



INSTRUCTION ON 1 JOHN

SIX EXPOSITORY LECTURES
DICK LUCAS

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THE MESSAGE OF 1 JOHN

The February 2007 lectures on 1 John were prepared in order to be spoken, not written to be read. As a result they are more 'free and easy' than formal lectures, though, I trust, not needlessly verbose.

A demand for written summaries has led to the production of these notes. I am very grateful indeed to those heroic listeners and scribes who have given time and skill to prepare them.

It occurred to me, however, that a succinct account of what I see to be the 'message' of 1 John might prove to be useful as an introduction.

RCL

AN INTRODUCTION

'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.'

1 John 5:21

Westcott's comment on the above was, "This comprehensive warning is probably the latest voice of Scripture." If so, John's final warning to the churches, now as then, is a solemn one.

Idolatry, in its numerous configurations is the normal religious condition of fallen mankind, whether in sophisticated first-century Athens or among the tribes of the Amazon forests today. In a world hostile to the claims of the true God for his Son Jesus Christ, it is the only form of religion that is acceptable (4:5).

Satan's masterpiece would be to lead Christian churches back into idolatry while they still retained all the outward form and structures of Christianity.

Not that this is an original plan (Satan was never a creative thinker) since Bible history is a record of declension from true theology and a pure worship until prophets and apostles expose religious seductions for what they are, and call God's people back to Himself.

The enemies in 1 John are the Antichrists (2:18,19). Remember, they opposed Apostolic standards by providing a rich and attractive counterfeit Christianity. In truth, their claims to superior experience (1:6-10), and a higher knowledge of God (2:4-9) were such that faithful believers were badly shaken as to the genuineness of their own spiritual state – hence the strong strand of Re-assurance (*not* first time assurance for new converts, as the tradition has it) in every part of John's letter.

Fundamentally, the antichrists rejected what John describes as the historic Apostolic testimony to Christ (1:1-4). Again, remember that to lose fellowship with the Apostles and their doctrine (teaching) is to lose fellowship with the Father and the Son. Any form of Christianity that does this is by definition idolatrous.

The hallmarks of the antichrists were three –

1. **They hated the brethren** among whom they had once belonged (2:9-11; 3:11-15).

2. **They espoused lawlessness**, by which John means that they refused to live by the authority of God's word – hence the repeated emphasis in 1 John on the necessity of obedience (2:3f; 3:21f; 5:2f).

3. **They denied the Son**, the Word made flesh, as the one indispensable mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:7). Hence, the many references to the propitiating sacrifice of Christ (1:7; 2:2; 3:5; 4:10; 5:6f).

The most straightforward application of 1 John to the modern scene is to that hollowed out Christianity resulting from three or more generations of so called 'liberal' theology, in which the 'modern mind' believes only what it can accept on its own terms (this equals the essence of idolatry, where man is the measure of all things). Nevertheless it passionately believes in the 'spirit' of the age, as painfully demonstrated this month (Feb 2007) by the Episcopal Church of America. Riddled with political correctness it is riddled with idolatry, yet is confident of its 'spiritual' leadership.

What, however, comes closer to home, is when this contemporary version of the historic faith begins to make inroads into British evangelicalism. It has happened before, in the 'liberal evangelical' movements that had all but expired by the Second World War, but now shows every sign of re-inventing themselves (Dr O.R. Barclay's 'Evangelicalism in Britain 1935-95' has valuable information and comment on this aspect of recent church history).

Summary

John's warning is that any departure from the Apostles' doctrine opens the door to new idolatry. The obvious signs of this will be a rejection of the authority of Scripture, a calling in question of the full deity of Christ (his virgin Birth and bodily Resurrection), a dismissal of substitutionary atonement, and a growing permissiveness in the moral sphere. Warnings of such declension have long been given; the situation is now upon us. What John does is to attach to these modern trends the right label.

LECTURE ONE

This was prepared primarily for pastors and teachers who want to do a series in their churches and so my aim was to help the preacher, rather than to comment on commentaries. In other words, what I am really trying to help you do is to wield the sword of the Spirit. It seems to me the commentator describes the sword, tells you what it's like, looks at it from every angle, but it is not the commentator's business to use the sword and plunge it in. There is a great difference, and so you often find with commentaries that at the end you are left with a lot of questions. You could not preach them just like that; you have to make up your mind what indeed is the Spirit saying through the word of God to people today.

In the first lecture we are going to look at the occasion for the writing of 1 John. That is, the circumstances that led the aged apostle of love to put pen to paper or whatever you did, to the churches in Roman Asia. There's usually a crisis that causes these letters to be written. It's very seldom that an apostle sits down and writes just because he's got nothing better to do. And there was certainly a crisis here. So first of all, we are going to look at the original occasion that caused John to write to these little apostolic churches.

In the second lecture we are going to look at the ultimate message of 1 John. That is, the decisive or final word that makes this little letter so important, both for them in the first century and important for us in the 21st century. Westcott says in his classic commentary of about 1881: "This comprehensive warning [the last verse of 1 John] is probably the latest voice of Scripture." Well, final words are often intended to be important and if this is the final apostolic word to the churches, then it's obviously very important.

Why was 1 John written?

So we start, then, with reasons for writing this remarkable little letter. As I go along, I will mention one or two commentaries that have been a help to me. I started my study on this last year on January 1st and I've been working on it more or less ever since but I haven't gone into all the commentaries, but one or two have been especially helpful. Not least

helpful is the Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges. It is by Dr Plumber and dated 1884, which goes to show that the orthodox Victorian commentaries are still worth reading. The standard explanation for the writing of 1 John is Chapter 5:13 and you hear this quoted over and over again: "*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*" And this is what Dr Plumber says. Normally I entirely agree with him but on this occasion I don't. The object of John's Gospel, St John tells us himself: "*...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (20:31). The object of the epistle he tells us also: "*I write these things to you... so that you may know that you have eternal life.*" The comment is that John's Gospel is written to show the way to eternal life through belief in the incarnate Son; the epistle is written to confirm and enforce the Gospel and to assure those who believe in the incarnate Son that they have eternal life.

I think is the standard attitude about the gospel and the epistle, but it was not long into January and February last year that I discovered that this is not so much wholly wrong but wholly inadequate. In fact, John gives several different clues in the course of his little letter as to why he wrote. And it is unwise to take these verses as though it applies to the whole letter. Usually these little sentences when he says "I write" refer just there to the paragraph before it. Chapter 2:1 "*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin...*" Well, that is obviously not the main purpose but it is one purpose: he does not want to encourage sin. 2:12 (a strange little parenthesis we will address later) "*I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven...I write to you, fathers...*" and so on. And perhaps most important of all, 2:26 "*I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray*". So you see there are a number of times when he says, "I write", more than the ones I have quoted, and we shouldn't pick out 5:13 as being more important than the others. I would put 5:13 as being alongside 2:26, for example.

Reassurance for believers

We will get a much more accurate picture if we say that John wrote to these little gospel churches and communities not to assure them about their standing but to reassure them. These three letters of John were not written at the time of the founding of Christian house churches but by then many of these churches had been established a good many years. John is writing at the end of the first century. Isn't he the only surviving apostle? I think I'm right in saying he's the only one who died in his own bed. We are here right at the end of the first century and these churches have been going strong for a long time. So the message of simple assurance of faith and confidence in God through Christ is one that they have known for many years. And he says that, actually, in that little parenthesis I mentioned: 2:13 *"I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning."* He means there by 'the beginning', the beginning of the preaching of the gospel, the beginning of the whole Christian explosion in Acts, and so on. So John is writing to reassure believers whose confidence has been very badly shaken.

Their confidence has been badly shaken by the emergence of men whom John calls the anti-Christ. 2:26 is, therefore, an important statement, although of course it refers to the paragraphs before. Seduction is in the air. And you're not surprised to know that this kind of seduction had been prophesied not least by Paul in his farewell address to the Ephesians. So we read in Acts 20:29 these familiar words: *"I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock."* That suggests people from outside coming into the flock. Acts 20:30-31 is rather different: *"Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!"* Now these are the verses that refer much more accurately to 1 John because these anti-Christ come from your own number. That's one of the main things we're going to see about them.

Who are the antichrists?

So, the anti-Christ. What a startling title it is! I wonder what your understanding of the anti-Christ is. I suppose I had in my mind the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians – that monstrous figure who will

stand at the end of time. Is that what John is talking about? Well, not exactly. I want to say that we hear about these only in John's epistles and so if we don't know 1 John we'll be ignorant of who the anti-Christ are and what sort of danger they bring to the churches. They were present in the first century; therefore presumably they are present in the 21st century as well. So 1 John is a particularly important warning about these miserable men.

I am only going to dart into various verses in these first two lectures. Let's turn to chapter 2.

"Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going shows that none of them belonged to us." (2:18)

The references to the antichrist in 1 and 2 John are as follows: 2:18; 2:22 *"Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is antichrist"*. 4:3 talks about the false prophets, who are presumably the same. *"...every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist"*. And then 2 John 7-8, *"Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out..."* So those are the references in 1 and 2 John. These are the trouble-makers who are causing so much confusion and disturbing the peace of the Christians.

Actually they are not just mentioned here, although they are given a name here. We shall find that we meet them in every part of 1 John. They are on every page and in every paragraph. They are almost in every line; echoes of them are to be found everywhere, even though we may not realise it. For example, when we start in chapter 1 and verses 6, 8, and 10 to read those familiar claims, *"If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."* He's talking there about the antichrist and their influence on the churches. Verse 8: *"If we claim to be without sin..."* Again, he's talking there about the antichrists who not only try to

deceive others but are deceived themselves. Verse 10: *"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar..."* That's not the ordinary Christians – that's the antichrists, the trouble-makers. We shall meet them again in chapter 2. There's a little Greek phrase which simply goes: 'he who says'. Verse 4, 6, and 9. Verse 4: *"The man who says, 'I know him,'..."* That's a tremendous claim isn't it? 'I have a real knowledge, I've been enlightened, and the impression is, beyond you ordinary Christians.' Verse 6: *"The man who says he lives in him..."*; verse 9: *"The man who says he's in the light but hates his brother..."* All those references are to the antichrist and the influence they have on the little churches – if indeed they are having this influence, as we shall come to see later.

Five hallmarks of the antichrists

Well, it's time to get a handle on them and I think the best place to start is in 2:18-19. I'm going to give you five hallmarks of these men.

1. **They are already present in the first century**, as early as that. See 2:18. Paul's man of lawlessness, 2 Thessalonians 2:4, is one man, a monster, at the end of Christian history. These people are already present in the first century. They are at work with their propaganda in these little Christian communities in John's lifetime. They are already present. That ought to chill us. It means they will always be in the churches.

2. **There are many of them.** Verse 18: *"...the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come."* And 4:1 *"...many false prophets..."* Not one trouble-maker, though one can be enough in a church as some of you know, not like Diotrephes in 3 John, who obviously was a pain in the neck, and there are people like that, aren't there. But here there are many pains in the neck, many Diotrephes or whatever they are, so they are already present, point one, and there are many of them, point two.

3. This is very important: **they had been professing Christian believers**, 2:19a. Remember Paul's warning? *"Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth"* (Acts 20:30) They came not from the outside, like wolves descending on the flock, but deceitfully, from within and therefore unsuspected.

4. **They had, however, left these little orthodox gospel assemblies**, 2:19. The person who helped me most on this is Colin Kruse and if I'm going to recommend one commentator to you it would be him. I think it's very thorough and really very good indeed; that was the one that really woke me up and my debt to Colin Kruse is enormous. He showed me many things about the way in which these people, for example, had left their communities and what that actually involved. So they had left these little early Christian communities but they didn't leave them alone; they wanted to draw away the disciples after them.

5. Finally, and obviously most important of all in 2:22-23: **they did not acknowledge Jesus as the God-man.** *"Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also."* These tremendous words seem to me to be foundational to our understanding of 1 John.

We shall see later on that he describes this particular denial in a number of different ways. It's not just in one way and that has caused a certain amount of dispute among the commentators as to what he really meant. 4:2 for example: *"...every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God"*. Then in 4:15 just simply: *"If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him..."* So we mustn't take one to the exclusion of the other. Later I will put them all together and to get some idea of what these men were saying. I will leave that until later, but I do want to reassure you with 2:20 which is remarkable: *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth."* So John is saying there that every born-again Christian has an experience of the Spirit, a spiritual provision, the necessary equipment to be kept safe from this kind of antichrist. So we're not talking now about the brilliant young pastor; we're talking about Mrs Baggins in your congregation who may have had

no theological training but she's a dear Christian woman and has been so for many years. She too has the anointing and is just as able as a pastor to understand that the antichrist is not teaching the true faith. That's very important. Since in recent literature in Christian evangelical circles we hear a good deal of nonsense about anointings, it may be worth turning to 1 John and asking what he has to say. And here he says that every Christian has an anointing – the most important anointing you could imagine because it keeps him or her safe from error.

Exposing the false and encouraging the true

Now what it shows is that in this letter (and this is very important for the preacher) that John both exposes the false and encourages the true. He does the two together all the time. I would suggest to you that that is an ideal for anybody who is speaking in Christian service. All good Christian teaching must encourage the faithful but must also expose the false. I want to suggest to you that that is the perfect pattern for the Christian preacher and it is fascinating how John does this. For example, *"If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."* (1:6) There is a plain exposure of those who make that bogus claim. *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."* (1:7) There is a great encouragement. Then we have another exposure: *"If we claim..."* And then verse 9, an encouragement: *"If we confess..."* He does this alternating: first an exposure, then an encouragement. Don't listen to that, do listen to this. There is a hard evangelical preaching that exposes unceasingly but doesn't do much positive encouragement. On the other extreme there is a soft evangelicalism that encourages wonderfully clearly and warmly but seldom if ever exposes error. John does both all the time.

So one very interesting characteristic of John in this letter is the use of the negative. You'll find exactly the same in John's Gospel. It is something I think we need very badly today on the fringes of evangelicalism where often the negative is avoided. John says, quoting Christ: *"I am the way and the truth and the life."* (John 14:6) Then comes the negative: *"No-one comes to the Father except through me."* You see, the negative interprets the

positive. You can't have the positive without the negative. Otherwise you're not being a faithful preacher. And so he does that exactly in 1 John 1:5, 6 and 8. He shows the negative and then the positive, the negative and then the positive, and you'll find that he does that all the way through his letter. We lie and do not practise the truth – those two are different, aren't they? They balance each other. It means we're telling a lie about ourselves and we're not in accordance with the truth of the gospel. They're the same thing, but there's a balance there; they are two sides of a coin.

John's principle is first century truth

Now let me make a comment here having given you these five signs of the antichrist, without which we would get into a dreadful muddle. The concept, of course, that they have left the orthodox churches must not be institutionalised. We live in a time of churches grouped together in formal denominations and so on, and there's a very great danger of institutionalising first century truth in a way that's quite improper. For example, the Exclusive Brother is taught that if anybody leaves their assembly they are going out into the world and are no better than pagans. This has led to infinite suffering because people have left the Exclusive Brethren Assembly and therefore have had to leave all their relatives who remain behind. I remember going to see one of the chief mandarins of the Exclusive Brethren in 1960 when there was the break-up in Reigate and some of the men were coming to St Helen's, Bishopsgate. They were an enormous help because they were used to hard work and they knew their bibles. I remember a senior member of the Exclusive Brethren, saying to me, "Mr Lucas, when you receive the Holy Spirit you will agree with us." The implication is very plain. 'We are the true church and nobody outside these boundaries will ever understand the things of God.' Now, that is wicked really, isn't it? Technically and historically, of course, Rome has taken the same position, though they wouldn't say so largely today. Nevertheless historically they have said, 'Move outside these boundaries and you are outside the true church.'

Leaving gospel churches

But what John is saying is in principle. He's not talking about denominations; presumably they didn't exist. He is saying in principle, 'If you leave gospel churches and gospel beliefs and gospel people, that is a very serious sign that something is wrong.' I want to make that clearer. If a person who professes to be a real Christian leaves a gospel church and gospel beliefs and gospel people, that should be to them and their friends a very serious sign. It's not a matter of leaving a particular denomination – a Baptist or a Methodist church; it's a matter of leave behind a bible church. A real Christian church.

Remaining in the Son

That's why you get so many comments in 1 John about 'remaining'. It's a key word. He loves this word and he plays with it in all sorts of different ways. For example, in 2:24-27, *"See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us – even eternal life. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you."* Well, he doesn't mean that they don't need pastors and teachers in their church. The secessionists were saying, 'You need us to teach you this new way'. And John is saying, 'You don't need these new teachers – the teachers you have always had have led you into the truth'. *"But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him. And now, dear children, continue in him..."* (2:27-28)

It's the same all the way through. It's a key word and of course, it is in close connection with what the New Testament is saying all the way through. One of my favourite verses in Colossians is 2:6 *"So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."* What Paul says there, John also says in his letter. So, remaining in the truth and letting the truth remain in us is the same idea as remaining in these true communities in which people first heard the gospel and were regenerated by the grace of God.

Again, we've got to be careful. I'm going to make little warnings as I go along so you won't misunderstand me. If you've been around as long as I have, you will know many who have at one time professed the faith of the gospel but have, as they would put it, moved on, grown up beyond these elementary beginnings. I think of the Cambridge University Christian Union Mission of 1949 with Dr Barnhouse. What a wonderful mission it was, with many people in the university being really converted. I think of one of the men I knew who was converted. I think he did move on from the truths that brought him face to face with Christ at that mission, but I would be very surprised to hear that he had denied the Son. He's still within the boundaries of the orthodox church so I don't want to push him outside those boundaries. So it is possible, isn't it, to grow beyond those early truths that led you to Christ and still be a Christian. On the other hand, it's a dangerous signal and may mean that you're moving out further and further, and will then cross the boundaries. We shall have to have discernment here. We shall have to be clear what is secondary and what is primary, and we shall discover that the antichrist cross primary boundaries, not secondary boundaries.

A rival Christ

Let me define antichrist a little further. When you see the word 'antichrist' written down, you immediately think of someone who is an opponent of Christ and of course that is undoubtedly true. Some who leave evangelicalism do sadly become opponents, even bitter opponents of the gospel they once embraced. But antichrist has, as well, (I think this is very important – I twigged it rather late in the day) the idea of a rival Christ. We use that of the antipopes in the medieval times. I think I'm right in the saying that in the course of church history, there have been 25 antipopes, that is, rival popes, set up in Avignon or somewhere else like that who claim to be the true pope over against the one at Rome. So when the word 'anti' is used it means not only an opponent but a rival. So the term does not mean simply opposing; it includes the idea of counterfeiting. Plumber again: "The antichrist is therefore a usurper who under false pretences assumes a position that does not belong to him

and who opposes the rightful owner." For example, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 where Paul talks about deceitful workers whom Satan sends into the church who appear to be genuine but are actually fraudulent. So it does mean opponents and adversaries and enemies and they can do us much harm; but our opponents may frighten us but they won't deceive us. It looks certainly as though increasingly our government is becoming hostile to Christian claims and that was certainly true in the first century. That may alarm us as we see some of the stupid things being done by ministers at the moment in the imagination that they can curtail the witness of Christians, but I don't think they are counterfeiting Christians. The counterfeit claims superior powers, advanced knowledge, and deeper spiritual experiences and I don't think any of these government ministers would claim that.

Now obviously, these kind of claims – "If we claim to be without sin..." – what a claim! "If we claim to know him", "to be in him" – these tremendous claims, which apparently some of the antichrists were making, shake the assurance of the ordinary Christian. Chapter 1:6, 8, 10 and chapter 2:4, 6 and 9. On 1:6 "If we claim to have fellowship with him...", Michael Eaton (whose little commentary in the Focus series is excellent and I recommend it but here I think he makes a small mistake) says, if it had been the antichrists who had made these claims it would run: "if they claim". Now there may be some truth in that. They may have had effects in the churches, so John writes "if we claim". But that doesn't follow grammatically at all, does it? If I'm giving a talk to some young people and I say, 'If we claim that there is no hell we contradict the teaching of Christ', that's a normal way of talking, isn't it. I don't mean that I'm claiming that – I'm just saying, 'If we claim that, then we're making a mistake'. And there obviously are people who do claim that, so when John says, "If we claim to have fellowship with him", he's actually talking theoretically in a sense but his finger is pointing at the antichrists.

Shaken assurance

How much influence they are having no one can tell. This shaking of assurance happens, of course, within the boundaries of the real Christian church. If a Pentecostal friend of yours who is as sound as a

bell on the person of Christ and the atonement, tells you that unless you speak in tongues you're not experiencing the Spirit of God, that will shake your assurance, will it not? I can remember a dear friend of mine from college days who told me that we've all been missing the best and explained to me the new charismatic experience. When people do that, it does shake your faith. You think, 'Have I missed out? Am I properly founded? Have I really known the Spirit?' So these superior claims can shake Christian confidence, but in that case with the Pentecostal it's well within the boundaries of orthodoxy. So it was with the Full Gospel Business Men International who at one period began to come to our Tuesday lunchtime services. They espouse that Jesus bore our sicknesses as well as our sins on the cross and, therefore, if we put our faith in Christ crucified, we shall be perfectly healed. And they stood at the back after the service and drank coffee and chatted with young Christians and said something like this: 'What Dick has been telling you is wonderful – but there's more to it'. Now, that shakes your confidence in the preacher and in what you've heard. In the end, sadly, I had to ask them to go because they were causing a great deal of difficulty with many young believers, recently converted.

21st century parallels

Now, can we identify these false brethren with the heretics of the first century? This is a very important question for those of you who have a great sheaf of commentaries at home and know something about the problems of the first century. Moving around in the first century church were the Docetists, the Syrinthians and the proto-Gnostics, as Carson calls them. It was in the second century that Gnosticism was fully developed, but there must have been some seeds of it in the preceding century. And this kind of quasi-Gnosticism is, of course, always with us. It's the brother who comes to you and says he's had some great experience and he knows. No argument will ever reach him; he knows, he's superior, God has shown him. That is the characteristic mark of Gnosticism which has been with the church for 2000 years.

It does seem that the heretics of 1 John are not precisely the same as the docetists, the Syrinthians or the proto-Gnostics. In other words, the cap

does not fit well enough. This is the conclusion of Howard Marshall, whose commentary in the New International Series is a very sound and good one, and it's the conclusion of Colin Kruse. So if I may quote from a very learned theologian called Schnackenberg, a Roman Catholic commentator who gives us some very fine work on these letters, he says, "The heresy which occasioned 1 and 2 John cannot be paralleled with any other manifestation of heresy known from that era. Yet [this is important] it has affinities with more than one such movement." Now I think that's very balanced. Yes, it does have affinities, as we shall see when we look at some of the problems in chapter 5. All those heretics played down the historic person of Christ and his atoning sacrifice. And that person of Christ is absolutely central of course to 1 John.

The person of Christ

Many of you will be experts in the various creeds, like the Creed of Constantinople, which we know as the Nicene Creed. I remember taking up a prayer book and simply adding up the lines. As you know, the Nicene Creed tells us about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. About the Father we have three lines: I believe in God the Father almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, and so on. About the Holy Spirit we have nine lines – of course it will be different according to difference printings. There are nine lines about the Holy Spirit and the church and the resurrection and so on. About the person of Christ in the middle: 16 lines. Isn't that striking? 3 lines; 16 lines; 9 lines. Now what the Nicene Creed tells you is that for the first three centuries that was the battleground. That every phrase you've got there – light of light, very God of very God, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation – every one of those was a battleground. Every one of those has been fought for. Every one of those has been defined until finally it is precisely what the leaders wanted to say is the teaching of the Bible. Now I didn't need much persuading on this business because I for a long time have had the conviction that God, providentially, doesn't allow us to make a tight connection between the heresies we read of in the New Testament and the heretics of our day. What he gives us is sufficient evidence to gain the principles of heresy, which we shall apply in a number of different ways.

The point is obvious, isn't it. Supposing actually this heresy was docetism, denying the real humanity of Christ. Well then, that's the end of the matter – is anyone here a Docetist? Of course not. I'm sure there aren't any Docetists in your local church, so we don't need 1 John. Throw it into the wastepaper basket; the warning is redundant, we don't need it. But we can see that some of Docetus and Syrinthius' principles turn up here in modified form, causing trouble in John's churches in all sorts of different ways. In fact, one of the difficulties I've found in 1 John is that the errors of the secessionists, (I'm now going to call them secessionists following Kruse – I think that's a good name for the antichrists, the secessionists: people who have gone out) seem to be mutually contradictory. On the one hand they believe this and then they believe something that seems to be contradictory, and yet you find it applies so much to things today. So you don't see Docetism today. So you see, God has prevented us from labelling these people in a way that would stop 1 John being useful to us and therefore we are not able to apply it to things today, which we can so easily do.

LECTURE TWO

John's first letter is both pastoral and polemical. Some scholars have called it the most polemical letter in the New Testament. Personally I think that's a wee bit over the top if you compare it with Jude and 2 Peter but you can make your own decision on that. But to me I have to say it was a surprise to discover how polemical this letter is. I had thought of it primarily as a pastoral letter. You know the old tradition of the apostle John being carried around amongst the Christians, saying, 'Little children, love one another.' But there is an ancient tradition that is more solidly grounded and that is when Syrinthius came into the public baths (and this is guaranteed by Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna in the next century) and it is said that when the apostle John saw Syrinthius he rushed out of the baths and would not be in the same place as the great heretic. So it is, I think, worth saying that the apostle of love is the apostle of truth and again that balance is so important.

We saw at the beginning that there was this balance between exposing error and encouraging the faithful. It's the most wonderfully balanced book. This great apostle of love and the truth that God is love and the church should echo that fact, we shall come to later. It's most wonderful material: at the same time, he's an apostle who is fighting for the truth that the churches might remain in it. In the church today, a pastoral which is not at the same time polemical in the sense of meeting the issues, of course will do no lasting good. So a pastoral – it's a word often used especially in the Church of England of a letter from a bishop to the clergy – inevitably has to sometimes be polemical, doesn't it. We mustn't shrink from that. And if we don't deal with the issues of what is wrong then we're not being true pastors.

Three great tests to reassure

So we turn now to the three great tests of 1 John and I suppose these became famous through a classic commentary by Robert Law called 'The Tests of Life'. It is probably the classic commentary as the older generation would see it. There is a reprint done by Baker in America. Robert Law uses these three tests to identify the true believer but there is a possible misunderstanding here which I'm not sure

he always avoids and that is the tests of 1 John are not like school examinations. You have your examination as a school kid in algebra or astronomy or whatever it is, to test out whether you know anything. John is not giving his readers these tests in order to try them out and to say, Well, really you don't measure up to it. That's a misunderstanding. He's not interrogating church members; he's reassuring them. So that word is going to come out again and again. He's not questioning the authenticity of these little churches, he's confirming them in their faith. So as they hear him describe these tests they can say with thankfulness, Yes, God has done that work in us.

Three great tests to expose

At the same time, he is using these three tests to expose the secessionists. He never does the one without the other, I hope I've made that plain. The coin has two sides. So that he uses the tests both positively to reassure the faithful and negatively to expose the unfaithful. And in my view from the commentaries I've read I don't think that's sufficiently underlined always. There is the negative in the test as well as the positive. Later on we shall see how these tests apply to the Christian in a positive way and that's very, very important. But it's even more important to realise that they expose the secessionists for what they were.

1. The secessionists hate the brethren. And by the brethren, the brothers, in 1 John, he always means fellow-Christians. He's not talking about your neighbour. A certain sentimentalism comes into some commentators as though he's talking about neighbours. No, he's always got his eye upon loving your brother and sister and of course the word the brethren means sisters as well as brothers. So the test is, do you love your Christian brothers and sisters? The secessionists hate the brethren. I know that's strong language and seems almost visceral, but remember in the New Testament hate covers deplore and dislike and speak against and slander and all these things as well. Two passages we'll glance at. 2:9-11 "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness." Notice how dogmatic he is, by the way. It's quite offensive actually done in modern terms. "Anyone who

claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble." Do you see? Exposure in verse 9; encouragement in verse 10, *"whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him."* I don't think we realise just how big a punch to the stomach that is. Because these secessionists are saying, We know where we're going for we see things clearly. And John says, No, you don't see things clearly and you don't know where you're going. So we mustn't water this word down even though it covers more than what we would call emotional hatred.

"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." (3:11-15)

Psychologically I think this is something that we see, that those who have with set purposes left evangelical and orthodox and Bible-loving churches, often are harsh in their criticism of the people that they have left. The most bitter hostility towards evangelical gospel convictions comes from those who once had them themselves but no more. Now you may have noticed a significant development as I was reading that passage in particular in 3:13 where he seems slightly to change his tune. We've been talking about the antichrist and how they hate the brethren having left them but suddenly he interposes a new thought. *"Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you."*

By the way that's very characteristic of John. It's rather like a great musical symphony; he develops his tunes, he develops his themes, so though he seems to repeat them he deepens what he says each time. So he's told us that the antichrist hates the brethren, but now he widens this and says the

world hates the true churches. What we learn from this is very important. It means that, in leaving the little apostolic communities, the secessionists, without necessarily being aware of it, have gone out into the world, that is into secular society hostile to God as our own society increasingly is coming to be. This is how then John sees it. A caution: he's not saying that the secessionists were worldlings in the way that we might think of a worldling, someone who is an enemy and thoroughly in the world and nothing else. Because remember the secessionists claimed to be spiritual men. Remember 2:4, they knew God. So what is so telling about it comes out in 4:4-6,

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They [the secessionists] are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. [Notice the positive and the negative.] This is how we recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."

Now do you see what has happened? We are beginning to get a picture, it will emerge from the mist, I can't give it to you all at once, it will emerge as we continue. A picture of these secessionists who had been members of these Christian communities in the first century, who had moved out, who claimed a deeper and more advanced version of Christianity but had actually become in tune with the world around them. And because they had become in tune with the world around them, the world was willing to listen to them. The Christianity that the secessionists were preaching was acceptable to a more secular society. The world wants a Christianity that will adapt to it.

Now you know, let us not be harsh. David Wells is helpful about this in his latest book. He talks about these early liberals at the end of the 19th century, the harvest of which has been so bitter in the 20th century. But he says, their motives were to reach out to a secular world that wasn't listening to them. The secular world was swamped by Huxley and Darwin and all the rest; the whole way in

which philosophy was going at the end of the 19th century was against Christianity. And here were Christians who had brains who said, Can we preach a Christianity that will draw them in? Well, as you know, if you try to move into the world to draw them in they often draw you out. And that is what had happened to the secessionists. So it's a very telling statement. The world listens to them but it won't listen to us. The world won't listen to full-blooded Christian preaching; it's hostile to it. And therefore there's a temptation to the evangelical constituency to alter some of the elements in the preaching so that the world is prepared to listen to us, prepared to accept us. Because if the world won't listen to you, you're often in a ghetto, aren't you? And you seem to be very unimportant and there's a great sense of lack of self-esteem amongst many little congregations in church and chapel. Nobody listens to us – how can we make the world listen to us? There's the danger.

So John will have none of this adaption. If a sophisticated world can approve our proclamation, can easily tolerate it, woe to you when all men speak well of you. So the first thing is, they hated the brethren, they have moved out of that society so to speak and unbeknown to themselves they were being infected with the world's values.

2. They espoused lawlessness. Now that means I think that the secessionists could not be desiring to return to Judaism. The most important verse here in 1 John is 3:4 – here's one of the really important definitions of sin which is given by John because it is so relevant to his whole case. *“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”* Now again I must be careful when using this word. It does not mean that these secessionists were like yobs on some of the estates in the cities, where lawlessness and mob rule is the order of the day - we must give them their due. What this word means is technically that they rejected the concept of law for ethical behaviour. And that of course was the mark of the new morality in the 60s; those of us who are oldies will remember. You remember the slogan that they took out of Paul and misused was 'love is the fulfilling of the law'. And it was very telling, it's very attractive to young people to be told that love is the essential thing. But of course as the years went on we discovered that love justified perverted sex. It

justified it because it was said that perverted sex was said to be an expression of love. This can become very compelling and it's found a great following in recent years. Let me tell you how compelling it is. It is instead of feeling that I am restrained by some external law, and we all hate legalism. Maybe we have escaped from legalism, most of us who are older will have been members of legalistic churches, being under the thrall of external law, tightening us in, which can be very unattractive. It is much more attractive to believe that the engine room of ethics is love from the heart going outwards. Not an external boss but an internal desire. Now ideally of course that would be true. If we were living in heaven, all our heavenly desires would be for the good, they couldn't be twisted.

There's a very fine answer to the new morality in 2 John 5-6 and it was used by Christian preachers in the 1950s and 1960s and should be used still today. 2 John 5 *“And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.”* So, the commandment says, love. *“And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.”* So as you might say to the Young People's Fellowship, I go to Mr Law and say, Mr Law, what am I to do? And Mr Law says, you are to love. I then turn to Mr Love and say, what am I to do? And Mr Love says, you are to keep the law. In other words, John will not have it that the one ousts the other. He will not have it that we can do without the external law. And as you know the great New Testament words for sin all have within them a terminology, an internal quality that makes this plain. Here are the three great ideas of sin in the New Testament. Missing the mark, falling short of the standard, trespassing against a boundary. Now within each of these phrases – mark, standard, boundary, you have something external. You can't trespass if there's no boundary. So the objective benchmarks and touchstones of the Bible still are relevant to the Christian today. God's commandments are never out of date; take them away and our ideas of sin will fall.

It is like the headmistress of a little primary school where a friend of mine's daughters used to go. It was quite a number of years ago but I believe this

sort of foolishness goes on. At Sports Day the high jump was 1 ft 6 and she would not have it any higher. The result was all the girls in that primary school thought they were great high jumpers. Of course when you come out into the real world you discover that you're not a high jumper at all. What foolishness! This was part of the foolishness that there must be no competition, nobody must be better than anybody else, all must be equal. The only way you can make all equal is by bringing the standard down to nothing. So you see what used to be regarded as intolerable by the Christian church for 2000 years must now by law be tolerated. That is the result of lawlessness. They want a law-free gospel. They hate the brethren and they espouse lawlessness.

3. They denied the Son. Now this is the most serious identity mark of the secessionists. They deny the word made flesh. I think I'm going to anticipate a little what I'm going to say later. If you deny the word made flesh then inevitably you deny his sufferings in the flesh, his cross. Looking forward to those difficult verses 5:6 "*This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.*" So the idea, of which there were many affinities in the first century, that the divine Christ the Son descended upon Jesus at his baptism but left him before his crucifixion. You see, it means that the cross has disappeared. That that is the case and was the case is shown quite plainly by the fact that the cross has such a central place in 1 John. 1:7 "...*the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*" 2:1 "...*if any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*" (KJV) I love that old King James Version. When you were young and you knew you were for it with your father and fortunately you lived in a family where father took steps to deal with it, you didn't rush down to the High Street to get an advocate did you? I never did – I was just put over his knees and had a good spanking! But you see this idea that the Prodigal Son justifies us going straight to the Father, as if it's quite possible for the Father to say, alright, OK you're forgiven. What does John say? "*If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.*" Whoever heard of such a thing, having an advocate with the Father? But that takes us straight into the New Testament idea of the atonement that we need a mediator, and God has

provided that mediator. And, of course, the greatest verse of all is 4:10 "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*" To reconcile himself to us and us back to himself.

So few things are more striking in 1 John than a stress on the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Deny that the Word was made flesh and inevitably you deny the cross. This issue of denying the Son is such a big issue. What 1 John is saying is if we deny the Son, we shall deny the Father. When 'Honest To God' was published in the 1960s it presented, undoubtedly a product of unbelief. That is not to judge John Robinson himself: we must make a distinction between judging a man and what he writes. God alone can judge John Robinson. But his book is undoubtedly an attack on orthodox Christianity. And rather foolishly I think looking back, I decided that I had to say something about it and took two Tuesdays to speak about this booklet which sold well over a million copies. And its effect I think still rumbles on. I don't think I did it very well and I'd probably have been much better to stick to the Bible. But to my astonishment and slight alarm I was tackled after the service by a tall and distinguished lady – it turned out to be Dr Elsie Chamberlain who was one of the stars of the Congregationalist church of that day and a very remarkable woman. She simply ticked me off and I can remember walking up the path to St Helen's being thoroughly cut down to size, how I was a young man and I oughtn't to talk like this about a learned theologian. I'm sure God came to my rescue because I was quite incapable of answering this very formidable lady and I said, But Dr Chamberlain, is it not strange that in his book about God he never once titles God as Father? And it was as though it was a Wild West film where the chap pulls out his rifle and shoots from the hip because she stopped just like that, her face fell, and she said, I hadn't realised that. And that was in a sense the end of the conversation, because if you can write a book 'Honest To God' without calling him Father then you've moved outside the boundaries of Christianity. Now you see that makes a good deal of sense of a verse like 2:23, "*No-one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*"

There are the three great signs then of the secessionists – these identify them. And later we will try to apply them to today. We're not going to put our fingers so much on the obvious cases. We're going to look at ourselves in this great evangelical constituency which seems to be growing every day and thank God for it, because it's within our great evangelical constituency that the seeds of these things will start again, just as they did at the end of the 19th century. And so we need to see these great signs of the secessionists and say, are there elements of these reappearing even in our own ranks? A leaving and hating what you have left, a desire for Christianity without the law, and a desire for Christianity without the atoning sacrifice.

A suggested structure of 1 John

I want now to get into your minds a suggested structure of 1 John. Any of you who knows 1 John maybe feel that anyone is a fool who tries to make a structure of this remarkable letter because if one thing is absolutely certain it is that 1 John is not like anything else in the New Testament. It's not like Paul, it's not like Peter and it's not like James or Hebrews. So I've put at the top of my suggested structure a quotation from Plummer. He says something very true: "Probably very few commentators have satisfied themselves with their own analysis; still fewer have satisfied other people". So my brothers and sisters, I'm not expecting you to be satisfied with my analysis, I will just do my best.

So I have followed by and large the outline that Robert Law originally gave at the first half of the 20th century, though I have adapted it to please myself in certain details. And so it goes as follows. We start with a prologue of 4 verses – which I think is clearly as everybody admits the prologue. Then the first cycle is 1:5 to 2:28 and that is divided into three subsections. The test of righteousness, the test of love, the test of belief. 1:5 – 2:6; 2:7 – 2:17; 2:18 – 2:28. So these are the three tests that he applies all the way through his letter, which are not meant to trip up the Christians but reassure them. Are you living a life according to righteousness, walking in the light? Are you loving the brethren? Do you believe in the Son of God? These are the three great tests. Where I think we can legitimately differ with each other is on the moment of division

between sections and main cycles. I often think when I'm reading 1 John that it's rather like an Olympic relay race. You see in the 400 metres relay that the first chap comes up at enormous speed handing the baton over and there's about 20 yards between the handing over of the baton and the starting of the next leg of the race. And John is a little bit like that. Often he does it just with one sentence where he finishes one section and introduces the next. But I don't think I want to quibble about where precisely the divisions come. So that's the first cycle.

The second cycle in which he goes over the same ground but deepens it in terms of the Christian family: 2:29 – 4:6. You see that the ordinary chapter divisions don't really help us at all. And again we have the three sets of righteousness, love for the brethren and belief in the Son of God. 2:29-3:10; 3:11 – 3:20; 3:21 – 4:6. The division between 3:10 and 11 is not always clear but personally that is how I think it turns out. And then the third cycle 4:7 – 5:17. And here you have the three tests intertwined because they stand or fall together. If you love the Lord, you'll love your brothers; if you love the Lord, you'll obey his commandments. Howard Marshall and Colin Kruse, both excellent commentators, don't agree with this because they say that the third cycle doesn't do the same as the first two – there is not this neat three, righteousness, love and belief. Carson answers that I think satisfactorily, by saying actually all three intertwine and you can't have one without the other. Well, you must decide for yourself. Then 5:18-21 – the epilogue. So this is an adapted outline of Robert Law's in his book *The Tests of Life*.

I've given you Colin Kruse's analysis, because I admire his commentary so much. He says, his analysis "doesn't seek to trace any developing argument throughout the letter because there isn't one". Instead it represents an analysis of the letter in terms of what appears to be its natural divisions. But that seems to me the council of despair because there's no real logical connection between his sections at all. But he and Howard Marshall feel they can't accept the Robert Law analysis which incidentally has been adapted by a large number of commentators

since 1913. Notice the remarkable use of groups of three throughout, some easily missed, like 2:12-14; 2:15-17. Run through the epistle and underline these threesomes. Michael Eaton, whose Focus commentary is well worth having, points three sections each on love, obedience, loyalty to the Johannine faith, and three passages which give reassurance. He calls the three cycles: meditations on love and loyalty to the faith. His three are 1:1 – 2:27; 2:28-4:6; 4:7 – 5:21. That simply confirms the Law outline but does not separate the prologue and the epilogue.

See my analysis below and there are some funny figures on the right hand side. I apologise to those of you who don't like statistics, I don't think you can do theology by statistics, but I do find these very intriguing. The first line of figures are the number of verses. So you notice that in the prologue and the epilogue there are four verses, and the material is divided into three. In the first cycle there are 34 verses; in the second cycle there are 31 verses; and in the third cycle there are 32 verses. At any rate that's a very interesting and intriguing coincidence. If I look at a Greek New Testament, and of course it will be printed with slight differences but they'll be roughly the same, on the right hand side are the lines in a Greek New Testament. The prologue has 10 lines and the epilogue has 9 lines. The first cycle has 76 lines; the second cycle has 70; and the third 71. Now it seems to me you can't ignore that. I've already persuaded myself, which I don't think Howard Marshall and Colin Kruse have, that John is using a framework, because he keeps using threes. Triplets. And so if I then extend the idea that John may have known what he wanted to do in terms of framework and to teach it in a certain formal way, and I find that the first, second, and third cycles are practically the same in length, containing precisely the three elements, and each of the three elements in the first and second cycle are almost exactly the same in length, I don't think it is unreasonable to suppose that this man did have an order. But that's entirely for you to make up your mind. Many people as I say have given up in despair and feel that there's no formal order in the letter, that he just rambles on from one thing to another. I think that must be unlikely.

A SUGGESTED STRUCTURE

'Probably few commentators have satisfied themselves with their own analysis of this Epistle: still fewer have satisfied other people' (Plummer, 1894)

This is an adapted version of Robert Law's outline in his book 'The Tests of Life'.

1: 1-4	Prologue
1:5-2:28	1st Cycle
1:5-2:6	Test of Righteousness
2:7-2:17	Test of Love
2:18-2:28	Test of Belief
2:29-4:6	2nd Cycle
2:29-3:10	Test of Righteousness
3:11-3:20	Test of Love
3:21-4:6	Test of Belief
4:7-5:17	3rd Cycle
	The three tests intertwined (they stand and fall together)
5:18-21	Epilogue

Colin G Kruse, 'The Letters of John'

(Apollos, Leicester, England 2000)

His analysis 'does not seek to trace any developing argument through the letter because there isn't one. Instead it represents an analysis of the letter in terms of what appear to be its natural divisions'.

1:1-4	A preface concerning the Word of life
1:5-2:2	Claims to know God tested by attitudes to sin
2:3-11	Claims to know God tested by obedience
2:12-14	Encouragement for believers of different levels of maturity
2:15-17	Warnings against loving the 'world'
2:18-27	Warnings against being deceived by the secessionists

- 2:28-3:10 Distinguishing the children of God from the children of the devil
- 3:11-24 The gospel demand to love one another and confidence in prayer
- 4:1-6 Testing the spirits
- 4:7-5:4a Claims to love God tested by love for fellow believers
- 5:4b-12 Accepting God's testimony and eternal life
- 5:13-21 Concluding reassurance for the readers and an exhortation to pray

LECTURE THREE

Notice the remarkable use of groups of three throughout, some easily missed (e.g. 2:12-14; 2:15-17). Michael Eaton, in his Focus commentary on John's Epistles, points out three sections each on love, obedience, loyalty to the Johannine faith, and three passages which give reassurance (pp 27,28). His outline is called 'Meditations on Love and Loyalty to the Faith', the three being 1:1-2:27, 2:28-4:6, 4:7-5:21. This simply confirms the Law outline but does not separate Prologue and Epilogue.

You may think that I have taken far too long introducing you to the text but if you don't come with the right ideas and the right angle, the text very often doesn't make much sense. The big issue in 1 John is revealed by the prologue 1:1-4 and the epilogue 5:18-21. In both cases you will see that they are very much parallel and they fall naturally into three. It's clear, therefore, that we've got a man writing who has a clear, ordered mind. I just wanted to say that, I know that it is difficult to answer why there are so many cycles, I don't fully know the answer myself, but I am convinced that we've got a man with an ordered mind. He writes what he wants to write and doesn't just drivel on, so to speak.

The central idea

A conviction of mine that I've had for many years, I don't know really how far you will share it, is that we can discern the central concern of a New Testament book by its commencement and its conclusion. That's very true, for example, of the Epistle to the Romans. At the beginning of Romans Paul says that he's going to give the gospel to all nations and at the end of Romans you come right back to that – a great symphony; the tune that's announced at the beginning is back at the end. So that to lock Romans into a discussion of justification by faith is to talk about the means and not the end. The point of justification by faith is that all nations can receive the gospel, whereas if it is by law or by Judaism, then it's confined to one race. So the great doctrine of justification by faith, central to our whole gospel preaching, means this gospel can go out to everybody, every nation, every race. Many of you have children at home who have great difficulty with bread and butter letters after Christmas and birthdays. It's very difficult to get them to sit down

and write the letter, isn't it, and it goes something like this: Dear Auntie Flo, Thank you very much for the postal order. They then put down their pen and they look around in desperation and they say they can't think of anything else to say. And so a parent says, why don't you tell Auntie Flo what we've been doing this Christmas and who came. And so chewing their pen they manage a paragraph on what happened over Christmas and just manage to get over the page and the last line is: thanks again for the cash. Now that is a very natural elemental letter, isn't it? You start by saying thank you for the postal order and then you come back at the end with thanks for the cash. And the rest in a sense – in that particular letter – has got nothing to do with it. But I'm not saying that is a picture of 1 John. What I am saying is that the beginning and the end are immensely impressive and immensely important.

The prologue

I'm going to read the prologue from the NIV and the ESV because here the ESV makes a fairly important improvement. And it really is lofty and splendid language isn't it?

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."

Second time:

"The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."

Third time:

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete." (NIV)

Now you notice that the phrase 'we proclaim' is given three times in the NIV which they do in order to make sense of it, but it's not there in the original and the ESV rightly omits it:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest,

and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - [third time] that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us..."

Eternal life and firsthand witnesses

Notice that the proclamation and the message of 1 John is about life, eternal life. There is a small dispute about the meaning of 'Word of life' in some commentators: does this refer to the person or the message? And my guess is that the little phrase, Word of life, which is such a lovely phrase, refers to both. In view of the prologue of the Gospel of John, the Word is Jesus. The Word was made flesh; it's the person. So it's likely that the Word here refers to the person of Christ, particularly because he keeps saying we saw him, heard him, and handled him. Yet the message of John in his letter is eternal life, all the way through, and you come back to that at 5:20 in that last magnificent phrase in verse 20 "*We are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*" So the word of God refers not exclusively to the person, nor exclusively to the message, but to both, because of course, he is the message. When John Wesley got out of bed early as he did every morning and stood in some market place having tomatoes thrown at him, what did he say he did in his journal? "I offered them Christ", or, "I preached Christ to the people". Because he is the message. It's not a message Jesus taught; it's a message about himself. "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*" And as John says in his Gospel: "*In him was life and that life was the light of men.*" So I take it that the word of life here refers both to the person and the message because they are both really identical. As we look at Christ we see God's message to the world.

So that is the essential proclamation of 1 John to a dying world. A world incidentally that 2:17 says is passing away. Who then initially proclaimed this message to the world? An important question. And the answer is very plain because it is said three times. "We did" – and who is the 'we' in this particular? It's not always clear who the 'we' is in 1 John we must honestly say, but there's no doubt who it is here. "We" means John the apostle and the apostolic company who were with him as

witnesses to Jesus. So he's talking about that original unique apostolic company. And why are they unique? Because they had a firsthand witness. We have about five law courts near here, in Borough. You can be sure that in some of these courts today the question will be asked quite simply, were you there? That's the question, isn't it? Otherwise, if you were not there we don't want to hear what you have to say. We want firsthand witnesses. When this person had his head cut off, did you see it? Now that's what John says at the end of his Gospel. You remember he says that he's recording these wonderful works of Christ which were done in the presence of his disciples. So what the disciples are telling us in John's Gospel is what they actually saw and heard and I think the parallel here is quite fascinating. So the language of 1:1-4 is the language of the original apostles who are the original witnesses by sight and hearing, which means they saw with their own eyes and they heard with their own ears.

The incarnation

That means they are witnesses to the incarnation. That's an obvious thing to say and I think is in all the commentaries: the Word was made flesh. Jesus is the God-Man, over against all ascetic claims. I heard of someone recently writing a dissertation saying that this also refers to the resurrection. I think that is very likely. The very fact that he says "*we have handled*" the word of God does seem to suggest that there is a reference here to the resurrection body, and the disciples not only saw and heard but probably handled the Lord Jesus Christ. So when Jesus was freed from the constraints of death and ascended to his Father in Heaven, he is still the God-Man. The Son of God takes manhood from the virgin's womb and then takes it to the throne of God. A man is at the throne of God. This is often forgotten but it is essential orthodox Christianity. The universe is ruled by a man, the God-Man. So manhood has been redeemed, manhood has been accepted, manhood shares the throne. That is the guarantee that we shall one day share the throne with our heavenly Father. That means that the virgin birth, when he took manhood to himself, and the resurrection body, that shows that he took manhood back to the Father, are indispensable parts of the creed and not dispensable as so often

quasi-liberal bishops and church leaders have said. Oh we're very certain about everything, except you don't have to believe in the virgin birth to believe in the incarnation. It seems to me it is impossible really to believe in the fleshiness of the incarnation, if he was not born of a virgin.

The importance of the apostolic church

So the proclamation is the message of life and the original proclaimers are the apostles and that is repeated three times so that we get it into our thick heads. Now why is this such a fundamental issue at the beginning of 1 John? Well, because fellowship with God is the issue throughout the letter and you can't have fellowship with the Father and the Son unless you have fellowship with the apostles and their doctrine. Look at verse 3 – it's easily missed but it's really quite explicit. *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us."* Not so that you may have fellowship with God. Then he goes on: *"And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son..."* You see the connection? You must have fellowship with us if you are to have fellowship with the true God. There is no way around the apostolic testimony.

There's nothing strange in that; the church of God has understood this all down the ages. These are elementary things but strangely enough Christians today don't seem to know them. But if you ask any church in history if they are apostolic, they will say yes. They will emphasize different things. The Roman Church emphasizes ordination of the episcopate through the line to the first bishop of Rome, Peter, that guaranteeing apostolicity because the line was said to be unbroken. Talk to a Pentecostal and they will be of course perfectly clear about the deity of Christ. They will want you to have an apostolic blessing and tell you that you can't count yourself an apostolic Christian until you speak in tongues as they did. That doesn't mean they are not within the boundaries, but that's how they tend to emphasize apostolicity, through experience whereas Rome does it through the episcopate. Reformation confession, which is where we stand, says a church is apostolic if it remains firmly rooted, standing on the apostles' doctrine. Which is why we have just two pieces of furniture in church which are indispensable. One, the lectern or pulpit in which we take them back to the apostolic teachings and two,

the holy table in which we take them back to Christ's death. Those are the only two things you need, aren't they? Both those pieces of furniture point back; they keep us in touch with the origins. They fasten us to Christ and him crucified, and they fasten us to the apostolic witness to Christ and him crucified. That's what the pulpit and the table are for. Walk down the Old King's Road in London and you will find quite a lot of little churches, and some larger buildings that have been taken over by big congregations. And I would guarantee in many of them you would find that word in the title in some form: apostle or apostolic. And if you didn't find it as The First Apostolic Church of God or whatever it is, you would find underneath the minister's name, The Apostle. This was true of a church where a fine man, Chief Azike, wasn't called the minister, the pastor, or the vicar, but the apostle. They weren't really claiming that he was an apostle, they were wanting to say, we are an apostolic church.

That is a very proper thing to say because if a church is not apostolic it is not Christian. And that's why of course just glancing back a page to 2 Peter 1, the apostle says in verse 12,

"I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have, I think it right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things."

And what are these things? It's the apostolic witness – look at verse 16: *"We did not follow cleverly invented stories..."* – we were eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses, that is we saw and we heard the God-given interpretation. Tremendous passage, isn't it? We saw the majesty of Christ and we heard God interpreting what we saw, because as you know visions can go all over the place. You're not at liberty to interpret your own vision, so Peter's vision is interpreted by a voice from the majestic glory. 2 Timothy 2:2 says exactly the same thing. So at the end of their lives both Paul and Peter go out of their way to say to their followers, you've got to remember what we

said. That is what you've got to go on repeating. The second generation of witness is no good at all and many of you who are students of early church history know how quickly the churches went astray in the second century. Very, very quickly. And so will we if we do not keep to the apostolic doctrine.

Removing the apostles' authority

We're now able to apply, therefore, 2:26 more certainly. When it says that the secessionists were trying to lead them astray, what they were trying to lead them astray from was the original witness. Let's go a little further: they were trying to lead them astray from the apostolic authority, from the apostles. How do you do this? I venture to suggest that if we have got our wits about us we shall see this kind of thing happening today. If I want to claim authority without going back to the true authority of the apostles, I have to claim that I myself have had an immediate experience of God. That is, I have to say that God is speaking to me, if I'm to replace the apostles to whom God really did speak directly. So when people today make claims that God is speaking to them and therefore their words must be authoritative, they may not be aware of it, they may be good-hearted and deceived people, but actually what they are doing is to remove the apostles from the equation. When I go to church I expect somebody to point me back. I don't want them to point me up. I don't want them telling me that God has said something to them because that gives to their words an authority that they don't possess. I want them to tell me what God said through the apostles because that is true authority I don't possess and that I need. And we shall find that this emphasis on the Spirit and a direct approach to God is very much underlying the text of 1 John. That's why at the beginning of chapter 4 you have very significant words. "*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.*" The danger of mysticism, the claim to have a direct apprehension of God, is a very dangerous one. And it easily dispenses with the need for mediation through the historic Christ and his bloodstained cross.

So that, then, is the prologue. The prologue points me to the apostles; they make a claim three times repeated that they were with the God-man. Saw, heard, handled. Therefore, if we want to have an authentic understanding of the God-man, the

central figure of our faith, we must go through the apostles. The moment the church wanders from the apostolic testimony, it gets a Christ who is not the real Christ. And that's why there are many dear people preaching a Jesus who never existed because they have ceased to be controlled by the apostolic witness. If you preach a Jesus – we could give many illustrations – who comforts people, who never warned people of eternal death, you're preaching another Jesus. But none of us will preach what Jesus said about hell unless we are forced back by the apostles to the real Jesus who spoke about hell more than anyone else in the New Testament. The only way that will keep us faithful to that is by getting back to the apostolic doctrine. Well, it's pathetic, actually, isn't it when you hear some dear person get up in church and say the Lord has spoken to them, and it's always just wishy-washy: the Lord says he loves you and is going to do great things for you and for this church and revival's just around the corner. Is that the authentic Christ? Well you know straight away it's not, don't you? But you know that is also well-meaning and I don't mean just to pore scorn on real sincerity, but what actually that does is to take you away to a Jesus of fantasy. And what John is saying here – I can't emphasize it too strongly – is that verses 1-4 set the scene. And he's now going to deal with the secessionists – we've already done so to some extent. What he's saying, quite simply, is the secessionists will take you away from our authority. That's what he's saying.

The epilogue

Now let's turn to the end. You remember the letter to Auntie Flo: we didn't know what to say to Auntie Flo but at the end we came back to thanking her for the postal order. So we expect when we come to the final conclusion of 1 John that we're dealing with the same great realities. It's a magnificent statement of three 'we knows'. I can't say how Gnostic it really was at the end of the first century; Don Carson thinks quasi-gnosticism was pretty active and he's a much better scholar than I'll ever be. So there can't be much doubt that if there was this insipient Gnosticism that John confronts it with these great words: we know. Not fantasy knowledge, not imaginary knowledge, but true knowledge.

1. v.18 *"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him."*

2. v.19 *"We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one."*

3. v.20 (this is the verse I'm going to concentrate on) *"We know also 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 – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols."*

Now because verses 18 and 19 are the culmination of material we haven't yet studied, I propose not to concentrate on them now, but I promise you that I won't avoid verse 18. The modern translations do avoid it because they say "continue in sin" and that is not really what the original says. The original simply says: "those who are born of God do not sin." And you can imagine that has caused all readers including myself great perplexities in the light of the fact that chapter 1 says we are not to say we don't sin. The NIV and the ESV take the easy way out to say that if we are born of God we don't continue in sin. The trouble with that of course is that it's not true, is it? We do! None of us can lift up a hand and say we don't continue to sin: we're sinners all through our lives. We've actually got to face the difficulty straight on, that John says, if you are born of God, you don't sin.

The true God

Let's look then at this magnificent verse 20. Howard Marshall says on this, "God's Son, none other than Jesus has come into the world. He has brought us understanding of the truth, so that we may know the one who is the true, namely, God." What is so fascinating there is that it opens out to us what John means by knowledge and he does not mean just what you get at university or in the academy. Knowledge for him means experience. So we not only know him, we're in him. Knowledge means the knowledge of a person and it means a spiritual experience. I think we know that when we talk about coming to know the Lord. It's 20b that is so important. "...we are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."

Now friends, the tricky question here is to whom does the final 'he' refer? I hope you won't think that this is splitting hairs because on these things an enormous amount can depend. And for myself I've changed my mind in the course of the last sixth months. Originally I believed that the 'he' there referred to the true God. That follows Westcott who is an immensely learned commentator and Stott who is an immensely reliable one. The Father is the principle substantive of the sentence, that is, the principle noun until this point, even though Jesus Christ is the nearest substantive as you can see in the text. Plummer, to whom I always turn when I'm really in a difficulty, sits up on the fence which is infuriating of him and gives us all the reasons on both sides. Actually that's quite reasonable because as some of you will know in Paul's letters sometimes the 'he' refers to both Father and Son and he doesn't make it clear which is which. But I'm now persuaded, rightly or wrongly, by Howard Marshall and FF Bruce that the 'he' here refers to Jesus. If so, it's a sensational sentence. Jesus Christ – he's the true God and eternal life.

Now some are disturbed by this and Plummer calms the waters: "The fact that John teaches the divinity of Jesus both in epistle and Gospel means that a text more or less in favour of the Gospel need not be the subject of heated controversy." So that takes the heat out of it. Let me give you the reasons why I'm persuaded that it refers to Jesus and why it brings the prologue to a magnificent conclusion. The one we saw, heard and handled is the true God and eternal life, the Word of life.

Jesus – the true God

1. Jesus is the very last subject immediately mentioned and that makes for a natural reading.
2. The Father has already been called the 'true one' twice, to say it again even for 1 John would seem a superfluous repetition.
3. This comes from Plummer who knows everything: "Athanasius, one of the great soldiers of the faith, in his great controversy with Arius, interprets the passage this way as if there were no doubt about it." That is an interesting sentence. So there was no controversy in Athanasius' mind, and he's much nearer to it than we are and much

more accustomed to the language in which the New Testament comes to us.

4. It is Jesus who in this epistle is specifically the life.

5. For me, (this is, not Plummer) this brings prologue and epilogue together in perfect harmony. He set out to say that we are witnesses to the word of life, just as they were witnesses to the word made flesh in the prologue of John's Gospel. He finishes by saying, "*He is the true God and eternal life.*"

Of course that's not to say that Father and Son are identical – this is important, so there can be a danger in saying that Jesus is God. He is saying what Jesus said, "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). What I'm going to say on this later is I think of great importance in 1 John. He's an enemy of mysticism as Jesus was. People want to have a vision of God, a beatific vision, they want to see the Father, and Jesus simply slams that down. He says, If you've seen me you've seen the Father. It's very earthy. You don't look up, you look there, you look to his earthly life if you want to see God, you don't contemplate him in a mystic cloud.

"Keep yourselves from idols"

Now if that is the theological conclusion, what flows from it? What flows from it is one of the great puzzles of 1 John: verse 21. Many people feel it's rather like our appendix; it doesn't have any particular meaning. "*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*" Is this just an arbitrary appendage? It's amazing how many pints of ink are spilt on this. Plummer's view is that John refers to the pagan idols of the age, the images that were in every street and in every home. I don't think we have any imaginary concept for what a street in Athens, for example, might look like – you were more likely to run into an idol than a human being. Every house would have its idols and images. If you've been in a place like Hong Kong or Singapore, you look up at these great high rises and you can see from the little red lights that in every house there are these idols and images. In the ancient world it was much more so. The Bible says that the world is naturally full of idolatry and we can be quite sure therefore that London is as full of idolatry as Athens only it's not in that way. We don't have them on the shelf at home but we're just as idolatrous. Well, I can't accept Plummer's view on verse 21, except of course what he does add and I think rightly, is that idolatry in the

ancient world always offered permissive immorality on the cheap. And that's always a temptation to human flesh.

The idolatry of the secessionists

I take it, in fact I would want to insist on it, that this extension, this extra exhortation must be connected to the main thrust of the letter. It must fasten on. It can't be floating free like a boy's kite in the sky. So I take it that it's an exposure of the secessionists. It has to do with them. That is, if you follow the way of the secessionists it will lead you to idolatry but not pagan idolatry – that's the point. The secessionists were not pagans; they were claiming to be advanced Christians. They're espousing what they say is a more intellectual Christianity, a more spiritual Christianity. They talked a lot, I think, about spirituality. But it was a cross-free Christianity and a law-free Christianity. Or of you prefer, a cross-free Christianity and an authority-free Christianity. Well, we don't have time to go into all the arguments to and fro. Marianne Thompson writes a small commentary and it contains only summaries, but I think she's very good at the end:

"If Jesus Christ mediates true knowledge of God, and is so intimately related to God that he himself can be called true God, then any doctrine or worship that dilutes those affirmations is tantamount to idolatry. The warning, "*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols*", points to the danger of worshipping any God other than the one revealed through Jesus Christ. The idols here are not pagan deities or images of stone or wood. An idol is a false picture of God that causes one to stumble and fall away from a relationship from the true God. The elder's readers are to keep themselves from every kind of false belief for loyalty to a false God leads to death, but allegiance to the true God leads to life."

Well, I think you could put it even stronger than that. I would like to relate it to the secessionists and say that the version of Christianity that they are propounding, takes you away from the true God, the Christian God, because they've omitted Jesus as the mediator. And I suspect that as we shall see that they proposed an immediate

knowledge of God which as far as a Christian is concerned is a nonsense. In other religions, they will talk about a direct knowledge of God but for Christianity that is an impossibility. God lives in holiness and we can never approach him, we can never know him directly. No man has ever seen God. We have to have a mediator. We have to come through Jesus Christ. And God has provided the bridge. Remove that bridge and we're not in touch with God, we're in touch with our idea of God and our idea of God is idolatry. Idolatry is just natural to the human heart. Mrs Jones who meets you in the street says, Vicar, my idea of God is this... And what you're listening to is a form of idolatry, isn't it? Often it's a grandfather in heaven who pats you on the head and lets you get away with anything. But this is much more serious than that. They were giving their hearts and lives and minds to a false view of God. I quote Stott, who often in a sentence does more than I can do in a lecture: "Their false view of the Son and therefore of the Father, constituted a monstrous idolatry." Well, I'm going to say how this takes part in our own constituency but of course this is true of the whole liberal rationalistic Christianity that has invaded and ruined the church.

Belief in one God

Now before we look at the final nature of this remarkable New Testament warning, I want you to imagine in your mind two graphs to show the history of the people of God in the Bible. One graph would be a straight upward graph, the kind of thing a managing director wants to see in his business, an evolutionary graph going from elementary to the best of all. That was believed by some of the lecturers in theology I listened to 55 years ago, and if you do that you have to take Genesis with its wonderful monotheism and put it far off into the history of the people of God. You have to rearrange the Old Testament to say that polytheism had gradually come to the belief in one God. That's the evolutionary view of Christianity, which fundamentally underlies a great deal of liberal and rationalistic thought. That's not the true graph.

The true graph as you know is that when the people of God are given a revelation of God himself they slip back from it, then a prophet comes and calls them back and the graph goes up. Then it goes

down again as they slip away, then it goes up, then it goes down again, perhaps more gradually, then it goes up again, then we have the golden calf and down it goes again. So the graph is down, backsliding, call back, backsliding – that's your own life too, brother and sister, isn't it? That's my life too. Reading in Judges the other day I think we get a wonderfully stark illustration of it. Judges 8:33 "*No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals... [they] did not remember the LORD their God.*" Isn't that striking? That can even happen in a church. No sooner than Mr So and So who for 35 years had shepherded the flock and kept them on the right road, no sooner has he retired that within a year that church is a shambles. Because the people are left without a shepherd and they naturally backslide. That's why I said earlier on, the only two bits of furniture that are essential are a lectern or pulpit by which we are taken back so that we don't forget the LORD our God, revealed through prophet and apostle, and at the table we're taken back to the cross so that we understand the mediatory work of Christ without which we are helpless even as we continue as Christians.

Do you remember that in Hebrews the author quotes Psalm 95, which in Anglican circles we call the Veniti. I was at a boarding school which was a church school and every morning in chapel we had the Veniti, I was in the choir, I was a basso-profundo. It begins at verse 1 and then by verse 7, suddenly there's a warning: "*Today if you hear his voice harden not your hearts*". Their hearts always go astray. "*I said in my heart, I loathe these people.*" It's an extraordinary juxtaposition! We jolly along for five or six verses, worshipping the Lord and then suddenly a voice interrupts, Today, you'll go astray and I loathe that. It's therefore to encourage each other, everyday, not once in seven days but everyday, because you'll backslide in 24 hours without the grace of God.

It is shocking, but all that this letter is saying is what we know, that the church, like the Christian, will slip into idolatry the moment those strong leaders and that strong teaching is removed. The church has its ups and downs like that. The giants like Lloyd Jones and Stott disappear off the scene,

then comes the danger, doesn't it. We feel ourselves minnows compared with them. Nevertheless we have got to do just what they did, which is to keep the church on the truth otherwise it will slip back inevitably. Well, this was then a Christianity that denied the Son, denied God's authority and was permissive with regard to the law and so on – all these signs that are so familiar today.

Radical theology

Now let's turn for a moment to destructive radical theology because I think 1 John really is pointing at that. Michael Eaton says, "It produces no converts, it destroys churches, it ruins nations. It is very solemn." My vice-principal at college was a Christian, a learned man, but he was a liberal Protestant. And because I was young and naïve I remember saying to him, "When our preachers come up for the Christian union, we see people coming to Christ, and when your men come up to the university we don't see anything." It was cheeky but he was a very friendly man and he said to me, "Dick, I can't tell you the answer." But the answer's plain, isn't it? There was in their preaching no good news. It produced no converts. What's the next stage? It destroys churches. We've seen that. What is the reason for the wasteland in churches in this country? It is destructive radical theology. It ruins nations, and it will ruin ours apart from spiritual renewal. It's what has brought our present Anglicanism to its final crisis with the American Episcopal church. We think of these leaders as really going back to worldliness; they actually think they are being led by the Spirit. They think they are in the van of church advance; they are very like the secessionists. They're saying, to ordain practising homosexual people as bishops is the leading of the Spirit – they really do believe that. So it is something much more devastating than just old worldliness. We can recognise the bitter harvest that comes from destructive biblical criticism. Some of these men, like my vice-principal, live in different departments. Their theological learning and their own personal life seem to be in different departments of their life. It's like Julius Wellhausen, one of the author's of the German high criticism of the Bible. He had a pietistic upbringing, he used to pray the prayers he learned at his mother's knee for the rest of his life. On the one hand a pietistic life; on the other hand teaching something that destroyed the faith of generations.

Dangers for living churches

But my question now is a vital one: can we discern subtle signs that point to emergence of unbelief of the secessionist kind in the live churches of our country? Don't worry about the dead churches, they are going to die anyhow. Live churches are growing everywhere today – church planting is growing. Where do you think the devil will do his work: in the dead churches, or the new live churches? He always gets himself appointed to every committee there. He is subtle and he will seek to sow seeds that will appear for ten years to mean nothing very much, but, like the seeds of early liberalism, in a century will have destroyed all that has been built. That's why you get this remarkable statement in 4:1, "*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit...*" I remember talking to my young people many years ago and causing quite a lot of surprise. I took them to those verses in Mark 13 which say when the many false christs will come, do not believe, and I said, Did you realise the Bible tells us not to believe? It's the other side of the call to belief. The devil will be saying spiritual thoughts and movements which actually we're not to believe. John it seems to me in his Epistle acknowledges there are many spiritual influences about. They indubitably exist, but they are not necessarily of God because they are spiritual and they show signs, wonders and so on. It was so in the first century, it is so in the 21st century. So that 4:1 is a clear echo of Mark 13:5, 21. Don't believe counterfeit christs. It's interesting that in Mark 13 he talks about counterfeit christs exactly as John did in his letter, so John evidently sat at the feet of Christ.

Now there's no point in looking at other Christian communities. It's easy to point a finger at Rome, and of course Protestants have been all too ready to do that. Don't forget that Roman Catholics are faithful to the person of Christ and they're faithful to the moral issues. In fact they are bolder than we are. That's why Calvin could never deny that they were a church, a church if you like in ruins, but a church none the less. It is very important to realise that about Calvin. So although he would talk about the papists constantly and contrasted the truth with what they taught, he never denied that the foundations were there even if they seemed

to be covered over so often with other accretions. I suggest therefore that we look at ourselves and we look with the secessionists of 1 John in our hands, and we look at our growing evangelical community that is becoming now so broad. Let me therefore give a few signs as I see them. I know I'm an old guy and I may be wrong, but sometimes when you're out of the battle you see more clearly what is happening in the battle.

Warning signs

1. First, the secessionists withdrew from the little Christian churches that treasured the apostolic doctrine. They left these gospel churches that John oversaw. They claimed for themselves a superior understanding of God and in this they demonstrated a strong hostility towards the churches from which they themselves had come. Has this no parallel today? Is there not now a broader evangelicalism that has turned its back on us and is openly critical of those who want to stay in the old paths?

2. The secessionists in effect disavowed the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. That's always been a mark of rationalist theology of course – nothing was more certain to get you a bad mark than to say you believed in propitiation when I was a student all those years ago. It has been defended by John Stott in his 'The Cross of Christ' in the most marvellous way. I do think the three or four pages on propitiatory sacrifice are unique in their importance and clarity. All congregations should be taught what that means. Now we find this questioned in confessing evangelical circles. Is this the beginning of a cross-free Christianity which is very vital and alive as far as we can see today but in ten years time what?

3. The secessionists sat loose to the authority of divine law. It's not so much laws as authority – that God spoke. They were more interested in God speaking today, something no one can ever verify. Do we not see the first signs of a new permissiveness today? A new attitude of tolerance which a few years ago would have been regarded as intolerable? When somebody said to me a few weeks ago, "I believe that the softer open evangelicals will accept homosexual relationships within twenty years", I found myself chilled. Could it

be true? It could. Let us pray that because we warn of it today that other times it won't be true. For the secessionists effected a reconstruction of the faith and made it acceptable to the world outside, which is normally hostile to Christ's kingdom. This increasing toleration of the world by the secessionists meant that the world was increasingly tolerant towards them, hence the warning of 2:15. I don't know how many sermons have been preached on not loving the world by evangelical churches, especially in the old days when worldliness was demarcated by going to the movies or wearing lipstick or whatever it was. But how many sermons have been preached on 2:15-17 taken right out of its context? Later we are going to put it right back in its context. In its context it is saying that the reason the secessionists have moved in the way they have is because they loved the world. Do you remember the scribes that Jesus warned about in such terrible terms? They loved long robes and major seats in the synagogue. That's worldliness. They loved to be thought well of by men – who doesn't?

Well, those are three signs and no doubt you could find others, but they seem to me to suggest the seeds of evangelical liberalism. Probably you may not know but we older ones can remember the liberal evangelical movements in the 1930s and 40s that have all died. And you might think that the new vital evangelicalism that has come to us since the war could withstand the germs of liberalism, but I'm telling you that it's going to be more difficult than we think. Just as liberalism began amongst earnest good people in the late 19th century, liberalism can begin again amongst earnest good gospel Christian people in the 21st century in a tremendous desire to pull down the barriers between us and the world, so that we can speak to them and they will listen to us. Now you may be content to be in a ghetto. There are dear Christians who are content to shut themselves off from the world and to talk to themselves, but if the Spirit of Christ is in you, you know that that's not enough, you've got to speak to your neighbour, you've got to speak to the world. But as we speak to the world we have to learn how the world understands and listens and therein lies the danger. That's the danger the secessionists ran into, and that's the danger John is warning about.

LECTURE FOUR

An overview

I think there is a misunderstanding of what we're saying at The Proclamation Trust about expository ministry; it's only a small misunderstanding but I think it could be rather desperate for a congregation. We do not mean that you should start at verse 1 of Jeremiah and spend a long time until you get to the end of it. I'm reminded of Bishop Ryle's commentary on Mark, you may have read his introduction when he tells us that the only large separate commentary of Mark is a remarkable work consisting of 1666 folio pages by George Petter, vicar of Brede in the country of Sussex, published in 1661. His commentary was originally preached by him in the form of expository lectures for his congregation. He began to preach on June 7th 1618 and continued preaching on it most Sundays with very little intervention until May 28th 1643. So one feels a little sorry for the villagers of Brede in the county of Sussex but there it is.

If I had started at 1 John 1:5 after the prologue and gone straight through you would have found it totally bewildering. And if you're preparing a series on a book like this you must first of all explain to people where they're going so as to get some kind of compass on the whole thing. So, we set the scene by first looking at the antichrist, who were the cause of the trouble, and then looking at the apostles. And I hope that as a result of those two scenes, the trouble-makers and the apostles represented by the great apostle of love, you've got an overall picture of the situation. The antichrists had left the orthodox churches and therefore by definition had left apostolic authority. They claimed, however, not to have left Christianity but to have a more advanced version which was actually another religion altogether under the name of Christian and was called by 1 John, idolatry. And we began to see how alarming that is, a popular Christianity, a new version, acceptable to the world, which you have eyes to see, is an idolatrous construct. And there'll be much more of this as we go on.

A recapitulation on commentaries. Colin Kruse: this was actually the one that woke me up and made me see that 1 John is not just a simple pastoral on assurance with 5:13 as the key verse. I guess there

isn't really just one key verse, but if there is a key verse, it's the very last verse of all, 5:1, "*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*" It's a verse that's caused a great deal of trouble to some scholars and I would say dogmatically, if you don't know what it's doing here at the end of the letter, then you haven't understood 1 John. It is also interestingly enough the very last word of the New Testament. Here's the last word to the church, that Christianity can decline into idolatry though still apparently being formally Christian. And I don't think anything could be more relevant at the moment; you know you don't have to work to make the Bible relevant. The job of the commentary and the job of the preacher are very different. The preacher in the end has to get together all the discussions and the possibilities and make up his mind what actually is the message of the book and then plunge the sword of the Spirit in. It does seem to me that what I've heard of 1 John in preaching that that sword of 5:21 is not plunged in as it ought to be. It's this final warning that Christianity can return to paganism without even knowing it.

Many good commentators like Colin Kruse and Howard Marshall have given up on 1 John with regard to any kind of formal shape, but I hope you agree with me that we don't have to give up in despair. I began to realise this when I saw that so much of his material is in triplets. There isn't a paragraph that isn't in some way in a form of threes and that gave me the clue that there must be some kind of shape. I have followed the three cycles that owe I think their origin to Robert Law. It's been adapted by many other commentators and it seems to me to be still worth taking seriously. I was asked a question last week: why three? It may be that John is simply giving us three cycles because he repeats it three times and deepens it I think as we go on. But I suspect, I can't prove it yet, Sherlock Lucas is working hard on it, but I suspect that the three great 'we knows' at the end which summarise the letter as an epilogue, actually summarise the three cycles. You can try and work that out for yourself and see if you agree.

We are going to look now at the first cycle 1:5 – 2:28; then we're going to look at the beginning of

cycle 3 because cycle 3 has this magnificent material on the fact that God is love and that we must demonstrate that love to our fellow Christians; thirdly we'll look at the knotty problem of sin which was inevitably raised earlier – are we entirely free from sin or not? It seems that John is making a very dogmatic claim that the born-again believer doesn't sin. And then finally, we'll look at the summing up in chapter 5:18-20.

Teaching the negative and the positive

1:5 – 2:6. I'll start by reading verses 1:5-10.

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. [A wonderful promise!] If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

You'll notice here that it begins with a grand statement that God is light and then we have this positive and negative. Actually it's negative then positive, which is such a characteristic of 1 John. In some ways I'm more keen to show you how he teaches than what he teaches. But what we find in him is an alternation of exposure and encouragement; encouragement and exposure. That is, in the same letter he is exposing the antichrists for what they are and encouraging the Christians to continue as they are. He's not suggesting that the believers have faltered, but he is suggesting that there's a danger in front of them with the antichrists. And so within each paragraph he does both exposing and encouraging. And I said earlier that the teacher who is always exposing negatively is a pain in the neck if he doesn't

encourage. Similarly the preacher is a pain in the neck if he encourages but does not expose the dangers, because you'll then fall into the trap. So then 1 John is not only a pastoral letter but a polemical letter, and has been called the most polemical letter in the New Testament, which does seem perhaps an exaggeration, but gives you some idea that the apostle of love could draw his sword.

So if you look at verse 6, 8 and 10 you'll see they are all exposure; these are the claims of the antichrists. Verse 6, if we claim this, we lie; verse 8, if we claim this, we deceive ourselves; verse 10, if we claim this, we make him out to be a liar, and so on. So that's all exposure and in a sense we've dealt with those three. And then verse 7 is encouragement: if we walk in the light; verse 9 is encouragement: if we confess our sins; and of course verses 1-2 of chapter 2 are glorious encouragement.

The apostolic message

Now, what are the signs of an authentic message? There they are in verse 5. First of all, it came from Christ: *"This is the message we have heard from him"*. And the "we" there is not us; it's the apostles. Secondly, the authentic message was heard by the apostles – we have heard from him. It comes from Christ, it's heard by the apostles and it's passed on to us. Those three may seem very simple but they're very, very important. The apostolic message comes from God, it is heard by the prophets and apostles, and it is passed on to us. So there is no way in which we can hear the word of God, the message of God, except through the mediatorial work of prophet and apostle. That's why we have our Bible open today because we have to go back to the apostles to hear what they heard originally from God. That is still God's message for us today, and the message is quite simply: God is light.

Reading 1 John for this past year has been a re-education for me. You'll learn a great deal of theology just as long as you read your Bible regularly. John was called the 'theologos' by the Greek church, which is simply the Greek word for 'theologian'. That's how they saw him. They did not just see him as an elderly apostle, telling the

little children to love one another. They saw him as the teacher par excellence. That's how they read him, that's how they looked to him. He tells us so much about God. There are three wonderful sentences if you take his gospel and epistle together. God is Spirit – John 4; God is light – 1 John 1; and God is love – twice in 1 John 4. If you put these three together you have a wonderful knowledge of God. Almighty God is Spirit, light and love. This is what Dr Plummer says about these three marvellous statements:

“They are probably the nearest approach to a definition of God that the human mind could frame or comprehend. In the history of thought and religion they are unique. The more we consider them, the more they satisfy us. The simplest intellect can understand their meaning; the subtlest cannot exhaust it.”

Isn't that a fine quotation? This is what you find in all the Johannine writings; the language seems to be so simple but the thought is so profound.

God is light

So then, what does it mean to say that God is light? Well it could mean at least two things. It could mean that God reveals himself, shines his truth into a dark world. And that is in fact how the Lord Jesus used it, *“I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life”*. But here it is immediately interpreted. Do you remember that wonderful statement of Jim Packer? *“The Bible is an interpretation.”* I don't need another book to interpret the Bible; the Bible will tell me as I go along what it means by its language. So when it tells me that God is light, what does it tell me? It tells me that in him there is no darkness at all. So that tells me that God is holy.

I love hymns and I sometimes use them in my own prayer time because my words sometimes seems so inadequate compared with the words of these men who have written hymns and I was very struck by the lovely one of Thomas Binney because it brings out so much the holiness of God.

Eternal light, eternal light,
How pure the soul must be
When, placed within your searching sight,
It shrinks not, but with calm delight
Can face such majesty.

And I love verse 2, though I don't think it's accurate:

The spirits who surround your throne
May bear the burning bliss.
But that is surely theirs alone
Since they have never never known
A fallen world like this.

Well, as a matter of fact when you read the Bible you find that the spirits around the throne couldn't bear it. Do you remember? They covered their faces and they covered their feet; that is, they couldn't look on God and they didn't want God to look on them. So if the seraphim in heaven who have never sinned cannot bear to look upon God, that tells us about his unique holiness.

Fellowship

So God is holy, that is how 1 John begins, and John is dealing with a great deal of unholiness that threatens the churches, as indeed it always does. I want to earth it all the time because John is a great earther – he keeps bringing these tremendous truths and earthing them to reality. God is light. *“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness we lie and do not live by the truth.”* That's as true today as ever. Let's take this word 'fellowship'. It's a word that's on everybody's lips and it's become slightly sentimentalised in our modern church. If not sentimentalised, a little thinned down and it really means now 'Christian friendship', what the Australians call 'mateship', only in a Christian sense. We're mates as Christians, and indeed tremendously valuable that is, isn't it, which is why we enjoy one another's company. But all the time we're seeking out Christian fellowship, and yet it's been, as I say, slightly sentimentalised. From time to time the word is better translated with the word 'partnership'. This is so in Philippians. And partnership means participation in a common task, that is, working together. That's what koinonia, fellowship, in the New Testament means. Paul is a great team man. He's always working together with fellow soldiers and fellow workers. He's not a one man band; he loves to be with people in his team.

Now you know that when you work together with a common task it produces fellowship. Actually this happens out in the world quite apart from Christianity. Many of you older people will remember how warriors from the Second World

War would often say, we have never experienced such camaraderie as we did when we were fighting in the war together. There they were in danger of their lives. I'm sure that the young soldiers coming back from the war will say to each other, it was awful and yet there was something wonderful in that it drove us together and we forgot our differences – our social differences, all the rest of it. Even ranks of officer and private will be forgotten under the matter of battle and the common task. Now, translate that into Christianity. I think when you read the New Testament and come across this word *koinonia*, partnership, that's what it means. We're all in it together and in working together for it, we get great fellowship. And you will have noticed how if you can get churches to work together in a locality in an evangelistic enterprise, it draws people together, even though one is an ultra reformed Baptist and the other is an ultra unreformed Arminian. They find fellowship together in supporting an evangelistic enterprise in the local area.

Whoever hates his brother

Now, the secessionists claim to have fellowship with God but you remember the first sign of the secessionists (I'm calling them the secessionists because that's the name Colin Kruse gives them and I think it is a very good one as they had left these little orthodox apostolic gospel churches) – they claim fellowship with God but they hated the brethren. Well, of course that's a contradiction in terms. They claimed fellowship with God but walked in darkness, and that is described later on in verse 2:9-11. *“Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.”* That's the exposure; then the encouragement. *“Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.”* Then the exposure, *“But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded him.”*

I remember incidentally talking once many years ago to a church pastor, a most godly man. We were talking about a church leader who had fallen into sin but constantly justified himself before the public and before the church. And I remember saying, how can a person do what he did and then claim that everything is alright? It probably sounds

very simple but my companion replied to me, “Don't forget, Dick, that sin blinds.” It's true, isn't it? Sin blinds. It blinds you to yourself, to what you've done and so on. And this is just exactly what John is saying, we deceive ourselves.

So these men were one, liars (1:6); two, self-deceived (1:8); three, they actually make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in their lives (1:10). It's very blunt talk, isn't it? There's no pulling of punches with the great apostle John. Here are men making tremendous claims to themselves – we have fellowship with God, we walk in the light, we are the enlightened ones. We claim to be without sin. I'm going to explain how they could make that astonishing claim later.

Light and holiness

It's useful in 1 John to realise that John's Gospel and John's Epistle help to explain one another. And if you want to know what this language of darkness and light means and you're struggling a bit, it's good just to turn back to John 3:19-21 and you'll find that it's exactly the same analogy that John uses in the Gospel and Epistle.

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth [that is what it means to walk in the light] comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

As you read that, you know that's true, you know that's true in your own experience. Do you remember the time maybe before you were regenerate, when the light came close you ran away? I can remember that, as a very early professing Christian, but backslidden, when my friends started chasing me to come to Bible studies I always found an excuse. The light comes and we retreat into the darkness. The whole idea that the Christian's faith is a leap into the dark is of course so ludicrous. Christian faith is coming out of darkness into the light, and we don't want to do it. We're like the little animals under those stones in your garden; when you lift the stones up they run away. We don't want to be enlightened by God.

So, God is holy. Therefore if we have fellowship with him we are committed to his holiness. If you want a good cross-reference, see Ephesians 5:8 where Paul uses exactly the same analogy, very powerfully, showing that walking in the light is walking in godliness. Being Christian is always something like this. If God is good, then we have to absorb that goodness by the Spirit into our lives and pass it on to others. Christian ethics is passing on what God gives us. He gives us his mercy; we pass it on to others. He gives us his forgiveness; we must pass it on to others.

A holy God and holy lives

1:5 through to 2:2 is a tremendous passage; it tells me that religion and righteousness are married and are never divorced in the Bible and that, my friends, is unique in the world of religion. This inseparable connection is foreign to all paganism. I guess we all know that in theory, but it was Bishop Stephen Neal in his book on holiness that first got through my very thick skull on this subject. It may seem absurd as an illustration but it got home to me. He worked in India for many years and he described to me the holy man sitting there in the dust. Here he is with one arm withered because it's been held up for 20 years, he's dirty, he's totally ascetic, he eschews sex and meat. He is regarded by everyone as a holy man. But in biblical terms he is not holy, do you see the difference? They are using the idea of holy, which the Bible does use in its preliminary form as being separated to God – they think he's separated to God. So if you think that man is a holy man, what must your ideal God be? As you pass him and you fail to put a rupee in his hand that is held out, he will follow you with curses – that is the holy man.

Now it is so important for us in our Christian civilisation, declining at incredible speed all around us. What do you make of a religious extremist who for Allah's sake can blow up an aeroplane, ruin the lives and the loves of hundreds of people and expect because he did that to go straight to Paradise. And what is Paradise? A great many virgins at his disposal. So not only is he unholy in life but he's expecting an unholy heaven. It's difficult for us to get our minds round this. There is no link between a man's religion and his righteousness. Again a cross-reference, Isaiah 1:10-17. All the magnificent 8th century prophets – Amos, Hosea,

Micah, Isaiah – constantly hammer this message home. 'I don't want to hear, I don't want to receive your sacrifices, I'm tired of the smell of your incense.' It's very powerful in Isaiah 1, the incense. 'I'm fed up with what you're offering me.'

What John is wanting us to see is that the secessionists making these tremendous spiritual so-called Christian claims, for advanced spirituality, are living unworthily. This strange combination can be seen in the church down through history. It's so easy to point our finger at the extreme cases, we look at those televangelists, ten years ago, who claimed to be so wonderfully filled by God's Spirit, had these enormous followings, and yet were tarnished, in fact went to prison in the case of Tammy Baker and her husband, for financial irregularities and so on. You will find that that kind of thing is inevitable once you fail to link a holy God and holy behaviour. It's the same as the complaints of the man in the street, who says, Mrs So and So goes to church on Sunday but you ought to listen to her on Monday.

Now there's no way of bridging the gap between Sunday and Monday unless you understand what worship means. Worship in the Bible is the giving of your whole life to God. And therefore we must be very careful that we don't spend our time talking about worship services. Worship is the giving of your whole life. I heard someone say, we leave church on Sunday to worship on Monday. Now that's overstating it, of course, it's both/and - we praise him not only with our lips but also with our lives. That concept of worship though very easily gets stuck back on Sunday - that is where we're religious. And on Monday we can go back to the City and start inside trading or whatever it is without a qualm of conscience.

Walk in the light

So what must we do? 1:7, the encouragement, "if we walk in the light". In the East African revival in the mid 20th century this phrase was a very popular one. It is taken to mean having no secrets between us as Christians, making public what was happening in one's life, and confessing these sins publicly. And there were very fine people like William Mugamba and co who I remember coming over here and their message was very

much a message of walking in the light. However, one does have to say that is not actually precisely what John means. John means living in the light of God's revelation of himself and of his will. If you like, not having any secrets from God, being open to God. We can pour it out to God and should do if we confess our sins. That's why we need to meet him first thing in the morning to open ourselves up to him, to show that we are willing to be spoken to in correction and improvement and comfort and coming back to him in honesty about ourselves. It's quite important that.

Anti-mysticism

So, what happens if we walk in the light? "...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light..." and then the line goes in a different direction to what you would expect. From verse 6: If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie... if we walk in the light, as he in the light, we have fellowship with God. But he doesn't say that. Now, this is a large number of anti-mystical texts as I call them – I want to tell you that John is an enemy of bogus mysticism. An enemy of people who say they have fellowship with God and it is not seen in their lives on earth in terms here of fellowship with their fellow Christians. The secessionists have left the apostolic communities, they hate the brethren they have left, or strongly dislike them, and therefore they're not having fellowship with them. It is so striking. It is almost as if John equates fellowship with Christian brothers and sisters with fellowship with God. What he's saying is this: do you have fellowship at the moment with your fellow Christians? Are you in fellowship with your church, if it's a live one? Are you committed to them and they to you? If you're not, then you're not walking in fellowship with God. Do you see what a sensational message that is? So down to earth. John is an enemy of that kind of Christian mysticism where I seek to see a vision of God, to have contemplation of the infinite; he's always making it horizontal. John is always asking, what is the horizontal reality?

So what should I have said to Mrs D? Mrs D lived in a vast, Victorian house with stained glass in every possible window, in the town where I was a curate for more years than I care to remember. She was a good woman; I knew her son, he was about the same age as I was, and he was a nice fellow, a fine

Christian chap, and she was a good Christian woman. But she told me that she couldn't go to church because there was no church that was adequate and sinless. As the curate, I didn't feel that I could challenge her then, partly because I knew her son, partly because I was so young, and yet you see it's exactly what John is talking about. She was really claiming a super-spirituality. We can find all sorts of excuses for her: if she'd gone down to the congregational church she would have heard a brilliant intellectual sermon but nothing really to feed her; if she'd gone to the Baptist church she'd have heard sentimentality but a disordered sermon; if she'd gone to the Presbyterian church where the minister always spoke at the memorial service on the Green at Sevenoaks – he would build up a magnificent piece of oratory but there was nothing in it... The only place she could have heard the word was in the parish church or in the Open Brethren assembly. But that wasn't well enough for her either. She claimed fellowship with God, she had her Bible open on Sunday, but I wonder what John the Apostle would have said to Mrs D. I think he'd have been fairly blunt.

This equation between fellowship with Christian brothers and sisters and fellowship with God – he almost makes them the same, as I say, there is a distinction – but this equation is why a 15 year old boy in 1941 went to a school's Christian camp and was enormously attracted by the students and young people who were running it. If you'd asked him to articulate why he was attracted to them he would have been quite unable to tell you, but of course it was the fact that these senior leaders of the camp had fellowship with one another and what was attractive in that camp was the fellowship, that sense that it was such a friendly place. And therefore if you see that fellowship on earth, isn't that the thing that attracts you to have fellowship with God? In fact it's one of the things that draws you in the first place isn't it? That's why it's so important for Christians to be drawing people into their fellowship. It's very difficult to do, I know. But it is so important for the non-Christian to see us living together because that fellowship with one another draws us to what it represents on earth, fellowship with God.

The atoning death of Christ

"...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1:7)

Now we meet the death of Christ for the first time in 1 John. And the atoning sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is absolutely central to 1 John. It is left behind by the antichrists. But if we are walking in the light, then God promises us that that blood will continually cleanse us day by day. For those of you who are pundits, and I know that there are some of you who are far more scholarly than I am, it was Bishop Westcott, whose classical commentary on 1 John some of you will have, who opined that blood stood for life. It was one of the great errors that has run right through the high churches of the Church of England for over one hundred years. Bishop Westcott said that the blood represented for life made available in the Eucharist, which is a funny phrase which really means nothing, but it does actually point to why the Anglo Catholics and the high churchmen think that the life of God in the cup at the Lord's Supper. It was a mammoth misunderstanding and stood for many years until the late Alan Stibbs wrote his monograph, 'The Meaning of Blood in Scripture'. But now I think it's clear to everybody that blood separated from flesh means death, and violent death at that. So when you're going along the motorway as I did not so very long ago and there's a great hold up and when you ease past the police vans you see a lot of blood on the road I can assure you, you drive more carefully for the next ten miles. You're sobered, because what that blood spells out is violence, death.

So, he will purify us from all unrighteousness. Dr Plummer says,

"God's decree is that his faithfulness to his people will appear and be demonstrated in forgiving and cleansing them from inevitable defilements all day long."

That is God's commitment to you. Our hearts are dirty, vile aren't they, even as Christians, but if we walk in the light with God, we shall have fellowship with one another and God's decree is that the blood of Christ shall have constant effect in keeping us clean before God and open before our fellows. And that's what you're experiencing today. The

blood of Jesus is purifying you; it is having this ongoing effect.

I'll say no more about verses 8, 9 and 10, it's very similar to what we've looked at before. But let's pause for a moment and see that it's quite clear that Christian believers who tell the truth, who know the truth, who do not deceive themselves, who have God's word in their lives, that is believers as God describes them, that means you, they know full well that they are still sinful. They know that regular confession of sin daily is indispensable and they know that Christ, through his sacrifice, keeps them clean and in fellowship with God. And that's why we can rejoice in God this morning. If we had any idea of the holiness of God we should be like the seraphim, unable to look at him and wishing that he couldn't see us. But God through Christ keeps the line open. So, we'll look at 3:9 later, I promise you I won't duck that one, where it says that we don't sin and presumably therefore don't have anything to confess.

Repentance for sin

But now just a brief word about 2:1-2. In reminding ourselves of the reality of sin and forgiveness, and reminding ourselves therefore by implication that we can never say that we are without sin, John does not wish to condone sin. You'll find this, by the way, very often in the New Testament. I think the supreme example of this is Jesus when he has company with sinners and prostitutes and the like, you'll find again and again if you read carefully, that while Jesus is a friend of public sinners, he never condones their sin. Look at Luke 15. Though people are welcome into his presence, even though they are sinners and tax-collectors and the rest, yet they must be repentant sinners. This is very, very important because we as Christians in the world do have to have to deal with sinners, but we must be careful not to condone sin. I remember in the Navy when I was a very, very junior midshipman, one night we had to put the chaplain to bed before the Sunday morning service because he was drunk. I sympathise with that chaplain – he wanted to show the chaps that he was one of the boys, he didn't want a stand-offish position, he didn't want his dog collar to make a barrier between him and all the seamen. He wanted to show that he was flesh and blood.

The result was he drank too much. The danger of having fellowship with sinners is that they bring you into their company rather than you bringing them into God's company. So John will not condone sin. *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence."*

Christ's sacrifice

So as we are faced with our own sinfulness, the sacrifice of Christ constantly reminds us that we must not become easy about sin. We must teach our young people as we must learn it ourselves. Young people find this so demanding in the world in which they live. It's so easy for a young Christian to say, O well, Lord, you know me, I can't help being me, you understand, and so not to take their sin seriously. And we can do the same. We're reminded what it cost the Lord and the only way out. And bravo to the English Standard Version that has brought back, *"he is the propitiation for our sins"*. The reigning theology that has arisen now is coming back to being a conservative theology and so what's the result? The ESV puts back 'propitiation'. They are not the masters but simply echoing the reigning theology of the day. It affects the translation. For thirty years no one has dared to say that Christ's sacrifice was a propitiatory sacrifice lest people should gather that God is angry with us. But you only have to look to 1 John 4:10 where it is said absolutely clearly that the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ was not to turn an angry God back to us but was to fulfil the love of God – verse 10: *"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* Nevertheless, the propitiatory sacrifice tells us that reconciliation is not a matter of reconciling us to God but a matter of reconciling God to us. How can God have anything to do with us? The cross is the only answer. And his death is not only for us but for the sins of the whole world. That's very Johannine. John 1:29, the Baptist hails Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And the same is said in 1 John 4:14 *"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world."*

I guess there was a certain exclusiveness about the antichrist, I don't know, but it often creeps back into the church. Professor Howard Marshall, who was a

wonderful Methodist and very hostile to limited atonement, makes great play of this verse and quotes Charles Wesley in extenso showing that Christ died for the whole world. The particular meaning of it here, I think, is that there is no way for anyone in all the world to come to a knowledge of God except through Christ and him crucified – no direct access is possible. See the quotation from F.W. Beare (Professor at Trinity College Toronto, who wrote a most appalling commentary on Matthew and then wrote a magnificent commentary on 1 John):

"Jesus Christ is the mediator and apart from him we cannot come before God in any capacity. The theology of the New Testament consistently teaches that we are never brought into an immediate relationship with God (which is what the mystics claim) which could dispense with the mediation of Christ. As we come to God through him in the first instance so we remain dependent upon him for the continuation of our life with God. The mysticism which aspires to an immediate apprehension of God by the human soul in this life is found in Neo-Platonism, Sufism and Hinduism, but when it appears in Christian circles it must be regarded as an aberration. That aberration started in the first century. "Without me you can do nothing." "

LECTURE FIVE

Encouragement and exposure

2:3-6 *"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."*

You'll find that instead of exposure and encouragement, we have encouragement and exposure. Verse 3, encouragement; verse 4, exposure; verse 5, encouragement; verse 6, exposure. And the three verses as you know, verse 4, 6, and 9 start with the same little Greek phrase, which is 'he who says' or 'the man who says'. I think all the translations tend to fill that out in other ways, but that's all it is in the original. *"This is how we know we are in him: the man who says he lives in him must walk as Jesus did."*

Now, remember that the encouragements are all to do with reassurance rather than assurance for the first time, I hope I made that plain previously. 1 John is not giving assurance to new believers but reassurance to established churches who have been shaken by the propaganda of the antichrists. And if you doubt that, you'll soon see it in verses 12-14; I'm going to hasten on towards it in this strange little parenthesis. It's almost as if John has gone to have cup of coffee at verse 11 and comes back and feels urgently that he wants to say, look, all's well, don't believe the antichrists, you are the Lord's. So verse 3 should not be read as though John is probing, interrogating the faithful. If you put a 'when' instead of an 'if', it might make it a bit clearer. *"We know that we have come to know him when we obey his commandments"*. Not 'if' but 'when' is the meaning. So verse 3 echoes what we found in the previous verses, that those who come to know the Lord genuinely, want to obey him.

Freedom from law

This raises the question which was raised earlier: what do we mean by obeying his commandments? You can only answer these questions within the context of the letter in which they come. John means accepting the lawful authority that God has

laid down for his children, and you remember in 3:4 that the mark of the antichrist was lawlessness. Lawlessness did not mean that they were out of control thugs, that they never obeyed anything. It meant that they wanted a law-free Christianity. But what is the law that they wanted to be free from? And so the commentators say probably they wanted to be free from the Ten Commandments. I dare say that is true; they probably wanted to be free from any kind of legalism. But I think verse 5 is helpful. *"...if anyone obeys his word..."* Well, where does that word come from? The word is comprehensive – all the commandments of God are in his word. If God speaks a word it is authoritative – it can only be authoritative. Now in the context of 1 John, the word that God has spoken is through Christ and through the apostles. So what the antichrists wanted to be free from was, in fact, the apostolic authority. That runs right through the five chapters. So when we're told that we want to obey his commands, it's not a new legalism. It simply means that we are willing to sit under the word of God as given to us in Christ, as interpreted and taught by the apostles. I can't tell you how important that is. All first century heresy, and probably ever since, is taking the name Jesus Christ and separating Jesus from Christ. All liberal theology is, in fact, that.

The apostolic word

I think I must give you a cross reference here because it is so commonly misused. John 16:12 *"I have much more to say to you, [says Jesus to his disciples] more than you can now bear [he's not talking to us]."* Verse 13 *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, [that is, on the day of Pentecost] he will guide you [that is, the apostles] into all truth."* I don't know how many times I've stood a vestry praying before a service and the prayer has been, *Will you guide Dick into the truth, will you guide us into truth?* Now, the Spirit guides us into Christ's truth. Don't separate the Spirit from Christ. Once you do that it's like cutting the little boy's string with the kite and away it goes into the atmosphere. The Spirit ties us to Christ, the Spirit ties us to the apostolic word and that is, I think, what is meant by 'lawful authority' in 1 John. Of course it means the whole word of God, but in particular

here the apostolic word which we see in the New Testament.

So the heretics wanted to move away from apostolic doctrine, and isn't that what heretics have done all down history? Isn't that what liberal modernistic theology was? I was just reading John Stott's *The Bible Speaks Today* commentary on Galatians and he quotes a man called Dodds, who was a very eminent professor in his day, saying that he disagreed with the Apostle Paul. There is a very striking paragraph where John Stott says that we're not at liberty to say we disagree with the Apostle Paul. Now, to the kind of liberal lecturer that I had to sit under at Cambridge, it was taken for granted that Paul was a figure of his own time, under his own culture and that we naturally saw things in a different way and probably in a better way. But you see, John the Apostle won't have that. He says the Spirit guided them into all truth, the whole truth, the full truth, the truth and nothing but the truth. *"He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."* (Jn 16:13) That is our sure ground and that is what we live under.

Proto-Gnosticism

And that's what the antichrist didn't want to live under. Verse 4 and verse 6 put something of the tremendous spiritual claim that these men were making. They said 'we know him', and it's that little phrase that has led many commentators to think that we have here the first seeds of Gnosticism that grew to its full development in the second century. So Carson has said that there are lots of elements as I understand it of proto-Gnosticism as he calls it in 1 John. I think probably that is right, except to say that that kind of thing is just universal and you even meet it amongst your Christian friends. People can be very obstinate and say they know, God has told them. When people talk like that, they have got a hotline to God and no one can question it. That's characteristic of proto-Gnosticism. I remember a lovely guy, he's had a wonderful ministry in his life, but I remember him when he was 16 in my youth group fellowship, and he was terribly susceptible to feminine charms and so it was a new girl almost every year. I remember one Christmas that he gave slippers to the new girl. They must have cost him a lot but he had a very fruitful paper-round and was a

very rich young man. And I knew that to his past girl he'd said nothing, not a word, not a telephone message, not a note, so I pulled him in. I said, "Have you said nothing to so and so who you've been walking out with for the past year?" "No, I prayed about it, Dick." See? That's the beginning of the same thing. In other words, you can't touch me on that, I asked God, and God has permitted me to go on to this other girl. It's not a very good illustration, but because it's so rife when we want to get our own way. Maybe it's only that, maybe it's just carnality, not Gnosticism.

So there is the claim, 'I know him'. And there it is again in verse 6, 'we live in him'. So they are claiming two things: a superior understanding and a superior union, or experience of God. I just want to say that those are not two different things in 1 John, they are two sides of the same coin. When John talks about knowing God, he means having an experience of God, not just an academic knowledge. Knowing him.

Tied to Christ

Just think for a moment again about what I said earlier. The Christians were told to be tied to the apostles' teaching, Christ's word, and the atonement, Christ's work. These are the two things that anchor us to God and the truth about God. I said that you only need two bits of furniture in a church: a pulpit or lectern that ties you to the word of God and the Lord's table that ties you to Christ's atoning sacrifice. And you'll notice that both the work of Christ that he did for us, and the word of Christ that he spoke to us, are both outside of us. That is, they are already finished and there, long before you came into existence. Whereas of course super-spirituality tends to ignore Christ's work and Christ's word and talk in vertical terms of a work of the Spirit, giving us direct communion to God. So we are tied to the past, that is to the work of Christ and to the word of Christ. Therefore we have constantly to look back to those great revelations of God which are still exactly the same truths as today, that is, what is written in AD 60 by an apostle is just as true now. Once you begin to cut that line then you will think in terms of a spiritual experience – that the Spirit takes you into the presence of God and it's through the Spirit that you hear the word of God.

This is why I think we have 1 John 4:1 and these warnings against false spirits. I used to teach my young people those wonderful words of Jesus in that great chapter Mark 13, 'Don't believe them'. I used to teach the young people there are things that the Bible tells you not to believe as well as to believe. The false prophet comes to you empowered, as he says it, by the Spirit. The centre of his understanding of Christianity is Pentecost and not Calvary and not the incarnation. We are constantly centred on the Word made flesh and Christ's cross, Christ crucified for us, and that's how we keep in touch with the reality of God. Cut that line and we begin to talk in terms of the Spirit directly bringing us into God's presence by a powerful experience and giving us a word from God by a powerful experience.

Christian mysticism

Do you see? It's all so obvious today that sort of thing is happening. It's at the root of Christian mysticism and it takes a number of different forms. By definition it can't be checked up on because it is the claim of a person to know him and to live in him; it is very hard to reach people who talk like that. I'm not unsympathetic to Christian mysticism and nor should you be, it's the result of a craving for God, it's the desire to leave the world behind, to cast off earthly fetters, to attain the heavenly sphere and finally attain peace in a joyous union with God. That's what mysticism stands for and that craving is deep down in the hearts of all men. Sometimes it's spoken of as losing oneself in God. It's interesting that Martin Luther wrestling with all his problems as a young monk was at the beginning attracted by mysticism. It was only Staupitz who took him off that line and in this end it sent him back to the Bible. Luther became an enemy of what he called the spiritualists. He didn't mean what we mean by spiritualists today. That is, he was an enemy of the men he called the 'Spirit men'; those whose centre of their Christianity was the work of the Spirit and not the work of Christ.

The work of the Spirit

For us there is no distinction: the work of the Spirit is to make the work of Christ available to us. Are we all clear on that? The work of the Spirit is to make the work and the word of Christ available to the church today. That's very, very important. There is no

separable ministry of the Spirit. There's no question of having an experience of Christ and then having a different experience of the Spirit. It may be a deepening of your experience of Christ but it's not separable: he is the Spirit of Christ. There is a danger here. An emphasis on the Spirit without being solidly taught the word and the work of Christ means that the work of the Spirit then takes over, and an immediate Christianity becomes more exhilarating and more exciting. What is talked about is God at work in us today and God speaking a word to us today. And it seems of course so exciting - God is doing something this very day. But you see what will happen then? The cross will slip into the background, and the apostolic doctrine, the Bible and the sermon will slip into the background. So I fear that if that should continue to happen the same way, you will find that your worship service puts the sermon away in the corner and the Bible is not treated in the same way as it was and the cross is no longer central.

The new commandment

The first subsection of cycle 1 then finishes at 2:6 and the second subsection of cycle 1 begins at verse 7. I know that there are people who don't like that, because he goes on using this picture of light and darkness, and they would rather draw the line at verse 11. I don't want to make a quarrel of that. I think I said before that the divisions come together rather like relay runners; where you are handing over the baton there is a period between. The second subsection starts at verse 7 and he merges the idea of commandments into the idea of love. The first is the test of righteousness; the second is the test of love.

"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining."

No real difficulty there. Right from the beginning, loving God and loving your neighbour was absolutely fundamental. Do you remember the scribe and Jesus? What is the whole law of God?

To love God and to love your neighbour. So right from the beginning, for everybody who was taught from the Bible whoever they may be, everyone knew that love was absolutely central. But of course Jesus said that he had a new commandment to give, rather strikingly in John 13:34-35, and that new commandment was to love one another. What that is simply saying is that the old great commandment that is fundamental to the biblical message takes on a new force through Jesus and his people. That is because now we see it lived out in Jesus and it has to be lived out in the Christian church in a quite new fresh and powerful way. I think that is all fairly clear. I think the reason he puts it here is not just to tease us. I guess the reason here, and again we come back to antichrists, was that they were giving a novel interpretation of the truth. They were teaching new things. Now, we can take it for granted, having known what the universal faith of the church is, that any new teaching is by definition heretical. There can't be any new teaching. If people come along with a novelty then you can be sure we're moving away from Christianity. But that's how all the great Christian sects started out – the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christadelphians, it's plates falling from heaven or whatever it is, it's a new teaching. And for a while it is very exciting, but there is no such thing as a new teaching. The old teaching of love is the new teaching of love, and the secessionists had nothing to add to the apostolic gospel.

Living in the light

Verse 9 is exposure. *"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother [you see we are on the theme now of love] is still in the darkness."* No comment on that, it's so obvious, we've seen it already. Verse 10 is encouragement: *"Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble."* So take heart, brothers. Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? You do. Well then, you live in the light. You don't have to scabble down here to find out if there's any light. If you love your brother externally – you don't slander him, you don't speak evil behind his back – if you love him, you're in the light. You don't have to look inside. Verse 11 is further exposure: *"But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does*

not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him."

The knowledge of God

Let's go on to the next paragraph with this unexpected parenthesis, 12-14.

"I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong,

and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

I think the only proper way to divide this is two lots of three. And the heading of the two halves is this sentence: *"I write to you, dear children"*. 12a and 13b. Those are the headings. Dear children – that is, all the children there. If you put what he says to the dear children together it is quite beautiful. It's so simple, and it sums up what he means by the knowledge of God. So, the first is, *"I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name."* That's the mark of the real Christian: your sins have been forgiven for Jesus' sake.

Second heading: *"I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father."* Do you see the point? If I want to know if a person knows the Father, then the question I have to ask is, have you been forgiven for Jesus' sake? The Christian truth is universal. It's quite simple, there is no first and second class. If I have been forgiven for Jesus' sake I know the Father. Whether I'm a Baptist, Congregationalist, Mennonite, whatever it is, no difference. The only necessity that brings me into the knowledge of God is forgiveness at the cross of Christ. That is so liberating, isn't it? There's no 'A level' being pushed upon us especially when we're young Christians. Wasn't it so with you when you were a young Christian? If my sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ, by the

mighty advocacy of the Saviour, I am accepted in heaven. I know the Father, and nothing else is needed.

Then under each heading, what does he say? He turns to the older members of the congregation and the younger members of the congregation. It's all very natural. To the older members he says, *"I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning."* In other word, don't get upset by this propaganda, you senior Christians have known the Father from the start of your Christian lives, when the gospel first came to you. That knowledge you had then is the right knowledge, it does not have to be added to. I write to you younger men, Christians, because the assault is on you today. You have overcome the evil one. In other words, the implication very plain: the propaganda of the antichrists is the activity of the devil, and you younger Christians are sufficiently well instructed and are sufficiently full of the Spirit and the word of God to overcome this assault. Verse 14, *"I write to you, fathers, [and he repeats it] because you have known him who is from the beginning."* There's nothing wrong with your knowledge of God, don't let anyone unsettle you. *"I write you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome to evil one."* I like that deepening, don't you? How is it that they have overcome the antichrist? They have the word of God in them. So then you see to it that all your younger generation of converted people in your church have the word of God in them. Then they won't need to go constantly to the pastor wanting a spiritual elastoplast put on them. The word is in them and they can stand firm when at college or wherever it is that they meet these assaults. That's the job of the pastor, to see that the word is embedded in the lives of the young converts so they stand firm. And what a job it is. So what is he doing to the fathers who have been Christians for 40 or 50 years? He is writing to reassure them. Not to give them assurance for the first time but to reassure them - they and the younger ones - that they are standing firm rightly against the powers of the devil.

Falling in love with the world

Verses 15-17.

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of

the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

I wonder how many times this has been taken out of context as the theme of the sermon. I dare say I've done that myself. It is so easy to do that, isn't it? But what I'm going to do now is put that paragraph back in its context. You must not read that paragraph without reading it in 1 John. A freelance sermon on the world, please, without telling them about 1 John - that's the demand made of the preacher. And what's the implication of it, my friends? One of the reasons the secessionists left the little gospel churches was that they had fallen in love with the world. And as usual John does it in three: everything in the world; the craving of the sinful man; the lust of his eyes; and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world. How easy, because your average pastor in the world today doesn't have much. We're very fortunate, most of us have elders who look after us, but not so in the third world. The average Christian pastor throughout the world will have very little and a lot of people depend upon him. And don't you think therefore that the world offers promises that are hard to resist? I think that it sometimes does. We won't go into those – you can think of them for yourself. So what has drawn the secessionists away from the loyal Christian communities is not love of the Father but love of the world. These cravings, these desires, this vain glory. Leadership in the church appeals sometimes to the worst part of us - to vain glory, to boasting. And you remember in Mark 12:38-39 where Jesus says,

"Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market-places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets."

If you're a Christian leader you're not claiming to be a special person.

So rule number one in Bible study and interpretation: the text must be understood in its

context. As usual, the false is being exposed and the true is being encouraged. And the false here is the pull of the world. When we see young fine Christian people, especially gifted people, beginning to behave as though they are important people, beginning to find a lot of money coming in their direction, perhaps fame and celebrity, what a danger it is! But the encouragement is that magnificent last verse. Verse 17, *"The world and its desires pass away"*. Nothing will be left. *"...but the man who does the will of God lives for ever."* That's the great theme of 1 John: eternal life.

Remain in him

Just a word on the anointing in verse 20. Remember the anointing is in every Christian, and therefore God very graciously gives an equipment within the very simplest Christian person - they may not even be literate - to keep them from following this false teaching. The point of verse 27 I think I mentioned. When he says you don't need anyone to teach you, he doesn't mean there shouldn't be pastors and teachers in the church. He means you don't need these new secessionists, they have nothing to give you, nothing to add to you. And the great word as I think I said, but I'll say it now we finish this section, the great word at the end of cycle 1 up to verse 28 is this word *"remain"*. Remain where? With the apostolic word and the work of Christ. With the work and the word of Christ given to you by the apostle - just remain in it. 'Remain in him' or 'continue in him'. So, verse 24, *"See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father."* So the antichrists did not remain with the truth so they did not remain in the Father and the Son. As for you - verse 27 - you don't need anyone to teach you. As that anointing is real, remain in him. Verse 28, the final verse in cycle 1, *"...dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed at his coming."* Well, isn't that a tremendous verse? We do fear his coming, we do fear the judgment seat, we do feel that we shall shrink back, we shan't feel confident, we know our own sinfulness, and John is saying, you can be reassured, you won't shrink back, you won't be ashamed, if you remain in what God sent through Christ through the apostolic teaching.

LECTURE SIX

I have three things I want to do in this lecture. I want to look at the beginning of the third cycle (4:7-12); I then want to look at the knotty problem in 1 John about not sinning; and then finally I want to look at the summing up, the three magnificent 'we know's', which must, I think, give us a clue as to what John's aim was. That's where he wants to take us, that's the goal. So we must look at that before we go on our way rejoicing, but we have only got time to look at the bare bones.

Love, righteousness and belief

1 John 4:7-12. It seems in cycle 3 that John combines the three tests of love, righteousness and belief. Howard Marshall and Colin Kruse, both very able commentators, say they cannot believe the cycles are really the correct way of analysing the letter. This is because John interweaves the tests and does not continue his very clear cut pattern in cycle 1 and 2 where the three are separate. I think their view is too pessimistic. Don Carson's view is that John interweaves the tests in the third cycle and it seems to me reasonable. Clearly if we believe Jesus is Lord and that is test 1 if you like, we shall then be happy to live under his authority – that is test 2 – and to live under his authority means to fulfil his major command, which is to love the brothers and sisters, in other words for the church to be a real manifestation of the love of God. So those three are interwoven in this third cycle and it seems to me a very sensible way of doing it. What he's saying in effect is you can't have one without the other. Don't come and tell me that you love your brethren and then tell me that you don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God. There are lots of people who want to have one but not all three.

The test of love

So we begin the third cycle with the test of love. Somebody asked me, what is the difference between the three cycles? All I can say at the moment (I still have lots of work to do on this) is that it does seem to me that he deepens his teaching as we go through the three cycles. In cycle 1 we were to love the brethren and so demonstrate that we were walking in the light; that was our relationship to God. In cycle 2 we were to love each other because we're now children of God and not part of

the world. That clearly has led us on from our individual walk to our corporate love for one another. And then in cycle 3 he comes right to the heart of it: it is because of the nature of the God we worship and serve. If he is a God who is love, then a church that doesn't demonstrate that must somehow be out of harmony with its God.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. [The positive and the negative] This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

It seems that this is just general talk, but actually each verse says something quite separate and important and we may not be able to go through it in detail. At The Proclamation Trust we have a conference instruction which is called 'Keeping the preacher under control'. All that means is keeping him within the context of what he's preaching. Now clearly if you don't do that, you can make a nonsense of verses 7-8. I've been to weddings and I dare say you have when this was read out as the key verse at the beginning of the wedding. *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."* Now, that sounds splendid, doesn't it? Everyone knows that Bill and Belinda love one another as they stand before the minister. Does that mean that they're born again, that they know God? They are not Christians, but they love one another; therefore are they born of God? That is a complete misunderstanding, it doesn't follow. Many non-Christians, many followers of other religions, and humanists I'm sure, love their partners, love their children and love their friends. So if you parachute down on a verse like this, (and we're all tempted to do it as they are such lovely verses) and just say

love comes from God and wherever you see love you see God, then you're in difficulties, aren't you? It doesn't make any kind of sense. One or two good commentators are weak here; they long to stretch over and say it means love for our neighbour, but I don't think John is talking about that. Of course we ought to love our neighbour, but the controlling thing throughout 1 John is the fellowship, it's the church, the local church. And he's saying, do you have this love, which is the love Paul calls "*the love for all the saints*"?

Love comes from God

Perhaps a clue will help us before we get to verse 12. I quite enjoy reading about great golfers; you read about some great golfer who has been off form for about 6 months and hasn't won a tournament and then some great coach says to him, your left foot is just 3 inches out of line. He puts his left foot in line, and then he wins the next tournament. In other words, you've got to have yourself looking in the right direction and settled in the right place in order to play a good game. It always makes me smile that these little differences make such a big difference. It is true, I think, that when you come to Bible teaching. You do need to be facing in the right direction; you do need to have the right understanding of where you're going. Now if you read 1 John as platitudes it just sounds lovely, it's like water off a duck's back. The implication of what he's saying in this paragraph is very important; he's implying that loving your brother is taxing and difficult, and that our human capacities for doing that are insufficient. So it's not a platitude. That's why this love has got to come from God.

I learnt this, really, from Colossians. When Paul talks about relationships in the local church, he never uses platitudes. Listen to this: "*Bear with each other*". That means some of us are pretty unbearable. "*Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*" That means there are people in the congregation who need forgiveness. "*Forgive whatever grievances you may have.*" That means there will be real grievances, and so on. Paul is a realist, and so is John. That's why he says this love has got to come from God, because to live with the saints on earth is quite a trial sometimes. Our faults can demand a great deal of patience from other people. We do produce

grievances in our own lives for other people that are real. John recognizes that. So if we can care for the more tiresome members of our fellowship, our congregation, if we can cope with those who provoke us, criticize us, take us for granted, never listen to us, then we know that God is supernaturally working in the congregation. That's what he's saying. He's not saying something that is obvious or platitudinous. You can waffle about love in the pulpit and people will say, what a wonderful sermon, vicar. But actually if you start talking about how tiresome people are in a Christian congregation and how foolish they often are and how self-centred they often are, and yet you've got to get on together and care for one another and love will bind you all together, that's a very different matter. It's rather disconcerting, isn't it?

The preacher's job is to stay within the restraints and constraints of the passage; that's our job as speakers. John is talking about difficult congregations and communities where people are not yet perfect but we've got to learn to care for one another and be other people centred. Verse 7 – what an encouragement it is! "*Let us love one another*". That by itself is an impossible thing to do. But then he says, "*love comes from God*", therefore it is possible. In other words, he gives us what we can't do. It is the same Spirit who caused us to believe in Jesus Christ, which is a complete enigma to your next door neighbour who can't see how you can believe it, that same Spirit that chased out the unbelief in your life and gave you faith. That's God's Spirit, isn't it? And the same Spirit that caused the people to come from an atheistic background to believe in Jesus as God's Son, is the same Spirit who can mightily change us in the congregation and cause us to be able to cope with one another.

But the secessionists had not shared in this mutual care and concern, and they had left the Christian fellowship as something that was inadequate and immature. In fact now they had come to hate the Christian church and what it stood for. Verse 8 is the negative: "*Whoever does not love, does not know God*". In the context, then, that makes sense. Whoever doesn't love his brother, he

doesn't love God. That was said in chapter 1 and now again in chapter 4.

God's love manifested

But we notice that the love of God is something that is manifested. Verse 9 - it's a very very strong verb, "*In this the love of God was made manifest [or demonstrated].*" (ESV) He didn't just say, I love you, from heaven. "*He sent his one and only Son...*" which of course, if you're a Christian, immediately makes you think of Genesis 22, when God said, take your son, your only son and sacrifice him. That's the picture here. Your one and only son. Some of you no doubt have an only son and I'm quite sure that he is therefore precious to you and important to you, and so God condescends to our understanding of fatherhood and sonship to say that he has sacrificed and sent his only Son that we might live through him. It is the kind of thing that when I read it I feel I have just got to take it in; I sometimes will then walk or do another job in the house or something like that, trying to take it in. I am trying to take in why this is so important. This is the one thing that we can't do for ourselves; we can't save ourselves from eternal death. All these people you see on the road on the way to destruction, few there be that find the road to eternal life. It is a terrifying thought that all these people we see on the street are on their way to hell. The one thing a human being needs above all is something who can rescue him from hell and put him on the road to eternal life, and that's what God did. So he didn't send his Son simply to demonstrate love, "I love you". It was with the one purpose: eternal life. What a gift. We don't think about it enough, do we?

So the little paragraph begins to take shape in front of our eyes. Then in verse 10 there are these striking definitions. Clearly the secessionists were looking at things from a human point of view and therefore love is love at its most wonderful. What John is saying here is that as Christians, our love even at its most wonderful, when we love God (and we do love God by the power of the Spirit), that's not love. It is not spontaneous. God's love is spontaneous. God's love is undeserved. We love God because he has done so much for us! So John gives another of those negatives, which are so concise and useful. Don't think that your love for God, or the love of the great Christians down the era, is how you define

love. Love is defined by what God is and what God did. How different, therefore, the Christian when he talks about love compared with the world. We are to refer to the throne of God if we are to have get any idea what love means.

Love one another

Verse 11, "*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*" In other words, Christian ethics is passing on to others what God has done for us. That is, an "us" who are people who are sinful, undeserving and rebellious. And so of course we called upon to look at that Christian congregation and see people who are very sinful and very undeserving, and often very weak Christians, and we're told to care for them. Isn't that what's going on there? It is utterly realistic. It is not pretending that the congregation of the saints is a wonderful thing, because it isn't. Of course, it is a wonderful thing because God is making it his church, and one day God is going to point to all the powers of the universe and say, look at that. That's what Ephesians says. Look at my church! That's the wisdom of God.

Verse 12 is a great verse; it's a wonderful example of John's anti-mysticism. In John 1:18 we have a very similar verse but there is a little tiny difference in the original language. John 1:18, "*No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*" You see again the anti-mysticism? If you search for God out there you won't find him. Do you remember Gagarin, the Russian astronaut? It was the first time an astronaut had gone into space; I think he only went up a mile. He was paid by his masters to say, I've been up there and he's not there. It's the mystics down the ages John is talking about. He says, stop looking up there, you won't see him. I hate those medieval paintings of the saints gazing up into the unknown with an angel hovering around. I hate those paintings, because they are so utterly unreal! He says, don't look there, look there instead. Look at Jesus Christ, look at the word made flesh. Not vertical but horizontal. It's exactly the same here in verse 12 and Dr Plummer tells me that the Greek here means "gazing and contemplating". That's what implied in verse 12. "*No one has ever seen God by gazing or contemplating God...*" In other words,

no amount of that contemplative prayer ever enables anyone to detect God's presence. If you want to see the God of love, you'll find it in the Christian brotherhood.

What a tremendous responsibility for the local church! People are saying, I can't believe in God in this world. Look at this world, look at the daily paper, I can't believe that God is love. And the only answer that the New Testament gives is, first of all, look at Jesus Christ, and secondly, look at his people. If you happen to love one another – to love Mrs Jones in the church who is always complaining and snotty-nosed Master Jones who is always wrecking the youth fellowship, and Mr Jones who is as mean as a miser – if you can manage to live together with those fellow members of the congregation, then the love that God has given you is being perfected in you. That's what he's saying. It's being completed in you. It's very striking language, isn't it? You'll find it in 2:5; 4:17 and 4:18 and each time he talks about the thing being completed or perfected. I suggest that probably the secessionists said, we are offering a completed, a perfected, Christianity. That is what some authorities of the Episcopal Church in America are saying. They are not cringing; they are not apologizing. They are saying that God has taught them that civil partnerships are a sign of what God is doing in the world today. In other words, the Episcopal Church says it is in the van, so there's no apology. The Holy Spirit has led us; you other fellows are far behind. I'm sure the secessionists were like that, saying, we have been taught. Actually what they are doing is being conformed to the spirit of the age. But they think it's the Spirit of God. My dear friends, it's a very dangerous thing to think the spirit of the age is the Spirit of God.

So I don't know what to make of John Wesley and his perfect love. I think he got himself into an awful muddle on it. I don't want to speak disrespectfully of such a great man. He never claimed to have perfect love himself. I think he was looking in the wrong direction. If you turn to 1 John and you say, what is perfected love? He says its just practical concern for the other person in the congregation. It brings you right down to earth again! But I think some of John's followers were looking for an experience of perfect love that would lift you above the very pedestrian Christian life that you lived.

We're all looking for that – that key. John Wesley was such a great man. Although he talked about perfected love, what he did showed he understood what mattered. He was the first man to start the house church, the home fellowship, with his classes. That was one of the greatest things John Wesley ever did. He started these classes because he knew that preaching, and seeing people profess conversion, was not enough. Unless they met together, learned together and learned to love one another, there was going to be no continuance. What he did lasted, because there were people learning to love one another against all the odds. In little towns and villages all over this country were groups of people learning to love one another, and that changed the whole of the 18th century. That is encouraging – it changed the 18th century.

Just two comments before we move on. First of all, what an education it is to look carefully at the text. There's so much here, and all that the devil wants to do is to get their eye off it. Whenever I get back into the text in my study I say to myself, what have you been doing wasting your time? Get back to it! Because it is so worthwhile. But the enemy will do anything to keep us from it.

Secondly, what a wonderfully practical writer John is. You know, you might think you'd rise to the sublimest heights, and in a way you do, because there's nowhere else in the New Testament quite so sublime as this statement that God is love. Then as you sail up into the heavens of God is love, he brings you straight down to earth. You have got to love them. Well, I can't do that! The negative, then is very clear, as we read the text. He dismisses the secessionists. Verse 8, No, Mr Secessionist, you don't know God. Verse 10, No, our love for God is not a sufficient incentive for Christian living. There is a great convention of trying to get you to love God more. That's not a sufficient basis for Christian living. The only basis for Christian living is a gratitude that God ever loved you and he still keeps at it. Verse 12, No, stop contemplating the infinite; you're wasting your time with transcendental meditation. Start getting on with the Christian life, and what God has started to do in you he is making complete.

The problem of sin

Let us take this knotty problem of sin and see what we can do to resolve it. The apparent tension is between chapter 1 – “if we claim to be without sin” (so perhaps the influence is even hitting the Christians, treating sin lightly, even saying they weren't sinners), and 3:9, echoed with 5:18. 3:9, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin”. Now this has caused commentators an enormous amount of difficulty. Tons of ink has been spilt. I'll tell you one or two ways out of the difficulty, and then I'll try and tell you what I think is the way through this maze. The first way out of the difficulty is to do what the NIV and the ESV do and that is to treat the present tense verse as present continuous. So Colin Kruse says, the author uses the present tense of the verb indicating that it is sinning as an ongoing activity that he has in mind as an activity that is impossible to those born of God. I think I have two things to say to that. The translators of the Authorised Version and of the Revised Version, a very distinguished bunch of men, did not see the present tense as giving them a way out. So they translate it he who is born of God “doeth not sin” (AV) and “doeth no sin” (RV). That is the normal way to translate the present tense. So I personally think the NIV and the ESV way is a cop out.

My second reason for disagreeing is that these people do continue in sin. If you don't, you're remarkable. I went to a conference once where a missionary said she hadn't sinned for six months and I thought that was absolutely marvelous. It was only after I came away that I realized she was talking nonsense. So if you think you're not going to continue in sin for the rest of your life at all, then you've got another think coming. I know what they mean, and there's an element of truth in it, isn't there, that the Christian does fall but doesn't continue in that way, or hopes not to continue in that way, but we do still sin.

Of all the solutions offered the one I used to find most attractive is Robert Law. What he would say is that it is all but impossible for us to consider a life of sin. He gives us an example, Genesis 39. Potiphar's wife has been trying to seduce Joseph, who we're told quite clearly in the Bible was well-built and handsome, and his reply to her was this:

“With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”

Now, that I think is a fair way of looking at this. Sin is in that sense an impossibility for us, even though we know we do fall. I can't do that kind of thing, you say. It actually happens in very trivial matters, doesn't it? Perhaps people try to sell you raffle tickets and you don't want to sound terrifically pious and say, I don't do that, but you can say, I won't thank you very much but I'd like to give you a donation. What you're saying is, I don't do that. Aren't we doing that in lots of things? We're saying, that isn't my way of life. That's Robert Law's solution. I don't think it's the correct one but I think it goes some way to helping us with this tension and dilemma.

Let me get on to what I think is right. My conviction is that you will only find the solution again in terms of the secessionists. You will remember that the mark of the secessionists was lawlessness, but that term is constantly misunderstood in terms of riotous behaviour. They were not like that at all but they did not accept the authority of the apostles. They did not accept the law of God, which is the very essence of liberal theology. That's what the new morality was when it came out in the 60s and 70s. We do not go by an external law; we go by an internal love. What we love to do we believe is of God, and therefore we should do it. We don't have any time for legalism and external law – that's what they said. So in terms of believe and behaviour, the apostolic authority was rejected by the secessionists. What happens if you reject the word of God? It isn't the law so much or the Ten Commandments, just the word of God given to us by the apostles in the New Testament. If you refuse their authority, you have to establish your own authority. You, therefore, have to have a standard for your own life if you want to keep any self esteem. And so that's what ordinary decent people do. A friend of mine was effectively thrown out of his church, and a lady in that congregation

said to him about his preaching, she didn't want him to go on preaching about sin because she didn't see herself as a sinner. She was quite sincere in saying that. Her standard was not over and against the standards of God; it was over and against the standards of middle class people in her neighbourhood. I am just as good as they. Why do you tell me I'm a sinner when I live a decent respectable life recognised everybody in the neighbourhood? If we take another standard, we will always take a standard that we can achieve. That was the mark of the Pharisees. They set a religious standard so that they could say, I fast twice a week and I tithe all that I own, and therefore I'm not a sinner.

The standard of the law

Now, we do accept the authority of the apostles. That is, we accept the authority of the word of God, and this authority continually convicts us of our sinfulness. So we have to say we are sinners because we know in our lives we never can attain the standard of the word of God. We're continually missing the mark, falling short of the standard, and trespassing over the boundaries. But if you brought down the standards and the law to your own level, then you won't be conscious of any conviction of sin and you will say exactly what they did say in chapter 1. So it is the law of God that makes us confess our sins regularly. Surely on all these moral issues, you constantly have to say to young people, well, that may be the standard of your contemporaries, it may be the standard that the government is happy with, it may be the standard you were taught at school but it is not the standard of God.

The Lordship of Christ

The standard of the law convicts me of sin, so I know I am a sinner. But if you are without that standard, then you don't really think that you are a sinner at all. Now we turn the other way and say, can the Christian do what the lawless people do and rebel against the authority of God? The answer to that is, we cannot. That doesn't mean that we shall never fail, but by very virtue of being born again we have been born into a situation where we accept the Lordship of Christ. Is that not right? I hope you don't want to contradict me. Do you remember all that foolishness, Jesus can be your saviour and not your

Lord? All nonsense. Jesus is your saviour because he is your Lord. The invading armies could not have liberated France in 1944 if they were not sovereign over the enemy. Unless Jesus is Lord over all the powers of the enemy, he could not save you from hell. He's your saviour because he's your Lord. Lordship comes first. If Jesus did not have all authority in heaven and earth, then the whole missionary enterprise of the churches is hopeless. It's because he's got all authority he says, go and tell all nations.

So by very definition the Christian is a person who has accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ and accepted the authority of the apostles. It is lovely with young converts to see that they don't quibble about the Bible. I love it when you open the Bible with them and they immediately say, this is God speaking to me. I think you see this whole issue very clearly in Psalm 19:12-13,

"Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.

Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression."

The Hebrew word there for "great transgression" is in only two other places in the Old Testament. It comes at the great occasion of the golden calf in Exodus 32. Do you remember Moses comes down the mountain angry with his brother? He says three times to Aaron in that chapter, you have led these people into a great transgression. The Hebrew word simply means rebellion. Idolatrous rebellion. Keep me from sin that I do not move into apostasy and rebellion. The other place where it is said is in 1 Kings 2:28, the notorious case of Jeroboam. He also made golden calves – unbelievable stupidity. So all the way after that we are told to remember Jeroboam who led Israel to sin. What was the sin of Aaron and what was the sin of the people? What was the sin of Jeroboam? Rebellion against the Lordship of God. Idolatry, apostasy.

So when John says we cannot sin, he is saying it in the context of 1 John. The way the secessionist was going was the way of apostasy and idolatry and John is saying, the Christian cannot go that way. We can fall into terrible sin, but basically it is true to say, that God keeps his children from that

awful sin of idolatry and apostasy. Sin in 1 John is lawlessness. Are you a lawless person? If you are, I would warn you. Are you really a Christian at all? What we're seeing today I think is soft evangelical churches catching the spirit of the age to be lawless – to acknowledge no authority except the authority of experience.

We know: the believer and authority

5:18-20 *"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also 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 – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."*

A wonderful climax to a New Testament letter. Let me say this as shortly as I can. The first "we know" has to do with sin. *"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin"*, that is, rebel against his authority. "The one who is born of God", nobody knows whether that's Christ or us. I'm afraid this is a difficult matter of textual criticism. *"...the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him."* What that is saying is that the believer cannot rebel against God, but that he makes no foolish claims about his own behaviour, since God's authority compels him to acknowledge that he is a sinner. The secessionists, on the other hand, believed that they were free from sin, because they were free from the law. In reality, they had made themselves their own law, and that was rebellion. The evil one had captured them. So I think that first great "we know" is simply telling us that once we have been born again we shall never fall into this foolish sin of the secessionists. We shall acknowledge God's authority over us and we shall not continue to live as though we were autonomous. We cannot live as though we are autonomous beings. We are under rule and authority. That hierarchy goes throughout the Bible. There's no such thing as freedom without submission to authority. *"Whose service is perfect freedom"* (The Book of Common Prayer). The believer and sin.

We know: the believer and the world

The second great "we know" has to do with the believer and the world. We know that we are children of God; we have been brought out of the world to the community of the saints as Paul would call them, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. So this is a tremendous reassurance which echoes chapter 3. The secessionists went out of the little apostolic churches and, lo and behold, found themselves in the world. Little did they know that the world was under the control of the evil one. This, then, is the tragedy of those who leave apostolic Christianity and want a Christianity that is acceptable to the world, that they find themselves actually under the control of the devil. Accept the Lordship of Christ, or you will be under the power of the prince of the air, the reigning king in this world, which is Satan. So we come out of the world to take refuge in the community of the saints, the believers, the true church.

We know: the believer and the knowledge of God

Verse 20 is a wonderful verse. Unlike the secessionists who denied him, we know also that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, which the secessionists did not have. So that we may know him who is true, which the secessionists did not. We not only know him but are in him – knowledge is experience – even in his Son, Jesus Christ. We can't be in God except by being in Christ. He is the true God – the very thing the secessionists denied, and he is eternal life – the very thing the secessionists had lost. So the secessionists by going out lost their understanding of God. Those of us who have had to sit under liberal teaching will know the great pain of this; they have lost the knowledge of God. They are offering people nothing. So by their sin and their worldliness, the secessionists were obviously idolatrous.

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

I just want to finish by saying that 5:21 is the key. The commentary will tell you the 45 different interpretations of the verse, but the preacher has got to come in the end to a decision. What is John talking about? You can't really preach saying, this is probably true and this might be the case. Of course if there is no certainty at all then that is

what you have to do, but I think the knife has to be put in, and it's because I don't see this knife being put in that I am so keen on 1 John at the moment. Because what ought to be said to the permissive church is that what they are following is the way of idolatry. Not, you have different insights into Christianity, but that you cannot keep together truth and idolatry. We ought to pray that the truth will become clear. You can't have the revelation of God on Mount Sinai and the Golden Calf. And that is a very unpopular message, and if you're going to preach it, you have to give proper reasons for it; this is why you need to know 1 John.