

Final Certainty

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A secular authority on public speaking, I did not document this quote but it's not original to me, a secular authority on public speaking once said this in terms of giving counsel on how a man should speak to make his material known, he said, "Tell your audience what you're going to say. Then say it. Then tell them what you just said." And what we find when we read the book of 1 John, you can turn there with me, that is exactly what the Apostle John did in this letter of 1 John, one of the final New Testament books written, it's exactly what he did. He told us what he was going to say and address, then he addressed it for five chapters, and then at the end he comes back and he summarizes everything that he had just said. It's really remarkable to view the book from this perspective.

So let's just see how John did that. When he opened the book, he told us that he was going to talk to us about the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first three verses of chapter 1 he said this, look at it with me. He said, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life," he's speaking about his personal experience with Jesus Christ whom he saw with his own eyes, heard with his own ears, and touched with his own hands. Verse 2, "the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us." And so what he's saying there is, "I'm going to tell you about what we have seen and heard, what we the apostles saw and heard about and from Jesus Christ." And so he puts Christ right at the center from the very start, says, "I'm writing to tell you about the Lord Jesus."

Well, as you go and you read through the letter with that perspective in mind, you see that that is exactly what he did. It is precisely what he did, he tells us about Jesus Christ, what salvation in him means, how Christ accomplished it, and how God communicates that salvation to men. And so we see, let's go through, John has told us what he was going to say and he says it, and what do we find as he says it? You know, there's more than what I'm going to point out here but you're gonna see that this is woven so intricately throughout the letter that you can't miss it. He is speaking to us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look, for example, at chapter 1, verse 7. We're just going to hurry through this little survey here. Well, actually in verse 3 he said, "our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." He says in verse 7 of chapter 1, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Then in chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, he expands on that cleansing power of the blood of Christ. He says in the middle of verse 1, chapter 2, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." He goes on and in verse 23 of chapter 2 he says, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." That is immediately after he said in 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." Verse 24, "If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father."

So let's just pause there for a moment. He says, "I'm writing so that you'll have fellowship with Christ like we do." He says, "The blood of Jesus cleanses you from sin that separates you from God so that you can have this fellowship." When Christ shed his blood on the cross, he was offering it as our advocate and he was acting as our propitiation. He himself being the sacrifice that turned away the wrath of God from our sin. And so you see what he's doing, he said, "I'm going to tell you about Jesus," and then he starts to unfold it, he starts to unfold Christ for us, and he tells us that, "If you're in Christ, you have the Father, you have this fellowship of which I am speaking."

So he goes on in chapter 3, verse 8. For example, he says, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." In verse 23 of chapter 3 he says, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us."

And then in chapter 4, verses 9 and 10. I know we're going through this quickly but, hey, I've been preaching on these things for two months. You're with me on this. Chapter 4, verse 9, he says, "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 that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Verse 15, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." And it just goes on and on and on like that, doesn't it?

Chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." Verse 5, "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood." Then finally in verses, beginning in verse 11, you can go all the way back to verse 9. God "has testified concerning His Son, God has given testimony," verse 10, "concerning His Son." Verse 11, "the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

Now the whole idea here is to just give you an overarching sense of the centrality of Jesus Christ to this letter and what John said at the beginning, "I want to talk to you about this Christ that I know," you can see that he did exactly that woven throughout everything that he says. That's very important to understand what he is doing as we come to the text that Matt read for us at the beginning of the service. Look now at verse 18 and I'll read it also. What John is doing as we come to this final text in 1 John is this – watch this, stay with me as I'm about to read the text – what he's doing is this, he is now summarizing everything that he has said in the prior approximately 101 verses. He's summarizing everything that he said and bringing it to a climax so that he brings it to a final conclusion and then makes a final call to action in response to it. It is utterly brilliant. So he says in verse 18, he says,

18 We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

And so he's summarized it all and he's brought it to a climax as I'll show more in a moment, he's brought it to a climax and when he says, "This is the true God and eternal life," here's what you are to understand: what he's saying here, this is the true God and eternal life, is a summary of everything that he has said in the prior 100 verses. He has brought this to a conclusion and he's basically acting like a trial attorney at his closing argument. He says, "I have given you everything that you need to know to understand who Christ is. He is God in human flesh and in Him we find eternal life and in no one else." And when you understand and you've got the whole context of the book in your mind, you see what a tour de force, what a powerful argument that he has made and he's brought it to a conclusion that leaves you with no other verdict to make. There's no other conclusion that you can reach and what you're left with, then, is this as you sit here tonight, as you watch over the live stream, you realize that God has brought to you, if you are a Christian, the greatest and final certainty about the reality of your salvation. Everything about those 100 verses points to the fact that Christ is the true God, he has the power to communicate eternal life to us, and by his shed blood he purchased us for it, and that eternal life, that gift of salvation, is received by faith, not by works. It's a marvelous concluding statement.

For the longest time when I read the Bible, for the longest time verse 21 seemed to be completely out of context and completely irrelevant to everything that he had just said. I'll show you by the end of the message why it's the perfect conclusion for what he has said,

21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Well, let's take a look at the summary of this. The message title tonight if you're taking notes and you like to write message titles on your notes, it's "Final Certainty." Final

certainty. It's the final passage in 1 John and it's final in the sense that it is conclusive. What he has given to us makes us certain that salvation is found in Christ and in Christ alone, and he has given us what we need to understand if we are in Christ or not.

So let's start, first of all, by looking at the certain realities of salvation. The certain realities of salvation, and I'm going to here just break this part into two subparts here. First of all, John is summarizing the certain realities of salvation by talking about the certainty of our sanctification. The certainty of our sanctification. If we are truly saved, there will be a sanctifying influence from Christ that is evident in our lives. John has been talking about that throughout the entire letter as well, and so as he's coming to a conclusion, as he summarizes everything and applies it in a closing argument kind of way, he emphasizes, first of all, that holiness will mark the true Christian. Holiness will mark the true Christian.

Look at verse 18 with me. He says,

18 We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

John allows for no exceptions to this rule. He knows nothing of a Christian, a true Christian whose life is not impacted by the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. You know, there are those and perhaps it was more prominent and acceptable teaching 20 or 30 years ago than it is now, but there were those who spoke about the term "carnal Christian," and that a man could be a Christian but live in a completely carnal way and show no fruit of being a Christian but if he had made a momentary belief in Christ, that that was what conversion was and that he was born again and he would certainly go to heaven, and you could therefore disregard everything else about his life because of a momentary confession that he once made. That kind of teaching that popularly became known as "no Lordship" teaching advocated by prominent men from Dallas Seminary, that has really been thoroughly refuted and it's, you know, it's just not, it's just obvious that this is in contradiction to the word of God. The problem is that that whole realm of teaching just overlooks the biblical doctrine of regeneration. What John says here in verse 18, the true Christian is someone who has been born again. He's been born of God. He has – watch this – he has received new life from God above and in regeneration what has happened is that the Holy Spirit has worked in that man's heart, he's worked in that woman's heart. He has not simply brought momentary persuasion upon them, he has reached to their innermost being and changed them. He has made them new. He has created someone new inside them and that newness of life bears the mark of the very nature of God and God has created new life within them. And because you have been born again, you've been born of God, you've been born from above, that miraculous work of God deep in the inner man will necessarily bear fruit. It could be no other way.

So that's why John can say, "We know that no one who is born of God sins," the idea being that he does not go on living in an unbroken pattern of sin. He has a new attitude, a new disposition that loves holiness and hates his prior sin. He has affections for the things of God and that manifests itself in his life even if he struggles and stumbles sometimes

along the way. My Christian friend, when God saved you, let me tell you something, summarize for you things that we've been saying for many weeks now, when God saved you, he didn't simply give you a new eternal destination, he didn't simply release you from the penalty of hell that your sins deserved, God when he saves a man, he changes his whole attitude and disposition toward sin. He changes your relationship to sin. He gives you a heart that prefers holiness over sin and as a result of that you pursue holiness, you confess sin, you repent of it when it comes into your life. That's what a Christian does. That is at the heart of the Christian life. God has changed your relationship to sin and changed you from a lover of sin and put into you a principle in your heart that made you a lover of Christ.

So someone who is indifferent to Christ and sins with abandon is not a Christian no matter what they say with their lips because the nature of salvation is it is a new birth. God has caused you to be born again and the reason that that is certain, the reason that that is incontrovertible is in the whole nature of the salvation that John has been talking about through these entire five chapters. Salvation changes the man's nature. It changes who he is. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold, new things have come." You know, and the difference is vast. You've gone from being a dead reprobate to being someone who is alive in Christ, and so of course that comes out in life.

Let's think about it from this perspective, think about it from this perspective. Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the third person of the majestic Triune Godhead, right? He is omnipotent. He is omnipresent. He is omniscient. The Spirit himself is sovereign and the Spirit is holy, and he is good, and he is loving, and he produces that fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, and he's sovereign over everyone that he indwells, right, because that's just who he is. He is God and therefore he is sovereign and he exercises and has full, complete, unhindered power. Well, beloved, if the Holy Spirit indwells every true believer, and he does, then isn't it obvious that he is going to exercise his power on true believers and make his presence felt? Isn't it obvious that he's going to make his presence known with the imprint of his own character and presence in the life of the one that he comes to indwell?

Well, if that's the case, if the Holy Spirit truly indwells a person, then his presence somehow is going to be manifested in the life of that person. They are going to be alive to the things of God, alive to the word of God, alive to a love for Christ, alive to a desire for holiness, alive to a living hope of eternal life. And I just want to say real candidly, there's a lot of people here tonight, that's always encouraging, thank you for being here, and those of you over the live stream, but I just want to tell you that you really need to look at your life and ask yourself are those kinds of affections present in you or not because it doesn't matter what you say you believe if the reality is utterly absent from your life. If that dominating reality, if that principle of affection of love for Christ and holiness is not in your life and is not somehow bubbling within you and affecting the course of your life and what you want out of life and what your priorities and goals are in life, then you have every reason to question your salvation because, look at the text, "We know that no one

who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him." The Spirit of God makes his presence known.

Let me state this another way. Jesus Christ does more than simply exercise moral persuasion upon his people. It's more than just us getting information that we receive according to our old nature and we get information and we change according to the new information that we've received. It's not simply a mental process. You have been born of God. He touches us at the inner core of our being and gives us a new heart and new life, and because we are born of God like that, then the true Christian starts to live by that holy nature that God has given to his heart. And so the question is do you see something of that in you, in your heart, in what you love?

It's a crying shame in light of this that so many have been persuaded that the purpose of God and the reality of Christianity is God coming to simply help us have a good life here and now, and that God wants you to be happy and to be nice and good people go to heaven. You know, that passes for Christian teaching. It's not. That's not Christian teaching. That's not Christianity. Christianity is Christ coming to die for sinners, rising again, and the Holy Spirit taking that work that Christ did at Calvary and applying it individually to the inner man of a man, woman, young person, and changing them so that they now live according to a new life that they did not have before. These are diametrically opposed understandings of what Christianity is and John has made it clear on which side of the modern debate he stands and thereby showing where God's true position is.

Now along with that, verse 18, God changes our relationship to sin, he also delivers us from the power of Satan. Look at there at the end of verse 18, "He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." Now I won't take the time to review the many references that John has made to Satan, to the evil one and all of that. Remember he's summarizing here. Christ has not only delivered us from sin, he has delivered us from Satan. We have been delivered from that dominating, blinding influence of the devil, the god of this world who blinds men to the Gospel. We've been delivered from that. We've been delivered from his power of deception. We've been delivered from his enslaving power to sin. Christ has saved us from all of that. He's not only saved us from our sin, he's saved us from Satan himself, something that you never could have done for yourself or on your own. What I hope that you're starting to see as we talk about these things is just the surpassing excellence of salvation, the surpassing wonder of it all; that Christ has saved us from sin and he has saved us from Satan himself, and having saved us, beloved, understand that he keeps us.

Look at it there in verse 18. This underlies the whole doctrine of eternal perseverance, the perseverance of the saints, eternal security. "He who was born of God keeps him." He keeps those he saves. He didn't save us and then send us back among the wolves to fend for ourselves. No. No. No. No, Christ loves you far more than that. He did far more for you than that. Christ saved you, using other biblical language, changed you from a goat to a sheep and Christ now exercises care for you like a shepherd over the sheep, and what does a shepherd do but he takes care of his sheep. The shepherd protects them, and he

guides them, and he feeds them, and he leads them. Well, that's who Christ is to us. That's who our Lord is to us as believing people.

So if we are in Christ, we are under one who has promised to keep us. He will keep us and therefore we know that we are safe and we are secure, and when we understand that and we live in the realm of that and we abide in Christ and he abides in us, look, that's what drives fear away. That's what lets you look at an uncertain world with a sense of confidence and a sense of security no matter what happens and no matter what kinds of changes you may be facing in life, you know, along the way. You always come back to this defining reality, "No, I belong to Christ and He keeps me. What have I to fear?" In one sense, this isn't even about me, this is about Christ and his promises to his people, and how the whole Christian church today needs to come back to this defining reality.

So beloved, our sin, we've been delivered from it, we've been delivered from Satan, we've been delivered out of this world. Satan cannot grab you and harm you because Christ protects you, Christ keeps you. Now to be sure, we're still subject to temptation. We understand that. Christ himself was tempted, right? We expect to be tempted. We still have remnants of sin within us that tempt us, the world tempts us, Satan tempts us, but never in a conquering, final, overcoming way. Christ keeps us from that final conquest of Satan. He has achieved victory for us at the cross and we live in light of that. The Scriptures tell us that though we are tempted, we're not tempted beyond what we are able, 1 Corinthians 10:13. But God keeps us. God measures out the temptation so that it does not exceed what we are able to bear, and he gives us the way of escape so that we are able to endure it. All of these things pointing to us and explaining to us the certain realities of our salvation, and these matters are final and we are safe and we are secure in Christ. You're safe and you're secure in Christ come what may.

So beloved, that strengthens you so that you do not falter in time of trial or temptation. It strengthens you in a difficult family situation to realize that, you know, whatever's happening here within the bounds of my family, the Lord loves me, the Lord cares for me, and that's greater than any human love or affection could ever be to me, and we learn to treasure Christ for who he is more above all human affection. You know, the nearest and best to us in our human lives and in our families, you know what? No matter how good they are to us, no matter how much they love you, no matter how faithful they've been, you know, they didn't die for your soul, did they? They didn't love you with an eternal love and offer themselves at the cross in order to save you from your sin, did they?

Well, do you see how all of these things that we've been talking about and that recognition elevates Christ to a place of surpassing preeminence in our affections so that we derive everything about our perspective of life from that vertical dimension from our union with him? I've been united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. He's in heaven, I'm there with him, so to speak, positionally I'm with him and one day I'll actually be there and I'll see him face-to-face. Beloved, for all of the sorrow that this world brings to you and all of the hardship and just the grinding weight of life and the way that humans disappoint us again and again and again and again, well, just let that be

what prompts you to come back to Christ and to appreciate him and to love him for all of his faithfulness and all of his goodness to you, and the fact that he will never fail and he will never change. Yesterday, today and forever, he's the same. Somewhere in our minds there should be percolating in our recognition, "You know, these things are true, that means that I am very well off. I am in a wonderful position here in Christ no matter what else is happening around me. I belong to the King. I am in His family. He considers me a child and a joint heir with Christ, a joint heir with Him." These are the certainties that Christ has purchased for us. This is how much he loves us. This is how generous and magnanimous he has been to us in our salvation, and those things transcend and redefine every difficulty in life that we have while we walk through this difficult world.

So the certainty of our salvation leads to a certainty of sanctification as we recognize these things and our affections are transformed by them. Let's go to a second subpoint of this, the certainty of our separation. So we're talking about the certain realities of salvation. We've seen the certain reality of sanctification as a subpoint under that, now the certainty of our separation. Look at verse 19 with me where it says this,

19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

See the contrast there. He says we're in the realm of the God of our salvation and the world is outside of that. The world lies in the power of Satan, but we have been separated from the world. We've been delivered from the world. We've been delivered from Satan. We're in the family of God. He said we're children in chapter 3, verse 2. And one of the things that we remember, one of the things that John is summarizing that he said elsewhere in this letter, is that in your salvation God, Christ, has removed you from the world and given you new life in him. By contrast, the world lies helplessly in the fiery clutches of the hands of Satan himself. They are trapped in that realm. They cannot escape it on their own power. But you and I as believers in Christ, we've been delivered from that. We're in a separate realm. We're in a new realm.

Look over at Colossians. I point you to this passage often and it's because it's an important passage for us to keep in mind. We're in a new realm. We've been separated from the world. In Colossians 1:13, the Apostle Paul said that "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." You were in the world. You were under the power of Satan. You were trapped and dead in your own sin and Christ in great love reached down, the Spirit of God worked in your heart and imparted new life to you, and in doing that he lifted you out of the very pit of hell, so to speak, and transferred you over to the realm of blessing, the realm of Christ, the realm of eternal security, the realm of forgiveness and eternal life. And friend, Christ having done that for you is never going to send you back. He saved you to keep you and because you are in a different realm, the world, Satan, your flesh, can't get there to take you back.

I'm using an illustration here. It reminds me of Jesus' teaching on the rich man and Lazarus. You remember the rich man, Lazarus died, the rich man woke up in Hades.

Lazarus was in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man wanted out of that desperate place, cried out, "Father Abraham, send somebody over here! Let him dip his finger in water and cool off the flame that's on my tongue here! I'm in misery over here!" And Abraham said, "Look, friend, I'm sorry but," I'm paraphrasing here, "there's a great chasm fixed between us so that you can't come over here and we can't come over there. There's this chasm that's fixed." Well, what we're talking about here tonight, we're just kind of reversing the imagery and showing the certainty of it here in this life about the reality of our salvation. The fact that Christ has saved us and brought us out of the world and into himself, it means that no one, nothing, no spirit, no demon, nothing from this world can enter into the realm of Christ and take us back. There is a chasm that is fixed for our benefit, for our protection, that guards us so that nothing can happen to take away Christ from us, to take away our salvation. We are utterly secure in him.

And so look at it there with me, look at the end of verse 18, "He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We are of God, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one," but we've been separated from that realm of the world. Although we used to walk according to the course of this world, we've been delivered from it. In grace, in undeserved favor where you deserved judgment, God showed kindness to you instead. It produces gratitude. It produces hope. It produces confidence. It produces spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world. The flames may be lapping someplace else, but they're never gonna singe a hair on my head because Christ keeps me and loves me and will never let me go. And so we see the certainties of our salvation.

Point 2. This is the next major point here. John talks now about the certainty of our Savior. We've seen our position in Christ in verses 18 and 19, and he summarized that for us. The position in Christ is one of utter security, one that produces real change in our lives and one that produces, puts us in a position of utter safety spiritually so that we know that we are safe and that we can live in a confidence and an assurance of our salvation with full joy, growing in holiness as a result. That's the certainty of it, of our position, we could have put it that way, but now we're going to see the certainty of the person of our Savior, the certainty of Christ.

What does he say about Christ? Look at the way that he's speaking in the language of certainty in this passage. Verse 18, "We know that no one who is born of God sins." Verse 19, "We know that we are of God." Verse 20, "we know that the Son of God has come." You see, he's talking in these realms of certainty. This passage is an utter assault against the post-modern spirit of our age that says truth is relative and you can't really know what's true after all. This utterly demolishes that. Christianity is utterly opposed to that mindset. Christianity is rooted in, our salvation is based upon revealed truth that is certain and that we can know by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. We know. We know. We know, it says. This is the word of God. This isn't me making something up. This isn't me being dogmatic. This is just what the Bible says and we believe the Bible here, right?

So verse 20,

20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know [there it is again] Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.

Beloved, the Son of God came to deliver us from spiritual darkness. He has given us understanding so that we can discern the truth, so that we can know true reality. He has given us discernment so that we can grow in the knowledge of Christ.

Now here in verse 20, he says "so that we may know Him who is true." That is a reference to the Father. He mentions the Son and now he mentions the Father, "Him who is true; we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ." And so he has the Father and the Son in his mind in this verse, and so we are in the Father, we are in the Son, and it is through the Son that we have access to the Father. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." And so what is the certainty that you're to draw from that? That if you are in Christ, you know the one true God. You may not have much in the way of earthly possessions, you may be losing your earthly health, you may be living in difficulty and anguish of heart over a variety of different things. That's life, right? But in the midst of all of the hostilities that this world brings, if you are in Christ you can know that you have the richest treasure of knowing the one true God. You have that which the world has missed. And by contrast if you're not in Christ, you don't know God at all. And these are things that we know.

And so look at verse 20 again with me. He says, "we know that the Son of God has come, He's given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ." Now you might well say, "I would like for you to unpack everything that that verse means. I want you to do that here tonight. After all, you're the teacher, right? You do that." To answer the question what does chapter 5, verse 20 mean we'd have to do this, we'd have to repeat the prior 22 messages that I've just preached over the past two months. Remember he's summarizing everything. This is a summary of everything that has gone before. He's making this final conclusion that summarizes everything that has been said leading up to this point. And so while I could, I supposed, repeat the prior 22 messages, I say let's not do that. Let's do something else. Let's just keep moving on.

What John is saying is we know the one true God over against the false gods of men, and when he says, look at this at the end here, at the end of verse 20, he said we are in his Son Jesus Christ,

This is the true God and eternal life.

What I want you to see is this verse isn't always at the top of the list of verses that people go to to prove the deity of Christ but that is exactly what he is saying and I want to give you two reasons for that interpretation. Who is the "this" that is the true God? Well, the immediate context, look at it with me, the immediate context, what he had just said is in his Son Jesus Christ, this is the true God. And so the immediate context tells us that having just mentioned the name of Jesus Christ, this is connecting Jesus Christ with the

identity of the true God. "Jesus Christ, this is the true God, this One of whom I've been speaking." It's the nearest reference. It's what he's referring to.

So the principle of interpretation of near context points us to that understanding but, beloved, watch this. This is what I think is really cool about reading Scripture and interpreting it in its entire context, in the context of the entire book. Go back to chapter 1, verse 1, which I read earlier. What did John say? Now I'm repeating myself. What did John say that he was going to write this letter about? He was going to write this letter about the Christ whom the apostles had heard, seen and touched with their hands. He says, "This is a letter about Jesus Christ," and then he unfolds it in the way that I showed you earlier and now what he has done is, he's come a full 360 degrees and he is back at the very point that he started at. He said, "I'm going to start telling you about Christ." He tells us about Christ and now in his summary he says, "This is the true God and eternal life." He's not simply talking about, he's not simply referring to this what he's said in verse 20 alone, he's making a comprehensive summary statement about everything that he's said in these 100 verses up to this point. He said, "I have told you everything that you need to know about who Christ is and what He has done. I have defended His person to you. I have explained His work to you. Christ. Christ. Christ. Christ. This Christ, this One, He's the true God and eternal life." Over against the false Christs that the false teachers were proclaiming, John says, "What I've told you is the apostolic truth. Follow after Him." Everything that John has written supports that great climax. Jesus Christ is the true God. To know him is to have eternal life.

Now I'm reminded of things that I've mentioned in the past, but when Christ saved me, he saved me out from under some influence that denied the deity of Christ. I don't need to go into all of that. In my pre-Christian days, the deity of Christ was challenged to me by people that were close to me and undermined my confidence about those things and Christ saved me. Now I want to say to you, those of you that perhaps struggle a bit theologically with this, is to recognize this, is that, you know, it took the church 300-400 years to sort through all of those things in a final way where they reached their final expression in some of the great early creeds of the church, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, so-called. It takes time to work through these things. If it took the church centuries to get through it, don't be discouraged if it takes you some time to get your questions answered. Don't be discouraged if sometimes you struggle with this and you wonder because you've heard things that cause you some questions. Just come back, just come back to the Scriptures and realize that God has given us a reliable road map that points us to the only conclusion that you can ultimately come to, that Jesus Christ is the true God, he is the fullness of deity in human flesh, all the fullness of God dwells in him in bodily form, Colossians 2:9, and just apply yourself and search out the Scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to illumine and help you because he will. And he leads us inevitably to this conclusion, but we understand that it takes some study to work through those things for some, and that's okay.

This for some of us, it's the path that God sanctifies us in to come to these kinds of conclusions and this kind of understanding, but understand this, maybe I should put it this way, someone that is studying and wrestling through questions about the deity of Christ

very well could be a true Christian. I'm just saying, you know, there's things about the depths of this that I don't quite understand and I'm working through it. Well, you just keep applying yourself to the word of God and let the Spirit of God grow you. The difference is, the warning sign is when someone actively denies the deity of Christ and says, "No, that is not true. I deny that. It's not that I'm struggling to come to an understanding of that which great men have wrestled with over the centuries, no, I deny it." That denial places someone outside of Christ. That is a clear indication that they are not a Christian. So we just want to respond very submissively and carefully to the Bible's teaching on Christ because he is the true God and in him is eternal life and there's none found outside him, and those who proclaim a false Christ proclaim a false salvation and find themselves in hell in the end if they don't repent.

Well, that brings us to our final point here, the responsibility of salvation you could say, the corresponding responsibility of salvation, and I got ahead of myself just a little bit with those things that I just said here. So here's the deal. I think it is 100 verses by this point or 104 verses, maybe it's 104, 105 in the whole book. It doesn't matter. John has summarized everything and he has brought it to that climax in verse 20 and said, "This is the true God and eternal life." Now what he does, it's very interesting, he does not give a formal farewell here. He doesn't pronounce a benediction like some of the other epistles do, rather he gives a command. In verse 21, he gives a command to obey. He says verse 21,

21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Now as I said earlier, for the longest time I thought why does he say that here? That doesn't seem to connect at all. Well, actually it's the perfect ending for the book.

Now in their day, literal physical idols were everywhere, all kinds of idolatry was present in a physical manifestation and Christians would have been living out their salvation in the midst of that kind of pagan religion. But beloved, John is not referring to statues here, he's referring to false religion. He's referring to false views of Christ and he's been refuting false views of Christ throughout this letter. And so having come full circle now, he makes a next step in terms of where that circle leads and he says, "The consequence of all of my teaching you is this, this is the true Christ. I have told you who Jesus really is therefore here's what you are to do in response. You are to guard yourself against false teaching that proclaims a false Christ. If anyone contradicts what you have been taught in this letter," of 1 John, John says to his readers, "you resist them, you reject them, you turn away from them, you refuse to support them, you isolate them, you cast them out, you move away from them. Guard yourself from those teachers that promote an idol of a false Christ. Guard against the false teaching that proclaims a false Christ." As he said in chapter 4, verse 1, "Test the spirits and know what is true and what is false."

So he ends on this affectionate note, "Little children." He commands them but it's obvious a command of affection, of fatherly protection, as one who is about to step off of the earthly scene and enter into his eternal reward. It's as though he's looking back at them, I'm being a little bit picturesque, a little bit dramatic here to simply to make the

point, he has said what he has to say and he's literally on the verge of bidding them farewell. His life would not last much longer and so he looks back at them and he says, "Little children, as I conclude this letter and as my life will soon be done, I call you to guard yourselves from idols. Take what you've heard, believe it, treasure it, obey it, protect it, defend it, proclaim it, and in that way guard yourself from the demonic spirits and the false teachers that would lead you astray." It's very poignant. With all of the love and energy of an apostle of Christ who's lived for decades serving Christ with his life, the last living representative of the apostolic circle, as he is about to step off of the scene, he leaves a parting admonition, "Guard yourself from idols," which is another way, a negative way of saying, "Take this truth and defend it and protect it and grow in it."

So what does all of that mean for us today? Well, beloved, we have to guard ourselves and we have to guard our teaching, right? We need to, we stay in these things by abiding in them. Friends, you need to be in the word of God on a consistent basis, on a daily basis. You need to be in the word of God because it is this word that protects us as the Spirit works within us. You need to be a person of humble prayer saying, "God, keep me in this truth that You've delivered me to." And you need to consciously stir yourself up to faith in these things, especially in the days in which we live. People are so afraid of what's happening. People are so upset by the lies and deception that are around us and I get it, it bothers me too, but you and I as the believing people of Christ, we have to guard ourselves against that which would drag us into fear, drag us into doubt, drag us into a preoccupation with the things, the passing things of this world. We've got to come back and we've got to stay here. We've got to guard ourselves and we guard ourselves by directing our minds again and again and again to this word and in humble, dependent prayer to the God of our salvation.

Friends, you and I, we can rest our destiny on these certainties about Christ, so much so that we can maintain our confidence in Christ, we can be certain and joyful and assured and growing in holiness no matter what is happening around us because these things are transcendent, these things are beyond the world, these things cannot be taken away from us. And the challenge for the Christian church today I really believe is to simply stay in these things and to believe them and to not be distracted away from them, and to lose sight of our first love for the sake of the world around us. We can talk about these things corporately as a church, ultimately it comes down to you sealing that kind of conviction to your own heart and saying, "This is what I believe, and because it is true, I am well. And because I am well, I don't need to be afraid and I will live joyfully, I will live confidently in the light of adversity and in the face of adversity, and by that joyful assured living and growing in holiness in the midst of a hostile world, I'll do my part to manifest the reality of the things that I believe and I'll trust God to take care of the conspiracies and the many things I don't understand. I'll trust God to take care of the aching sorrow in my heart. I'll trust God to take care of the people who are violating my trust. I'm just going to abandon myself over to completely trusting Him and I will do that knowing that my trust is not misplaced because this is the true God and this is eternal life." As you do that, do you know what will happen? You will find yourself achieving spiritual victory in the midst of this hostile world.

Let's pray together.

Father, there's always a bittersweet moment when we conclude a book like this. Thank You for the opportunity that You unexpectedly gave us to give ourselves to 1 John for a couple of months. It's been a refreshment to our hearts to see Christ and to see the realities of the new birth and the implications it has for those of us that believe. Father, may You strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit and help us to guard ourselves from idols. We look to You for the help that we need.

I pray, Father, for those that are outside of Christ and I pray that Your Spirit would work in them in the deepest recesses and create new life, impart new life, grant them repentance and faith in Christ that they too might be saved.

Father, for those that are falsely assured, unserious about Christ and yet naming His name, Father, would You awaken them? O God, O God, O God, why would You bring them here under the sound of the word again and again and again only to leave them in darkness? Why would You do that, O God? And so we plead with You, the God who sent Christ to be the Savior of the world, the God who loves sinners, the God who calls them to Himself, God, we pray that You would go beyond that external call to that inner effectual call in the hearts of men and women, boys and girls, and draw them to Christ. As we've sought to lift Him up, Father, may You draw all men to Yourself.

Bless our church, Father. Bless these dear friends in front of us. The pain, the sorrow, the anxieties of this world are real, Father, and we all feel them and it's a very difficult time right now. God, be gracious to Your people in every personal, relational, material, spiritual way that You Yourself know that we need. Father, show Yourself to be that graciously abundant Shepherd to Your people. Care for us. Feed us. Protect us. Help us, O God. We have no power of our own. We are weak and we easily go astray and so we ask You, Father, to lead us not into temptation but to deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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