martyrdom and he was exiled to a remote island, Scriptures tell us. There is just this hostility from Christ to the apostles and it carried on through the first three centuries of the church even. Historians tell us that in the first 300 years of the Roman empire, that Christianity just suffered wave after wave of persecution, 10 different waves under different emperors of persecution, of murder and torture is what met our brothers and sisters in Christ from across the centuries. Men and women just like you and me. Men and women with families and a love for Christ, a love for prayer, a love for God's word; no threat to the world but because the world hates us, they suffered for Christ.

Jesus told us to expect that. This is nothing new. This isn't surprising is the big point here. Jesus said in Matthew 5:11, Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul said, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Jesus summed it up in the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 20, he said, "A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." You see, the Bible tells us repeatedly to expect difficulty from the world; to expect persecution; to expect people to speak falsely against us; that that just comes with the territory of being a Christian pilgrim walking toward our heavenly home. It's not surprising. This isn't unexpected. When it happens to you, when it happens to us as a Fellowship perhaps in the future, we should just realize that this is to be expected like storm winds blowing in April and May. This is not unusual. This is to be expected because this is what happens to Christians.

I'll tell you the truth, not that I haven't been telling you the truth before now, but just to make the point: the real difficulty for Christians in America today, what should really stop us in our tracks is not that the future may be difficult. That's not the difficulty for us at all. The real troubling difficulty for American Christianity ought to be this: why don't we suffer more than we do? If the Bible tells us repeatedly that followers of Christ are going to suffer, followers of Christ are going to be persecuted like their Master was, how do we explain the fact that we know so little about persecution in our lives here in America? It is a question that has troubled me over the years. We look at that and superficially think, "Oh, it's a blessing! There's no trouble." Well, when you think biblically, you say, "Wait a second. What is wrong with me spiritually, what is wrong with us collectively as a church that we don't feel this persecution that the Bible says will

certainly come?" You see, it gets a little bit unsettling, doesn't it? Well, the time may come when we feel that and some of us, some of you and your families have felt the weight of persecution, rejection, people that won't talk to you because you've shared the Gospel with them, that's a taste of what Jesus is talking about, and if you've tasted that in your life and feel that weight of separation, I have relationships like that where people won't talk to me because I shared Christ with them a long time ago, if you felt that, look right here to the word of God and say, "Okay, I see. I understand that this is to be expected. The world hates us and therefore we understand why we are experiencing a hostile environment." It's okay when that happens because the word of God tells us to expect it. The truth is that Christianity flourishes in the midst of hostility and your spiritual life can flourish too when you face that personal hostility in your own life.

Well, the problem with this world as we read 1 John is more than its outward hostility, there is a second point that we need to see as we consider the problem of this world. The second part or the second aspect of the problem with this world is this: it's that the world deceives us, and what I mean by that is that the world tries to deceive us as believers. The world deceives us. You see, as you read through 1 John, it's very evident that the world is filled with false teachers who try to deceive people and try to deceive true Christians. This was a predominate problem that prompted the writing of this letter from 1 John, you can tell because he goes back to this theme so very often.

Look at chapter 2, verse 26. It's not just that the world hates us but it's that the world is trying to deceive us as well. Look at 1 John 2:26, John said, "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you." He's writing to strengthen their hand. This flock or these Christians that John was writing to strengthen, were under the dominating influence of teachers who were giving them false doctrine, who were very arrogant, who were unloving, who were abusive in their spiritual oversight, and these innocent Christians were trying to respond to that but they were being beaten down by these false teachers who had apparently a greater influence than would have been appropriate for the wickedness that they were trying to impose upon the flock. Well, John writes and says, "I'm writing concerning those teachers. I'm writing to strengthen your hand. There are men in your midst who are trying to deceive you," he says.

And that's not the only place that he alludes to that problem of deception and we're not even going to look at all of the passages. We'll get to them in time as we go through verse by verse but for now, just look over at chapter 3, verse 7 in your Bibles. That's okay, go ahead and look right down at your Bible. "Little children," he says, chapter 3, verse 7, "Little children, make sure that no one deceives you." So the reason that he had to give that command is that there were obviously people who were trying to bring deceptive influence upon the flock and John strengthens them, commands them, says, "Listen, get your act together. Realize that these deceivers are out there; realize their deceptive ways, the deceptive things that they teach, and don't fall for the trap. Don't be like a bird that flies in to take bait in a little trap that is set up in a field someplace as if you didn't realize that there was danger there. Look at the trap and stay away from it. Fill your mind with truth so that you are not subject to those deceivers." That's what he's saying there in verse 7.

Then he says also in chapter 4, verse 1, I love this passage. We'll spend some time on it in a few months down the road, but in chapter 4, verse 1, look at what he says here. He says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Many of them. There are an abundance of false teachers now just as there was back in the first century.

So the mere fact and if you're new to Christianity, maybe new to the church, I want to really encourage you to lay hold of this thought: the mere fact that someone claims to speak for God doesn't mean that he really does. Don't be naïve, the Scriptures teach us. Realize as Jesus said in Matthew 7, that there are wolves who would love to devour you but they put on sheep's clothing so that you'll be unsuspecting. If you saw a wolf coming and were a sheep, you would know to get away, but they are a little too subtle for that. They are smart enough to know that they need to pretend to be godly in order to bring the deception in. If you knew they were deceivers, you'd turn away and so they look like they are the real thing when they're really not. So there's this deception that goes on.

John calls these teachers with really strong terms, terms that we really kind of step back from a little bit in our day to day life because where everybody is supposed to be kind to each other and get along, well, the Apostle John calls these false teachers liars, deceivers, antichrists, children of the devil, he calls them. And if that language sounds strong on your ears, understand that these are words that are written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God is giving us warning so that we would recognize how dangerous these men are. This isn't a matter of a difference of spiritual opinion, the world is trying to deceive us. There are false teachers trying to take advantage of us, and the way that we protect ourselves from that is by knowing the word of God, by teaching each other the word of God, studying the word of God so that we understand truth so that when error comes, we recognize it for what it is and we're not sucked into the deception. That's the idea but we have to recognize that we're in an hostile environment, that there are deceivers out there, so that we can take guard, so that we can protect ourselves, so that we can turn away from them in order to achieve a greater spiritual result, and that is to have spiritual victory in this hostile world; to glorify Christ and walk with him in an obedient, loving way. That's the spiritual victory that we are after as we live as Christians in this world.

So these deceivers are a perpetual problem for the church. It's been that way for 2,000 years, it's going to be that way until Christ comes. There are going to be these deceivers around and we have to recognize the environment that we are in. If you know that you're walking in a landmine, you know to watch your step so that you don't trigger a mine that is going to blow your leg off. Well, it's the same way spiritually. You realize that there is this spiritual minefield and God has given us his word so that we can walk through that minefield without suffering harm. I love him for that. I love our Lord for giving us such a clear and powerful word that is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work," that's 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17. The word of God equips us for that and that's why here at Truth Community Fellowship, we place such a priority on the teaching of the

Bible. We're not ashamed of the fact that we teach for an hour at a time. It's because it's so important. It's because it's so necessary for our spiritual protection. It's because it's so important for our spiritual growth. We're not going to treat it flippantly. We're not going to tell a bunch of funny stories and yuck it up for 20 minutes and then go home in time for the football game. No, we're going to take God's word seriously so that we can walk in the midst of victory in this hostile world because the world is trying to deceive us and we need to be protected about it. That's why we do what we do.

Well, there's a third aspect, a third aspect of the problem with the world and it's this, it's a different thread but it's just as real and vital and we've all felt the pain of this. It's not just that the world deceives us, it's not just that the world hates us, it's that the world tempts us. The world tempts us to sin. It tempts us to turn away from the pursuit of righteousness and to embrace the love of sin and pride and arrogance.

Look at chapter 2 with me, chapter 2, verses 15 through 17, as we continue on in our consideration of 1 John. Look at what it says in verse 15 of chapter 2. John tells his readers, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You can see why that's true. If the world hates us, if the world deceives us and the world is tempting us and we love the world, how in the world, if I can put it that way, how in the world could the love of the Father be in us? You see, there has to be a separation from us and the world if we're going to maintain our claim to be true Christians. That's what John is saying here in verse 15, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." But look at what he goes on and says, verse 16, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever."

That's what verses 15 through 17 says, and here, it's just another vital aspect of you grasping this so that you can walk in a righteous way through an unrighteous world. The world appeals to our sinful desires, doesn't it? You don't have to do anything more than stand in a supermarket checkout line to realize that. It's blatant. It's severe. It's very disgusting. But all of that sinful appeal to the pride and vanity of life and the lustful desires of our flesh that is just so prominently displayed, when we're in that environment, when we see, try to watch even a sports program and the commercials come on, just by way of illustration, we have to realize that the world is trying to tempt us away from faithfulness to Christ when that happens. The initial allure of that kind of temptation needs to become something that we find so very distasteful because we realize that the world is hostile to our spiritual growth, and you see through it for what it is. You see that it's the world pretending to be your friend, pretending to offer you pleasure and the passing allurements of sin, when in fact what it's trying to do is devastate your spiritual life. So we realize that the world tempts us, we understand that in advance, we understand that we are in enemy territory so that instead of walking into enemy fire, we go for cover, we go for protection. We turn away our eyes and our thinking from such things so that we can walk in the power of the Holy Spirit in the pursuit of true righteousness to honor our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who died and rose again to save us from our sins.

And I just have to appeal to those of you that are in the audience today, I wish I was there in person, but I just want to appeal to you, if you haven't turned away from sin, if you haven't broken the path with sin and turned away from it, I'm afraid you're still in your sins. You're still separated from God. You need to repent of your sins. You need to come out of that. You need to turn away. You need to reject that and come to Christ for salvation, come to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins so that he can save you out of those sinful things in the world that only lead to eternal judgment. Would you come to Christ today? Would you turn to him for the salvation of your soul? It could very well be that God brought you into the audience just today to hear those exact words and to realize your lostness and come to saving faith in Christ. I appeal to you to take that opportunity seriously and to come to Christ and pray for him to save you from your sins.

Well, the world is a problem for those of the rest of us as we try to live for Christ. We are surrounded with these threats of hatred, deception and temptation, and the truth of the matter is that these are subtle forces. You know, we don't always realize it. They don't come with big drums banging and saying, "Temptation is at the door. And persecution is right here. Or deception is now in your midst." It's much more subtle than that and the truth of it is that we're so often spiritually dull, we're not paying attention. We miss it. You know, we fall into it. We follow our desires instead of following our Lord like we should. Well, how is it that we are ever going to navigate our way through that? It's a pretty bleak picture to live as a Christian in the world, but it's bleak only as long as you're only looking at the world. What gives you courage, what gives you strength, what enables you to rise above that and live in spiritual confidence is the fullness of this second point here this morning, and that is this: it's the provision of the Father. The provision of our heavenly Father; the provision that our Lord Jesus Christ purchased for us on the cross with his own shed blood. You see, God has provided the means for his children to overcome the world and live in the midst of spiritual victory. The glory, the nobility, the wonder, the awe, the majesty of being a Christian is this: it's that God has given you everything you need in order to overcome those obstacles, in order to persevere. The God of heaven has intervened in our lives and saved us and not only excused us from the punishment of eternal damnation for our sins, but he has given us abundant spiritual provision to live a godly life despite this hostile environment.

We saw in the first part of the message that the world hates us. Do you know what? That's okay. I could not care less that the world hates me. I'd love to see people in the world saved and come to the knowledge of Christ that God has given to so many of us in our Fellowship, but I'm not worried that the world hates us because there is something more important, more transcendent, that the book of 1 John points us to, that makes the hatred of the world seem immaterial by comparison and it's this: the world hates us but the Father loves us. God the Father loves us.

Look at 1 John 3:1 again. We looked at that verse a few moments ago and we focused on the end of it, well now we're going to look at the front of it. Look at chapter 3, verse 1. John says, "See how great a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are." The God of the universe has adopted us into his family; has made us his children through faith in Jesus Christ. And whereas we were children of the

devil, now we are children of God, and his loving protection, the affections of his heart are set upon his people and that is of far greater value than any hatred and vitriol that the world can throw at us because the love of God is of such pure holy transcendence that the passing hatred of men whose breath is in their nostrils, seems weak and ineffectual by comparison.

Look at chapter 4, verse 7, where this theme of the love of God is repeated. John says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Verse 9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but," get this, "that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." There is so much about the love of God in that passage, I can't wait until we get to it to exposit it in detail. But just be mindful of this one fact: that God loved us first, 1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us." The wonder of the love of God is that he initiated his love toward us while we were yet sinners. While we were his enemies, while we were dead in sin and transgression, God loved us and sent his Son. And it's not just that he loved us but that Christ came to be the propitiation for our sins. The love of God is seen in the fact that Jesus Christ took upon himself our sins in order that the wrath of God might be turned away from us and that we might receive forgiveness and have eternal life. God's love is not a superficial sentiment, it is an active sacrificial love that comes to us through the price of his own Son. It came at great personal cost. He took our sins on his shoulders and bore God's wrath for us.

Now, there's another way that we see the love of God in this passage, in this book of 1 John. It's a very simple thing and I found that it's easy to overlook it but when you realize it, it's a wonderful thing. We're going to look at the sacrifice of Christ a whole lot more. That's really where we see the love of God. But we also see God's love in the way the Apostle John addresses his readers. Look at 1 John 2:1, for example. He does this repeatedly. 1 John 2:1, he says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." He calls them his little children. It's a term of affection. Remember, John was almost 90 years old when he wrote this letter and so he's writing to people, some of whom were half or a third of his age or even less. So he's writing to them and he expresses this term of endearment, this term of affection, "My little children," to express his love for them. Chapter 3, verse 7, he says it again, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you." Chapter 4, verse 4, "You are from God, little children." Chapter 5, verse 21, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." Woven throughout the book are these terms of endearment where he calls them "little children." In other places, he calls them "brothers." And in still other places, he refers to them as "beloved." That's one of my favorite terms to address an audience when I'm speaking because it's an expression of affection that is fitting for the apostle to show to this audience that he's trying to protect spiritually. He cared for these people. These weren't academic students in an ivory tower environment, these were people whom he loved from the depths of his heart and he's writing to protect them and care for them. So he calls them by these names of affection: my little children, beloved. He repeatedly expresses that kind of affection.

Well, let me ask you a question: why is that so important? What does that have to do with the love of God as part of the provision of the Father for our spiritual victory in a hostile world? Well, it's only this: remember that the Apostle John was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He was writing the words that God wanted him to write, and when he did that, what he was doing was he was expressing the love that God himself had for these readers. God himself was addressing these readers through the Apostle John, calling them "my little children, beloved, brethren." This is an expression of the affection that God has for the people who belong to Christ through saving faith. It's a statement of God's own attitude. Do you see what that means, beloved? Do you see what that means? It means that our heavenly Father cares for us. He cares for you. He sent Christ to save us and what that means is, and when you remember that we have the Holy Spirit abiding in us as one of the great gifts of our salvation, it means that you and I and the church of Jesus Christ, we are not alone as we walk through this hostile world. There is the great hand of our great heavenly Father upon us to guide us, to protect us, to provide for us both spiritually and materially. We have a wonderful heavenly Father and his love dwarfs and overwhelms the animosity that the world has to us. We rest in his love. We find comfort in his love and that gives us the motivation to persevere in the midst of opposition from hostile forces.

Well, we saw another aspect of our problem in this world, is that it tries to deceive us with false teachers. Well, do you know what? God has provided for that as well. He has given us the means to overcome that as well and it brings us to the second aspect of the provision of the Father. It's not just that he loves us but, secondly, God gives discernment. God gives discernment. Look at chapter 4, verse 6 with me. It says that, "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us." He's talking about the teaching of the apostles in that verse as we'll see in the future. But he goes on and says, "By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." As a believer in Christ, you can know truth from error. That's simply part of the package that God gives to his children. We are meant to know the truth and to distinguish error. We're not to be confused. Ephesians says we are not to be tossed about like waves on the ocean but that we're to grow up in Christ and be able to have discernment. Well listen, even if you've been in weak churches that haven't taught you the Bible over the years, what I want you to be excited about, thrilled about, is the prospect that you can grow; that you can know truth; that you can distinguish truth from error. As you study the Bible and as we study it together collectively, you are going to grow in discernment because that is one of the reasons that God gave us his word is so that we would know these things.

Isn't that wonderful, beloved? Look, I'm a guy from North Vernon, Indiana. I'm from a little hick town, not to insult North Vernon, Indiana. Now that I'm closer to North Vernon, I've got to be more careful about what I say. I love my hometown. I love the people in my hometown. I love where I'm from. My only point is that I come from nowhere comparatively speaking and the rest of you, you know, you come from families that aren't noble and big and, you know, the movers and shakers in the world. So what? We can know the truth. We can know what God says. We can have the joy of understanding. We can know what it's like to take in the word of God and understand it

and have that give us joy. We can know eternal truth despite our humble backgrounds. I love that. I love that. God gives us discernment so that we can know the truth and we can value it and cherish it and prize it, and every one of you who is a believer in Jesus Christ, you can have that same kind of discernment. Psalm 119 says, "I have more understanding than all my teachers because Your word is my meditation." That's wonderful. This is available even to you young men in your late teens and early 20s. If you want to know Christ and you know him by faith in him and you pursue truth, even in your youth, you can have discernment and know the truth and I just invite you to come with us as we do this, you young men, you young women. Come with us in the pursuit of truth. Set your mind and heart on this so that your life would glorify the God of your salvation, would glorify Christ by treasuring and knowing his truth and turning into instruments that can share that discernment with others as well. Come with us. Be part of that because God gives us discernment.

As you read 1 John, you see some of the different ways, I'm starting to run out of time here and so I won't go into all of it and look at all of the passages, but what 1 John teaches us is that false teachers can be known, first of all, by their ethical error. Their ethical error by which I mean they live sinful lives. They live profligate lives and the sinful lives of false teachers expose them as deceivers. Look at chapter 2, verse 3. How can you discern a false teacher? One thing to look for is what's his lifestyle like. Chapter 2, verse 3 says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. The one who says I have come to know Him and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." A disobedient life, a sinful life is the mark of a false teacher no matter what he might say from a pulpit. There have been teachers, so many especially in the past few decades, who have professed to be evangelicals who have taught the Bible and then you come to find out that they are exposed as adulterers, unfaithful in their marriage and all sorts of things. It has happened to men I know and it exposes them, that all along they were false teachers because they were not keeping the commandments of God. It's one of the ways that you can recognize a false teacher.

You can also know them through their social error. Their ethical error, their social error. What we mean by that is simply their lack of love. False teachers have an arrogance about them that makes them dismissive of the people that are underneath their authority. They lack the love of God in their lives. Look at chapter 2, verse 9 with me, "The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now." Verse 10, "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him." Listen, maybe the guy didn't fall into immorality but an abusive, arrogant spiritual leader is betraying the marks of a false teacher because the true teachers of God have a compassion and a tender love for the people of God. They understand that they are simply under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and they have a responsibility to manifest this love of God that we were just looking at, to be an instrument of the love of God to his flock, and men who don't do that, men who are not interested in pursuing that, men who abuse their authority, are simply declaring that they are false teachers to whom you owe no allegiance, from whom you should run. Look for the true shepherds, the ones who show that kind of love because it's a mark of a false

teacher, one of the ways that you can discern them is by their attitudes toward the flock of God.

Then, thirdly, you can also see that there is a theological error that marks false teachers. It's not just their personal lives or their love toward the flock, but also false teachers can be recognized by their false teaching. Look at chapter 2, verse 22, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son." You can recognize a false teacher by their false teaching on Christ. That's one of the easiest ways to identify that the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, for example, are false teachers because they teach a doctrine of Christ that is contrary to what you find in the Bible. They deny his deity. They make up weird stories about the origin of Christ. Well, Christ was pre-existent. He is equal with the Father. Uncreated. And anyone who teaches something other than that exposes himself as a false teacher.

So you see through these various tests the ethical nature, the social nature, the theological nature, God gives you a lot of different means to show discernment and to have discernment about teachers as to whether they are men that you should follow or men that you should flee from, and God intends you to know that. We'll look at all of that more in the coming weeks. For now, just remember this central point: that God gives us discernment so that we can walk in the truth and avoid the deceivers. You could sum it up, I've got a couple of little other things to say here but you could say also here in the third sub point is that God gives us victory. God gives us victory. That's one of the points that John so wants to emphasize in this letter. The world tempts us but God promises to us as believers in Christ a lasting victory.

Look at chapter 4, verse 4 with me again. It says, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them," you have overcome them, "because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." Slide your eyes over to chapter 5, verse 4 where it says, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith." Verse 5, "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Do you believe in Christ? Are you a true Christian? You're going to overcome the world because one of the gifts in God's gracious gift of salvation, one of the aspects of it is that he enables us to overcome the world and we love him for it, and as we grow, as we continue to walk in this salvation, we develop strength in specific ways that John points out. We grow in joy, chapter 1, verse 4, "I have written these things so that you might have the joy of salvation. We write these things," chapter 1, verse 4, "so that our joy may be made complete." God gives us not only joy but also the strength for holy living. Chapter 2, verse 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."

So John spells out very specifically why he's writing, "I want you to know joy. I want you to know holiness." Chapter 5, verse 13 says, "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." God gives us the victory and John defines what he means by that. In the midst of a hostile world that you would have joy, that you would grow in holiness, that you would have assurance of salvation. That's spiritual victory as defined by the Bible and so our efforts

to grow, our efforts to overcome the world, to turn away from sin and to grow in the knowledge of Christ, God calls that victory, and if God calls it victory, I want to win, don't you? Well, that's the point of this book is so that we could grow in that and to know that in our lives.

Well, there's one final thing. This is the best one of all. The final provision that God has made for us is this: it's that Christ has taken away our sins. Christ has taken away our sins. If you are a true Christian, your sins are forgiven. God does not hold them against you. You have been cleansed. Your conscience has been set free from those past transgressions. That's why Christ died, to remove our guilt vertically before God and so that our conscience would be satisfied, knowing that the guilt of our sin has been satisfied at the justice bar of God, and because it is satisfied, because that guilt has been paid for and removed and righteousness imputed to our account, that you are able to go forth with a clear conscience. This is just so wonderful and its central to John's teaching in the book.

Look at chapter 1, verse 7. We're almost done here. John says, "if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Chapter 2, verse 2, "He is the propitiation for our sins." Chapter 2, verse 12, "My little children, I am writing because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake." Chapter 4, verse 10, "He is the propitiation for our sins." And on and on it goes. Christ has taken away our sin. We stand forgiven at the cross, as the great hymn goes. Our sins are washed away through the blood of Christ and that is the greatest provision of all for victory in this world is that we have a Savior who has intervened at the cost of his own blood in order to give us eternal life. You see, there is a great provision from the Father that overcomes the problem of this world. He loves us. He has given us discernment. He has given us victory. And Christ has taken away our sins. That is spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world.

So in light of these things, beloved, understand this: we can enjoy those blessings, we are meant to enjoy those blessings, to walk in the joy and assurance that they bring all the days of our life until we reach our heavenly home. God hasn't hidden these things in a corner in his word, he has made them known to us so that we could enjoy the benefit of them and give him glory because of his great love and goodness to us as believers in Christ. So in light of these things, my dear flock at Truth Community Fellowship, be strong. Be resolute. Be encouraged even in the midst of those trials that have been breaking your heart over the past few months. I have specific faces in mind as I say that to you through this camera. Be resolute. Rise up and grab hold of the provision that God has graciously given to us in Christ and let that be your source of joy and hope even in the midst of this hostile world where people wrong you and you feel the weight of your own sin. Jesus Christ has bought us with his own precious blood. Jesus Christ will continue to bless you. He's not done blessing you. He has only started and he's going to bless our Fellowship as we proclaim his word and honor him in our own individual lives. Beloved, let the world pass away, let the world pass away, we will devote ourselves to growing in grace. We will devote ourselves to telling sinners that the blood of Christ can

save them too. They can find forgiveness through his blood and righteousness. Beloved, live for Christ with joy. Christ has provided for your victory. You and I can overcome. You and I will overcome. God bless you.

Bow with me in prayer. We shouldn't neglect as we close a most fundamental question: have you been saved from this evil generation? Have you repented of sin and received Christ for salvation? The Bible says there is salvation in no one else. My friend, come to Christ and be saved. Ask God to open your heart so that you can turn to Christ. For the rest of us,

Father, we thank you for the provision that you have given that overcomes the world. Thank you for your protection. We ask you to use Truth Community Fellowship for the sake of the Gospel. We ask that you would help each one of us in the midst of these hostilities to live with joy, holiness and the assurance of salvation that is befitting of our calling as followers of Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

God bless you. The musicians are going to come to close us now. We'll see you next week.

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