Certainties of the Word of Life, Part 1
1 John 1:1
62-2

Now let's open our Bibles to 1 John chapter 1, 1 John chapter 1. And we're going to be just sort of introducing the book starting with a look at verse 1. John begins this epistle in a very straightforward way. There are no introductory statements. There is no identification of the author. There are no greetings. It's very unlike the letters of Paul and even Peter and even James, for that matter, it just jumps immediately into the issue. John writes: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld, or looked upon, and our hands handled concerning the Word of Life."

This is a book about the Word of Life. And John says, "I am writing this from personal experience. I have heard it. I have seen it. I have looked deeply into it. I have handled it with my own hands. And so John is writing as an eyewitness. At the time that he writes it's the last decade of the first century, he is the last Apostle alive who still has a vital, vibrant ministry of preaching and teaching and leading the church and writing. And when he writes, his subject is the Word of Life...the Word of Life. The Word of Life which he heard and saw and looked intently into and his hands handled. The Word of Life that was, according to verse 2, manifest, what we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you, that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you. Three times he affirms that this is firsthand, eyewitness truth concerning the Word of Life, the Word of Life that was once with the Father, the Word of Life which was incarnate, the Word of Life which brought eternal life.

This then is a message about God's revelation in Christ and God's revelation concerning Christ. That is to say the true revelation of God in the incarnate Word, in the true revelation of God in the written Word. The Word of Life embodies Christ and the gospel of Christ. They are inseparable.

So John starts out by saying, "I'm going to be writing to you the truth about the Word of Life, incarnate and written. I'm going to tell you the truth." This is important because the churches to whom he writes in Asia Minor have been subjected to error. And as a sort of an apostolic duty and responsibility, John knows he has to confront that error with the truth. We could title these first few verses, "Certainties concerning the Word of Life....Certainties concerning the Word of Life."

Now just a very important starting point as we begin to look into this amazing letter, to remind you

that the greatest reality the world possesses is divine truth. The greatest reality the Word possesses is divine truth. (The first time John said world, the second time he said word.) That is the testimony of Scripture all the way through the Old and the New Testament. Nothing is as important, nothing is as valuable as divine truth. The purest, the most powerful, the most necessary, the most valuable reality in existence is God's truth, the Word from God. It alone provides eternal life and eternal life is the most necessary thing that exists.

Since that is inarguably true, since the greatest reality the world possesses is divine truth, the greatest threat in the world is any idea contrary to that truth. Any high idea invented by men or demons raised up against the Word of God constitutes the greatest threat in existence. Now this draws the bottom line in a crystal-clear fashion. The greatest gift the world has, divine truth. The greatest threat is anything that assaults that truth, any form of error. Therefore, all faithful servants of God throughout all of redemptive history, all of human history, all faithful servants of God have been given the responsibility to proclaim the truth and point out the error. The Apostle Paul put it this way, "We have a ministry of teaching but we also have parallel to it a ministry of warning." We are engaged then in this which is essentially the real spiritual warfare. It is a war between the truth and error. And it rages on today as it has through all of human history way back to Genesis chapter 3 where Satan told Eve that God didn't say something God did say. It's always been that way...the truth of God against the lies of demons and men.

It is then the first responsibility and in a sense the singular responsibility of the servant of God to proclaim that truth and to point out anything that threatens that truth. In the first century of the church we would certainly like to believe that at least for the duration of the first century the church would have stayed pure doctrinally and pure behaviorally, but it didn't, as we well know. In the first century of the church after the Savior's work on earth was done and He had ascended back into heaven at the end of the first third of that century, He sent the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, and the purpose of the Holy Spirit was to inspire the Apostles to teach them the truth, to speak to them concerning Himself so that they could write down and those who were with them the record of the New Testament which is the record of the life of Jesus Christ and the ministry of Jesus Christ and the redemption of Jesus Christ and the full explanation of its meaning. They were to write that down to establish the truth. Having written that down they were to tell all of those who proclaimed that truth that they had that responsibility to preach the Word in season and out of season and to reprove and rebuke anyone who attacked that Word.

Well, by the end of the first century, just 50, 60 years after the church was established, the truth was under a massive assault. The first assault on the truth came from Jewish legalism and that is the primary assault that you see the Apostle Paul battling in writing the book of Romans and writing the book of Galatians, battling the issue of legalism which wanted to encroach itself upon the church. You find that was the issue in the Jerusalem Council, that is the issue that is battled through the book of Acts as the Apostle Paul in particular goes into Jewish synagogues and confronts their damning legalism and points to grace and salvation in Jesus Christ and Him alone. That is, of course, the great truth that Paul shed the light in his own heart which he writes about in Philippians chapter 3

when he saw the glory of the truth of salvation in Christ alone, apart from any works. He said he considered every work he had ever done to gain any favor with God as dung. So the first great warfare, the first great battle that Christianity fought had to do primarily with legalism. The second great battle that Christianity fought is one which John is here engaged at the end of the first century and it is...it is a danger that is still with us, legalism is still with us also. They don't go away, they come and stay and just sort of reform themselves through all of history. But John is going to take us into a battle that engages the second greatest threat to the church and it's, as you'll see in a little while, still with us today.

So the Apostle John as he writes this letter is, on the one hand, engaging in a positive ministry of affirming the congregation in life-changing truth, the truth that sanctifies. But at the same time he is equipping them to be able to discern the things that threaten the truth, the assaults and the attacks of the evil one in his systems of error. You remember, of course, that all of the Apostles who engaged in preaching the gospel and in confronting error were rejected and eventually lost their lives, the great majority of them as martyrs. The Apostle Paul who was a sort of later Apostle, the last of the Apostles, a special and unique Apostle, was a martyr to the cause of the truth. They killed him for the truth. And here John, the last of them alive, is about to be exiled to the isle of Patmos because of the preaching of Jesus Christ because of the truth.

Now when he writes this epistle, he's an old man...he's an old man. He writes the gospel and the epistles somewhere in that last decade of the first century, then around 96 A.D. he received the Revelation. Surely he's got to be in his eighties by now. The only man now alive with a personal, intimate association with the Son of God all through His ministry, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, an eyewitness to the incarnation, an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus to which he refers in the verses I just read. Many of the early church fathers in the next century, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexander, and Eusebius tell us that John was at this time living and ministering in Ephesus which was the intellectual center of Asia Minor. He was there overseeing the church in Ephesus, pastoring the church in Ephesus but overseeing the other six churches in the other six well-known cities of Asia Minor to which the seven letters were addressed in the book of Revelation. They tell us John was preaching and John was teaching and he was leading and he was evangelizing and we know, of course, that he was also writing.

The church in Ephesus was founded by the Apostle Paul. He spent three years there. He prophesied, remember, I read you last time in Acts chapter 20 that false teachers would come and they did and they would infect the church with their lies and there would be men within the church and rise up and teach heresy and that heresy would have to be dealt with. John is now having to face what Paul said would happen. And he writes to deal with the heresies to protect the truth as well as to edify the saints.

So 1 John is kind of a polemical letter on the one hand. It is really designed to arm people to deal with error. But at the same time it is also a teaching letter in that it has immense edification within it.

You will find that probably your response to the gospel of John as you go through, first and foremost response is going to be the amazing impact that it has on your own spiritual development. But it also is going to equip you in the process of that development to be able to recognize error when it appears. And John had a zero tolerance policy for error. He would not allow it. I think he was right, I want to have the same tolerance for error, zero tolerance for error, and zero tolerance for anybody who perpetrates error. And because John is so consumed with the truth, and so concerned to protect us from error, there's nothing vague in this epistle. There's really nothing ambiguous here. Oh there are some things that he doesn't tell us everything about, but everything that he does say has a ring of clarity to it. And if you were to just go through the epistle, just starting in chapter 1 and reading which is something I want you to do anyway, you will find that statement after statement after statement comes with absoluteness.

For example, just take chapter 1 verse 6, "If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie." Now that is a very matter-of-fact statement. There are no exceptions to that. In verse 7 he 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." Another statement, verse 8, "If we say we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves." Another statement, verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He's faithful and righteous to forgive our sins." Verse 10, "If we say we have not sinned we make Him a liar." It's just that way all the way through, just point-blank absolute clear statements. Chapter 2 verse 3, "By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments." He never says, "Well yeah, I know everybody doesn't do that all the time but, you know, that's the general..." He never says that. It's all just point blank. Verse 4 he says, "The one who says I've come to know Him and doesn't keep His commandments, he's a liar." In verse 5, "Whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected, by this we know that we are in Him." In verse 9 he says, "The one who says he's in the light and hates his brother is in darkness," I don't care what he says. Verse 10, "The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there's no cause of stumbling in him, but the one who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." In verse 15 he says, "Don't love the world, things in the world, if anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him...period." Boy, it's just so absolutely clear, precise, unambiguous.

And that's how it goes, I won't read all the way through the whole letter, but that's basically how it goes. The end of verse 2, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." How can you tell a Christian? He practices righteousness. You find the same kind of things in verse 10 of chapter 3, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." Pretty clear. You find the same thing also in chapter 4 verse 8, "The one who doesn't love doesn't know God no matter what he claims." Chapter 5, the same thing, verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is Christ is born of God and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him, by this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and observe His commandments." There's just nothing ambiguous about any of this.

It's very different from Paul's writings. Paul...Paul was kind of given over to the exceptions. But not John. There's only one time when this style leaks a little and that's in chapter 2 verse 1 where he says, "My little children, I'm writing these things to you that you may not sin," and then I'm sure it was painful for him to write this, "But if anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." I think he almost hated to even say it. That's John. But though he is committed to the truth, he is clearly committed to the balance of truth and love and that's why he's become known as the Apostle of love, even though he's so firm for the truth. Chapter 3 verse 16, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," now that is love. He learned that from Jesus because Jesus said, "No greater love can a man have than that he lay down his life for his friends," right? Jesus said that in the upper room, there is no greater love than that a man lay down his life for his friends. And John learned that and he is saying here we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. He had a great ability to love. Yes he was committed to the truth, but he was equally committed to love. And he points it out in verse 17, "Whoever has this world's goods and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" You don't just have to give your life for your brother, you could give him out of your substance when you see he has need. And then verse 18 he says, "Let's not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth. And by this...verse 19...we'll know we are of the truth and assure our hearts before Him." So John is definitely committed to this love.

Over in chapter 4 verse 18 he gives us that wonderful statement, "Perfect love casts out fear." In verse 19, "We love because He first loved us." Verse 21, "This commandment we have from Him that the one who loves God should love His brother also." So John was a great lover as well as a man committed to the truth.

The letters of John, and that's true of all his epistles, are the truth expressed out of love. They're not sentimental, they're not soft, they're hard, they're straightforward, they're absolute, they're dogmatic, but out of love he gives us the truth. And we shall experience that love as we learn that truth.

John also is very warm. You're going to find that he's very personal, very conversational. Paul tends to be polemical, logical, theologically technical. Paul writes like he was arguing in a law court. Paul writes like he was a lawyer trying to make his case. John writes like a father giving a message to his beloved family. With Paul it is the logical presentation of the facts. With John it is warm, personal conversational truth. Paul has these flowing arguments that go from point A to Z and through this logical sequence of links you move along the path of Paul's profound inspired reasoning. That's very different than John. You're not going to find a logical argument flowing from the first verse of John's epistle to the last verse of chapter 5. You're not going to find that sort of Pauline logical flow that you find in the letters of Paul, and even in the letters of Peter and James and even Jude's letter. You're going to find something very different, you're going to find him having conversations with you and circling back through the same thing, like a father teaching his children with repetition. It's line upon line, precept upon precept, and so forth. And as I pointed out in the Study Bible, when I did an outline and maybe was the most challenging outline of all the books of the New Testament to try to outline this...this epistle of John is no small task. And the reason it's hard to outline is because it's not in that

sort of systematic flow, it's a series of very personal conversations with the family. But what you see here is a series of...of circles. First he goes through the first series of statements. He goes through the same thoughts again, the same thoughts again, the same thoughts again four times. Each of the times he does that he goes a little wider and a little deeper. But it's basically going back through the same great truths that they might be laid deeply into the heart of his beloved children. Paul has been in heaven at least twenty years when John writes, so John has the last word, for what it's worth. Maybe like the marriage at Cana, God kept the best wine for the last.

Now it's helpful, just briefly, to make a brief comparison between the epistles of John and the gospel of John. And that's easy to do. First of all, you are struck when I read 1 John 1:1 that it's about the Word. It's about the living Word, the Word of Life. Well, that's what his gospel is about as well. We remember how his gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." John writes about the Word. But in the gospel, here's the difference. In the gospel he is writing for unbelievers in order to arouse their faith in the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, in John 20 at the end of his, or near the end of his gospel, verse 31 he tells you why he wrote the gospel of John. "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name." So the purpose of the gospel of God is evangelistic. That's why typically if I meet a person who's not a Christian and they're interested in understanding the gospel, I tell them to read the gospel of John because it is written that you might believe and in believing have life in His name, so that the purpose of the gospel of John was to write about the Word and to prove that the Word was God incarnate and that He came to bring salvation. The gospel was written then to the unbeliever to bring the unbeliever to faith in the Word. The epistle, on the other hand, was written to believers not to bring them to salvation, but to deepen their confidence in the work of Christ and their assurance...and their assurance. His desire for the readers of the gospel was that through the record of the life of Jesus they might receive life. His desire for the readers of the epistle is that they might fully enjoy the life they had received. So the gospel contains signs, that's the key word in the gospel, it contains signs, the gospel of John, that evoke faith. The epistles contain tests to verify faith. That's the distinction. And they were written, as I told you last time, at very much the same time.

Further, the enemies of the truth in the gospel are unbelieving Jews, the legalists of Judaism who refuse to believe that Jesus was God and refuse to abandon their legalistic system of self-righteousness. They are the enemies that appear in the gospel account. The enemies of the truth, however, in the epistles are professing Christians who are led astray by false teachers. They too are the enemies of the truth. The truth has enemies everywhere, outside the church and inside.

Now the gospel then is evangelistic where the epistle is pastoral. The gospel reaches out with the gospel to those who are not converted. The epistle reaches into the church to those who profess Christ. And, of course, first and foremost would be the churches of Asia Minor who, no doubt, were the initial recipients of John's epistles.

Now I told you last time that John has three purposes here and clearly they are purposes that relate to Christian. Chapter 1 verse 4, "These things we write so that our joy may be made complete." We'll talk a little more about that. Some translations say "Your joy," and I think John can be added to that so that it's "our" joy. So the first purpose we saw was full joy. The second purpose, chapter 2 verse 1, "I'm writing these things to you that you may not sin." So the first purpose is joy, the second purpose is holiness. Third purpose, chapter 5 verse 13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life," assurance. He's writing to believers that they might have joy and hope and holiness and assurance. Wonderful, wonderful purposes. And when you, as I closed last week, when you learn the wonderful epistle of 1 John, it will increase your joy, it will increase your holiness and it will increase your assurance. If you are a true believer, you're going to have a greater joy, a greater righteousness practically and a greater assurance then you would have without this.

So there are three benefits that John wants to deliver to the student of his first epistle. And in the epistle he gives us three basic keys to seeing those purposes fulfilled. Turn to chapter 3 for a moment. If we're going to have these purposes fulfilled, there are some essential keys. Verse 23 of chapter 3, this is his commandment, "That we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ." That's the first thing. We need to believe. If you're going to expect the benefit of this epistle, you have to be a believer in Jesus Christ. Secondly, in verse 23 he commands us not only to believe but to love one another. We're commanded to believe, we're commanded to love. And thirdly, in verse 24, we're commanded to obey, to keep His commandments. For those who believe and love and obey, this letter will deliver an increased joy, an increased holiness, and an increased assurance.

Now as I said a little bit earlier, and I'm still just kind of giving you the overview, the epistle is also polemic. That is it involves a controversy. He's not just positive, he's negative. In fact, there are probably as many negative statements here as there are positive ones...which is good because it reminds us that ministry is not all the time supposed to be positive thinking. You can't just say, "Well all I want to have is a positive ministry," you won't have any ministry if you don't have a positive and a negative ministry. People say, "Well I hate to be negative." You shouldn't hate to be negative, you should love to be negative. I never hated to be negative with my children. I loved to be negative because I wanted to protect them. And consequently I had to warn them against those things that are harmful. There is a tone sweeping through this of positive affirmation to bring about joy and holiness and assurance, but at the same time there is a strong negative note. While he wants the Christians to know who they are, he also wants the non-Christians to know who they are. Bu this epistle, the congregation is sorted out. And he knows that there are in these churches false teachers. By the way, in the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor that the Lord gave him on the isle of Patmos which were later delivered to those churches, it's very clear that there were false teachers in those churches. They're even identified occasionally. So John knew that there were false teachers already there infecting the churches with their evil influence. People who were representative of those false teachers, as long...as well as the false teachers themselves, needed to be clearly identified. So there are the positive affirmations that point out who's a believer, and the negative ones who point out who's not, and therein is the church warned.

Now, John even directly speaks about false prophets, chapter 4 verse 1. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they're from God because many false prophets have

gone out into the world." You really can't be naive about this. You just can't be naive. You can't be trusting. False prophets are everywhere. They are the agents of Satan, as we know. And so John speaks about false prophets in very specific terms.

Back up to chapter 3 verse 7, he identifies them not only as false prophets, that is false preachers, false speakers and teachers, but he identifies them as deceivers, verse 7. "Let no one deceive you." These false prophets are also deceivers.

Backing up again into chapter 2 and verse 18 he has even a stronger word for them. They are not only false prophets, and deceivers, verse 18 of chapter 2, "Children, it is the last hour and just as you hear that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen." The substance of their teaching was to deny the truth about Christ. The substance of their teaching was to deny what the Bible taught about the nature of Christ and the work of Christ and the atonement of Christ. And in all three cases he says there are many...there are many false prophets, there are many who would deceive you, there are many antichrists. We would be foolish and willfully ignoring the warnings of Scripture if we assume that some kind of ministry could only be positive all the time. You literally are opening up all of your congregation to the destruction that's brought to bear by those liars that always infiltrate unwary and unprotected churches.

Apparently these false prophets and these deceivers and antichrists, all really the same people, apparently at one time they passed as church members. Apparently they were in the congregation, they professed to be Christians, they belonged to the church. Some of them were still remaining there. Some of them had left, chapter 2 verse 19, "They went out from us," some of the antichrists had left, "But they were not really of us," he says. "If they were of us they would have remained with us, they went out from us that it might be made manifest they were not of us." So some of them left.

What would cause them to leave? Well I'll tell you what would cause them to leave, the preaching and the leadership of John. In his ministry he was driving them out. It's maybe one of the reasons why even when the seven letters of the churches to Asia Minor were written that there weren't more false teachers then there were. There were a lot of problems and there were some false teachers but Ephesus apparently had been rid of false teachers because in the letter to the church at Ephesus there's an affirmation that their doctrine was sound. They had just left their first love. So under the tremendous power of this old Apostle, under his preaching and teaching there was the exposure of some Antichrists, deceivers and false prophets who were leaving, but there were some who remained. And they were hitting hard at the truth. John wants the flock to recognize the truth and to recognize error.

Now the error that they taught, we can put it together by reading the epistle, I'm still giving you an overview, the error that they taught was concerning the Word. That would be concerning the Word

incarnate, Jesus Christ, and the Word written, the gospel about Him. Their error began with the person of Jesus Christ. Always false prophets want to deny who Christ is because if you believe in the one Christ, you can't be saved. And so they would assault Christ. That is why in verse 18, I just read you, in chapter 2 they are called antichrists. When you say...when I say the word antichrist, most people think of an eschatological figure who is going to come at the end of the age, and if you've been reading all the books and novels on the Second Coming, you've got a whole misconception in your mind, a fictional conception at that, of what the Antichrist will be like, but most people when you hear the word antichrist just sort of think about the eschatological figure who is going to come at the end of human history. But there are many antichrists and an antichrist is anyone who is anti-Christ. It's a small "a", not a large A. It's not an uppercase antichrist, as if there were only one. There are many antichrists, many of them. Go down to verse 22 and it's explained. "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." Anybody who denies the true God and the Son of God is antichrist. It's not limited to one individual. Verse 23, "Whoever denies the Son doesn't have the Father," that's antichrist. Any deceiver, chapter 3 verse 7, any deceiver is an antichrist. Any false prophet and there are many of them is an antichrist. And chapter 4 verse 2, "By this you know the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that doesn't confess Jesus is not from God, this is of the antichrist." Antichrist is a term for anybody who tampers with the true nature, person and work of Christ.

Now we're not...we're not given a label about this heresy. It's not important that you identify a heresy at a given piece of time. What's important is that you understand that those heresies which come against the truth always start with an assault on the nature of Christ. They're always anti-Christ. That's true of everything outside the Christian faith and some who would like to be included inside the Christian faith, cults. They were making all kinds of claims, these antichrists.

What kind of claims were they making? Well look at chapter 1 for a moment. Look how these verses go starting in verse 6, "If we say...," verse 8, "If we say...," verse 10, "If we say..." Well, that's reflective of what these false teachers were saying. What were they saying? Well they were saying in verse 6, "We have fellowship with Him and yet we walk in the darkness." What does that mean? Oh, we're true believers in the true God, but they walk in darkness, that is they are dark to the truth both intellectually and morally. "If we say that we belong to the true God, but it is clear that we're in the dark about the truth concerning Christ and we walk in sin, we lie." Who is a liar and an antichrist? Who is a deceiver? Somebody who says you can be a true Christian and still live in the darkness, you can still be in the dark about what is true and the dark about what is right. They said in verse 8, "We have no sin, we have no sin." That's another one of their statements. Well that's not true. They're in a state of self-deception and the truth isn't in them.

Now as you read those you begin to piece together what their theology was. They were denying the person of Christ. They were denying that you had to believe the truth and that you had to live a righteous life. They actually went so far as to deny that they had any sin by redefining things, and I'll tell you how they did that. In fact, in verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a

liar." So they were lying about their sinful condition. They were lying about their fellowship with God. They were in the dark and they were living sinful lives, but they wouldn't admit it. They denied that sin existed in their nature. So they started out denying Christ, then they went to denying sin. They said, "We can be in the fellowship, we can be in the fellowship even though our lives are full of sin. Oh, it's really not sin, we don't sin." Amazing.

And as a result of that they had no interest in practicing the law of God. They had no interest in living a holy life, as chapter 3 verse 4, "Everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." So what John is saying is these people deny Christ, deny that God has come in the flesh in Christ. They deny their sinful condition. And even though they're living in sin, they say they're still in the fellowship. And they don't even acknowledge that the sin that they commit is sin and therefore they can go on practicing their redefined sin and violate the law of God. That's the...that's always how the false religious systems go. They deny Christ and then they deny their true lostness. The third error in this system had to do with love...had to do with love. They said you could love God and hate others. That's what they said. Verse 4 of chapter 2 they said, "I've come to know Him, but they don't keep His commandments, they're liars...they're liars." Furthermore in verse 9 they say they're in the light but they hate their brother, they're liars. They rejected the true Christ. They rejected their own sinful condition, redefined it. And they hated. Verse 11 says, "The one who hates his brother is in darkness no matter what he says." He can't live that way and maintain a legitimate claim to belonging to God. Chapter 4 verse 20, "If somebody says he loves God," and he's just repeating what the false teachers were saying, "If they're saying, 'I love God,' they hate their brother, he's a liar." How many times does John say "he's a liar?" This is really straightforward stuff. It's good, isn't it? He's just so blunt.

Well, you know, I'm in the fellowship but I don't believe Jesus came in the flesh. Then you're a liar. You're a deceiver. You're antichrist. That's what John would say. So we can piece together a little bit of what their heresy was. Like all heresies, it assaulted the essence of the Christian gospel, the person of Jesus Christ. It had a wrong view of man, failed to see him in his dire and desperate condition as a sinner who had no ability to save himself. And they had no regard for others. There was no love there. In fact, they looked down with disdain on anybody who wasn't in their little elite philosophical religious group.

What heresy is this? It's a lot of them but it's the incipient roots of what later came to be known as Gnosticism. It was a couple of centuries before Gnosticism really got labeled and you can't just isolate Gnosticism to a small little easily defined religion. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis*and it's based on the idea that some people had secret knowledge, that they had ascended above the hoi-polloi to the high levels of secret knowledge. It's 2 Corinthians 10:5 again, "It's every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." It's all that high thinking by which man elevates himself. And this...this sort of incipient Gnosticism is the second great heresy that the church had to face. First was legalism, it's still around. And the next was Gnosticism, and it's still around.

You say, "Well, what is modern Gnosticism?" The New Age Movement...any form of mysticism, any concept in the mind of man that is elevated above the Word of God, any mystical system, any religious system, any cult, any false system, any theory, any viewpoint elevated above the truth. And you can't necessarily narrow it down, there are people in the New Age Movement, people in modern mysticism who believe all kinds of bizarre things. In fact, one of the things about being a mystic is you sort of invent your own religion and so when it comes to cataloging it, it's pretty hard to do. You can't catalog what they believe, but you can catalog what they don't believe and what they don't believe is they don't believe in Jesus as the Son of God incarnate, that's clear. They don't believe they are sinners and in need of a Savior. And they do not look down on people who are below their level with any measure of love.

Now Gnosticism had in it as it developed a philosophical dualism. Philosophical dualism was an erroneous philosophy, still around today, that all material substance is evil, that all material substance is evil. They have a view in Gnosticism that the...that everything that is material was created by a bad god, a bad deity. I covered some of this in a series I did on Feminism. But the Gnostic concept was that a bad god made the material world and so that everything in the material world is bad and only the spirit is good. Man's problem is that he is good, inherently good but he is incarcerated, in prison in a bad material body and the only way that you can ever sort of win over that bad incarceration, your only hope of salvation is through self-knowledge. So what is all this New Age stuff? What is all this philosophy of mysticism tell you? If you want to find God, look...where?...within because down inside you, prisoner to your bad material flesh is this great self-god of goodness who can be liberated. And you are saved by coming to know your good god-self. Now matter is viewed as evil, therefore matter is always evil. It can never be good, says Gnostic philosophy and says New Age philosophy, so therefore what you do physically is meaningless. Gnostics then would engage in literal unbridled indulgence of the flesh because there was a gulf-fix between the good spirit and the bad flesh. The flesh could never be good, it could only be bad and there it was so let it be bad because as bad as it is it never affects the good in you. That is the modern philosophical New Age mentality. And who knows what kind of conduct these people engage in. Historically Gnostic people engaged in the worst kind of sinful indulgences because it had absolutely no bearing on their goodness. The material body is sinful anyway so let it do whatever it wants to be.

And we see this being lived out in our society. People living in ....in a absolute immorality, doing whatever their lusts tell them to do without restraint, at the same time looking to find the goodness inside of them. And they believed that because material is bad, because the physical is bad, the true good God would never live in a material body. Therefore the incarnation couldn't happen because the good God would never come and incarcerate himself in a material body. So the Gnostics denied the incarnation. That's why John says in chapter 4, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God," because these people in this sort of incipient Gnosticism were denying that Jesus came in the flesh because of this philosophical dualism in which they lived.

You say, "Well where did that come from? What was the revelation that brought that down?" It's pretty simple. Pretty simple. They wanted to live as rotten as you could possibly live and feel good

about themselves so they invented the system. Easy enough, isn't it? I mean, if you...if you love darkness rather than light and you wanted to just sin to the max, but you wanted to feel good about doing it, in order to alleviate your guilt, you invent, you concoct a very sophisticated system that says, "Inside I'm good, inside I'm God. And the problem is, I'm stuck in this physical body, this material body which is always bad and it can't do anything but be bad so let it be what it is, that's not a problem it has no effect on the goodness within." Boy, that is a convenient justification, isn't it? So you had a group of people that showed up under the big banner of Gnosticism called Docetists, D-o-c-e-t-i-s-t, Docetists from *dokeo*, the Greek word "to seem." And the Docetists said that Christ was God but He only seemed to have a body. So you could see that this...this Gnostic/Docetic view actually got into the church and people are trying to say, "We believe in Jesus, we believe..." I mean, there are people today who say, "We believe in Jesus, we believe Jesus is a representation of the good God in Him and the good God came out in Him more than it does in most people and we believe in Jesus," etc. And these people would even say that we believe that Christ was the good God come down, but He could never take on material form so He only seemed to have a physical body. It was an illusion.

There was another group called the Cerinthians and the Cerinthians said that the divine Christ came on the human Jesus just for a brief time. That God didn't dwell in his material body permanently because that wouldn't be good, God would never do that. But He just sort of came down and hung around from His baptism to the cross and then left. And these are people within the framework of Christianity, these Cerinthians, who said when Jesus...the Scripture says...yielded up His Spirit, that good God left and He came descending like a dove at His baptism and left at the cross cause they couldn't tolerate an actual incarnation because of this dualism.

Some in the early church said that Simon Magus was the father of all of this. You remember Simon Magus in Acts chapter 8 who tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit? Some church fathers say Simon Magus was the start of this. It is also very possible that the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation 2:6 and 15, had some form of this kind of gnostic dualistic heresy.

Now keep this in mind. If Jesus wasn't God in human flesh, then that is an outright denial of the substitutionary atonement, right? Because if you don't have Jesus as man dying for man, you have no substitute. There's a lot at stake.

John answers the Docetists in the passage I just read you, at the beginning of his letter. They were denying that Jesus actually had a body. They were...can you imagine people telling John? "John, that wasn't a real body, it only seemed to be a body." John who spent three years intimately acquainted with Jesus, so this is how he writes, "What we have heard with our ears and seen with our eyes and look on and our hands have handled." That's what he's saying. You guys are crazy, I was there and we saw it and we bore witness and we proclaim it. And he says it in verse 3, "And we saw it and we heard..." Silly idea of the Cerinthian that Jesus' Spirit came down on that body from baptism to the cross is a denial of the eternality, of course, of the Son of God in that there's some floating Spirit, we don't know when it came into existence but it was some created Spirit. The gospel indicates that the Son of God eternally came in and took a body for the duration of His time on earth,

beginning even in His mother's womb. When we get to 1 John 5:6 we'll talk about that again because that's a verse that answers the Cerinthian heresy.

So, Gnosticism comes, it attacks Jesus Christ, it attacks the person of Christ, attacking the fact that God came in human flesh. It attacks the diagnosis of man, that he is a sinner in need of a Savior. It assaults the responsibility to love, thus it wipes out the substitutionary atonement, wipes out obedience, holiness, righteous and the law of God, and it wipes out the necessity of loving relationships. These people lived to gratify their appetites, to gratify their lusts without limit. Physical purity was meaningless. In fact, they didn't even sin. When they said, "We have not sinned," if you say you have no sin they're saying, "In my inner person I have no sin, it's just my material body." This is the character of this heresy that developed.

In fact, the gnostics actually divided everybody into two classes. Let me talk a little bit more about this third thing that they didn't love. They divided everybody in two classes: those capable of the higher life, those capable of the getting to know the God within, and those not capable of it, the low life, the *psuchikoi[?]*, *psuche*is the word soul. The *psuchikoi*were the soulish, sort of beastly people who never advanced beyond the physical life. The *pneumatoi[?]*from the word spirit, were the spiritual people who floated higher and higher, who were lifted above the mundane by their contemplation of their own deity within.

The result was obvious. The imaginary elite, the *pneumatoi*looked down with disdain on the *psuchikioi*and love was gone as if it could even exist in a life of total immorality. That is why John in his epistle is concerned to point out the nature of Christ, the essence of sin and righteousness and the demand for love. This is distinctive. Those are the very marks if you go back to chapter 3 where I started, verses 23 and 24, that are the keys. "This is the commandment that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ." You can't be wrong about Christ. "And that you love one another as He commanded us and that you keep His commandments." Those are the ones who abide in Him. You have Christological heresy, moral indifference, and arrogant hate that made up the roots of Gnosticism that always, even today, assaults the person of Christ and His work, exonerates man, he's not a sinner, he's this good person, he's God within, and teaches the ones who are enlightened to look down on the poor beastly ones who can't find the God within them but are pounding on their breasts and crying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

So, as John writes this epistle, he exposes the false and he also reveals the true. From the very personal viewpoint, you're going to find out whether you're the real thing in this letter. And these concepts just cycle around four times in an amazing way and we'll be taken back to the very black and white, absolute realities of what it means to be a Christian. Throughout this epistle there is a note of certainty, as I said, that rings loudly. One of the ways you're going to hear the bell ring is when you see the word "know," 36 times, k-n-o-w 36 times. "By this we know..." not we think, we hope, we wish, we feel, we know. This is an epistle of certainty and it starts out in the first four verses with five great certainties and that's what we're going to look at next time.

Lord, what a wonderful, wonderful overview You've given us of this great letter and how our hearts are eager in anticipation of the joy of seeing its mighty works in our hearts. We want that joy, that holiness, that assurance that was the purpose for which this epistle was written. And we want to be able to discern the false teachers, the deceivers and the antichrists who attack the person of Christ, attack the reality of human sinfulness, attack the commandment to love. We want to be able to discern the terrible heresies that strike at the truth. We want to be the people of the truth and faithful to that truth. So we await what You have to teach us in months ahead. And now even tonight, Lord, may we come to grips with how important it is for us to believe in Jesus Christ, to love one another and to obey Your commandments. Herein is the demonstration that we are truly Your children. For any who are here for whom that is not true, may this be the night when Your mighty Spirit works in their hearts to bring them to faith in Christ that they might be ushered into a life of love and obedience. We pray for His glory. Amen.

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