

What Every Christian Must Know

Forgiveness of Sins

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The apostle John's epistle, called I John, is a tremendously encouraging and faith-building letter. John likely wrote I John from Ephesus, where apparently he had relocated near the time of the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in A.D. 70. The letter itself was not written until the last decade of the first century A.D. No one knows exactly what year, but it was toward the end of John's life.

John writes to Christians who had witnessed a departure from the truth in some of the people who were meeting with them, and resulting in an exodus from the truth. It was, in a sense, devastating the church at that time, because so much false doctrine had been introduced.

John's focus is to urge members of God's church to refine their biblical understanding, so that they are not led astray. They are to deepen their moral steadfastness, so that they are not enticed by the world, and to intensify their dedication, so that they are not neglecting their worship of God. John was a mature man, probably in his 90's or close to it, and he was giving the church exactly what it needed at that time out of the wisdom that he had accumulated over the decades.

That is, speaking to the church that they must grow in faith, obedience, and love. It is not a letter of 'dos and don'ts,' but rather a testimonial of what has been done. John recorded Jesus' words, to this effect, in John 19:30, "It is finished." In a sense, this is what John is trying to relate to them at this time.

The letter of I John highlights what God the Father has done in sending Christ the Son, offering Him up as a sacrifice for sins, and sending forth "the Word of life" that is causing this world's darkness to pass away, and the true light of the coming age to shine. It is a very encouraging and comforting letter.

God's action becomes the directive of those who believe in His Son. John writes, "Whoever does the will of God abides forever." God's will is, for those who read and believe this letter, to receive the truth of Christ's coming, rejoice in the commands of Christ's teaching, and find peace in the love of the Father, as it continually translates into love for one another. This is a key, and this is what John wants us to learn from what he tells us in this letter, that all of the love that flows from God the Father and Jesus Christ means that this is the love that we are to emulate, imitate, and develop for

one another. This is "not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

In I John 2, John uses three titles, or descriptions, of the members of God's church.

I John 2:12-14 I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 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 wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

John calls them 'little children;' in verse 12, the Greek is teknia, and in verse 13, paidia. 'Teknia' indicates a child young in age, and 'paidia' a child young in experience, and therefore, in need of training and discipline. He also uses the descriptions "young men" and "fathers." Primarily there are three categories here, children, young men, and fathers.

These three verses come as a kind of parenthesis in the series of appeals and encouragements that the apostle John makes at this point in his letter to the saints, to you and me. There are basic foundational things that John believes that every Christian should know: that sins are forgiven for Christ's name's sake, that we are given the power to overcome sin, and that we know God the Father and God the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

Next, John tells us that we must keep the commandment of love to the brethren, because that commandment is so essential to fellowship with God. Then, he goes on to convince and remind them that they must not love the world.

I John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The love of the Father implants a desire to break with idolization of the world. Here, John warns against devotion to a world system that is opposed to God. But, before John

warns them that they must not love the world, he introduces this break, in verses 12 through 14. Why does he do that, why this sudden change? Why does he suddenly interpret his series of encouragements, and at the end of verse 11 pause, and in verse 12 say, 'I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake,' and so on?

There is a very interesting reason. The apostle John, in effect says, 'I have been showing you some of the basic principles. I have been reminding you of some of the demands that the Christian life makes on you; and I have been showing you the extraordinary conditions of blessing.'

John pauses before beginning verse 12, because he was a loving and understanding pastor, and he knew that there was a great depression in the church at that time because of the number of parting from the truth. He did not want to just lecture them on keeping the commandments; he had a very practical purpose in mind, which was to help them endure. They were arriving at a point, similar to where we are, where we are going to have to persevere to the end. So John is taking a genuinely warm approach to them.

At this point, John wanted to do three things to help them endure:

First, he wanted to comfort them. Second, he wanted to encourage them. And third, he wanted to show them that there is no excuse for failure in this life, in view of the provision that has been made.

It is an easy thing to say love our spiritual brothers; it is a simple thing to say we are to keep God's commandments; but is anyone capable of doing these things perfectly on their own? We know the answer to that, because we have been trying.

If God's standard of Christian life, morality, and ethics is presented without first showing clearly how this is possible in the light of God's truth, the New Testament would initially seem very discouraging. We see that in mainstream Christianity, there is much discouragement. The pastors comfort the people by telling them that they do not have to keep the commandments, that they have all been wiped away, and your sins as well. But thankfully, God has inspired the New Testament to tell us certain things that are essential to the carrying out of His way of life. So, John writes this to comfort and encourage those individuals in the church at that time, and to us today at the end of the age.

In reality though, there is no excuse for failure. So the apostle John introduces this parenthesis in that way; comfort for those who feel condemned, encouragement for

those who feel this is something unachievable.

Before John goes any further, he tries to take away any excuse that we may come up with, any attempt to excuse ourselves from this high calling we are called to in Jesus Christ. At this point, John stops and says, 'Do you think this is all hopelessly impossible?' Then, he continues, 'If that's the way you feel, it's quite clear that you have not understood the original doctrine.' That is why he mentions some things that every Christian must know in the way of foundational doctrine.

The members of the church were approaching the whole thing the wrong way. John could tell that they were uncertain somewhere about the basic elements of God's truth. In his letter of I John, he emphasizes these foundational things. So this is the way that he continues—by telling them that he is writing these things to them on a certain assumption:

He says, "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 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 wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father."

That is John's basic assumption—which means that if they are not sure about that, then obviously his appeals and encouragements to them would be ineffective and useless. He would be wasting his time to tell them not to love the world, because unless they are in basic understanding and agreement they will not understand the significance of his admonition.

So, what vital things was it that they needed to understand and agree about? In I John 2:12-14, we have the bare essentials, the basic foundation of Christianity, and what the future of their spiritual state depended on, as does ours.

If it was important for these Christians to understand these basic doctrinal principles, then it is also important for us to understand them. All Christians must know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that our sins are forgiven upon repentance and baptism, initially; and ongoing through life as we repent, and work to overcome our sins.

It is not only the mature Christians that must know that, but even the very newest member of the church. Baptism cannot be valid unless the repentant sinner understands this. It is not only the fathers who know that from the beginning of their conversion, all Christians must know it. It is not only the young men who overcome the wicked one; that

must be understood of all Christians.

So, John writes for all, but at the same time there are steps and stages in our Christian lives, and at these stages we need one emphasis more than another, and then we go on to need another one. The whole complete truth is meant for everyone, and still there are applications at certain points that are more needed than at others. This is what John is doing here; he is breaking these things down, to what you might call, spiritual levels or maturity levels.

So, all John is doing, in verses 12-14, is emphasizing, to the members of the church, key elements that relate to the spiritual level of their individual maturity.

To emphasize once again—It is essential for us to be clear about fundamental assumptions about God's truth, because it is nearly impossible to appeal to people to live God's way of life, as the Bible instructs from beginning to end, if they have not been called, and are not Christians. You can talk until you are blue in the face to people in the world, and they will shake their head, and they may even agree with you, but they walk away and have forgotten it all. Really it all goes over their heads, except for the very basics that they receive out of keeping the commandments, if they do.

The Old and New Testaments are written by way of admonishment for righteous conduct, primarily to those who are called, and receive the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit to actually overcome. It is not the responsibility of the church to encourage the world to practice Christian morality and ethics, because it is impossible for the church to convert the world. The church has no effect if God does not call them.

It is difficult for the Christian, it is impossible for the world. So there is no single moral or ethical encouragement in the Bible to a person who is not a Christian. Christians do not turn to the world and say, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world;' we know that they cannot understand the language, still less can they practice it.

This is not to say that we are not to preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to the world—of course we have a divine commission to do that—but this does not mean that we are to cast pearls before swine, in the form of trying to convert the antichrist world. We preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, by the internet and by our daily witness, but relatively few respond. Only those who God personally calls, and a few others who recognize a little of its value intellectually react. So John repeats these fundamentals twice for emphasis, and effective teaching.

John highlights three essential understandings that all Christians must know—three

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basic assumptions behind the authority for keeping the commandments, loving the brethren, and not loving the antichrist world.

First, we must be clear in our knowledge of the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." This is a fundamental assumption that every Christian must know, understand, and believe.

What does this mean? Let us divide it like this: The first thing that Christians should know is that their sins are forgiven, when they repent and are baptized, thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is not possible for us to earn forgiveness, it is the gift of God, through His Son, but there are "qualifications" for receiving the gift of salvation. This gift of forgiveness is given through Jesus Christ. He is the One whose blood was shed to wash away our sins. The apostles were sent out to deliver this essential message of repentance, the remission of sins, and the coming Kingdom of God.

Let me emphasize still more. Our certainty and assurance of forgiveness of sins is based on our knowledge of the way in which our sins are forgiven—I John 2:12 "I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." There must be some significance to 'His name's sake.'

To believe in the name of the Son of God, is to know the assurance of eternal life. This is the basis for our certainty and assurance; we are forgiven because of the perfect, the finished, and the full work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Our sins are not forgiven because we rest upon the hope of our own good lives and merits, or our own good works.

Why do we believe our sins are forgiven, on what grounds do we believe? If you put that question to a mainstream Christian, often he will say, 'I believe that my sins are forgiven because God is love.' But if those are his grounds for believing, then where does Jesus Christ come in? They say that they are Christians and that they are followers of Christ, but yet for them, it is all about a vague sense of love.

The apostle John says, "Your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." Whose name? Jesus Christ's! John uses this thought-provoking phrase 'for His name's sake' to express that forgiveness comes through the name of Jesus Christ.

The Jews used names in a very special way. A name is not simply something what a person is called; it stands for the whole character of a person, as much as is known to others. This use is very common in the book of Psalms.

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Psalm 9:10 And those who know Your name will put their trust in You.

Psalm 29:2 Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name.

This does not mean that those who know that God is called Yahweh, or some other name, will put their trust in Him; it means that those who know God's nature, having had it revealed to them, will be ready to put their trust in Him, because they know what He is like, and what His character is, and what He stands for. The psalmist prayed, in Psalm 25:11, "For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great."

For all intents and purposes this means 'for Your love and mercy's sake.' The basis for the psalmist's prayer is the character of God as he knows it to be. He can request forgiveness only because he knows the name—the character—of God.

In Psalm 20:7, the psalmist says, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." Some people put their trust in earthly assistance, but we will trust God because we know His nature, and what He stands for.

So then, in I John 2:12, where John says, "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake," he means that we are assured of forgiveness, because we know the character of Jesus Christ. We also know what He was willing to do for us, and what He did do for us.

We know that in Him we see God. We see in Him sacrificial love and patient mercy; and it is for this reason that we know that God is like that; and, therefore, we can be sure that there is forgiveness for us. John had already put it like this with regard to the test of knowing Christ, in I John 2:

I John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Our assurance of forgiveness of sin comes from it being 'for His name's sake.' We know our sins are forgiven because Jesus Christ is standing there as our representative with God; it is for His sake, for His name's sake, that we are forgiven. Our sin has been dealt with in Him by the blood of His sacrifice.

Isaiah 53:5-6 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

That is what Jesus Christ's name represents; all of that. Our sins are taken and laid upon Jesus Christ, by God Himself; and because He has borne the punishment of our sins, therefore we will not bear the punishment for them because our sins are forgiven in Him, for His name's sake.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is true because the justice of God insists on our being forgiven, because Christ has been punished for us. These are the grounds of our certainty and assurance.

Let us put this in a practical form. If we are uncertain about the forgiveness of our sins—that in itself is sin—and we know that 'whatever is not of faith is sin.' This is important to understand, because there are people who feel that an assurance of the forgiveness of sins is presumption, and they would rather give the impression that they are being humble and modest, than to realize and believe that their sins are forgiven. They do not like to say 'my sins are forgiven,' they do not feel good enough to say that, they are so conscious of their own unworthiness. But our sins are not forgiven by our action.

The simple reply to that is—if that is their attitude, then there is only one explanation for it, and that is lack of faith, unbelief—it is not an indication of righteousness to be uncertain that your sins are forgiven. Actually, it is denying and doubting the Word of God, because we have that promise. The certainty of the New Testament is that our sins are forgiven; we have been forgiven for His name's sake.

If we do not know that, it is because we are unclear about the doctrine, because we are still relying on ourselves, because we are not relying on the finished, complete work of the Son of God. It is because we do not realize the merit and the power of His sacred name.

That name, when pleaded before God, immediately assures pardon for the one with the right attitude—the repentant, humble heart. His name is above all other names, the

name in which all fullness dwells, the name that gives an entry to the presence of God. It is just beyond our comprehension to be able to understand how much power there is in that name.

I am going to shift gears here, because I want to say something about what it means to do something in a person's name. What does it mean to do something 'in someone's name'?

The word 'name' and its inflected forms occurs nearly 1,100 times in the King James Version, and is almost always translated from the Hebrew word 'sem' [pronounced seem] (which is also rendered "fame," "renown," "report") or the Greek word 'onoma.' Just under half of these occurrences refer to the name of God, or God's Son.

Ideally, a name captures the essence of the person. The Creator God, of course, has called everything in His creation by name, and He has done this because of His discernment (or the authority to make the judgment). In Genesis 2:19, Adam has this discernment concerning the animals and with it, authority over them.

In the case of the minister of God, it is the authority behind the command, not their own authority that expels demons.

Luke 10:17-19 Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

Jesus' great power over demons was delegated to His disciples. Serpents and scorpions are physical dangers that the disciples faced in their preaching, and are also symbols of demonic opposition. Both discernment and authority are often implied in the changing of names.

Biblically, formal re-naming registers a change in personality, and signals a new phase of one's life. Upon being given new responsibility Abram, meaning "the Father is exalted" was changed to Abraham, meaning "Father of multitudes"; and Sarai, meaning "Lord God is prince" was changed to Sarah meaning, "Princess," and this was done because she would be progenitor of a great nation.

The phrase "in someone's name" can indicate status, impersonation, responsibility, or

purpose.

Usually, however, it claims delegated authority. Apart from acts of ministry and battle, and generally serving as a person's representative, the phrase is mostly associated with verbal commands.

Here is an example of the formal communications from a king or a leader.

Esther 8:7-8 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke."

This is just a physical example of the power behind 'in someone's name.' In this case it was a king.

To "know" God's name means to be in harmonious relationship with God's character and purposes; to know God is to love Him. In the performance of miracles generally, and in prayer, "in Jesus' name" is more appeal than command, and involves faith.

A lame man who was healed at Solomon's porch held on to Peter and John, then Peter responded to the gathering crowd who witnessed the miracle.

Acts 3:16 And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

The phrase: 'through faith in his name,' refers to Peter's faith rather than to any faith on the part of the lame man. Jesus healed the man, and faith (or trust) in Jesus also healed the man, because Jesus worked through Peter's faith, and by the faith that is through Jesus. Jesus himself imparts this kind of miracle-working faith to people's hearts and minds.

'Forgiveness' is "through His name" along with life and salvation. In Scripture, we are told that faith in Christ results in: forgiveness of sins, eternal life, confidence in prayer, protection from the evil one, and understanding and knowing the true God.

We should have a complete trust and confidence in God, based on his character and promises.

James 1:2-8 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

If we were to say a prayer in a doubting way, and ask at the end of the prayer in Jesus' name, even though there is great power in Jesus' name, the will of God has not been fulfilled there because of doubting, and the lack of faith. It is very important to have that humility, and that confidence, when we pray, especially in time of need. Assistance is readily available from our 'giving God,' but, not just in crisis. To those who lack wisdom, it is attainable anytime by asking. James assumes that members of God's church would feel the need for wisdom, not just knowledge; and that God provides wisdom generously, never grudgingly.

To receive God's wisdom in trials, we must be wise in asking; we have to ask in faith; to believe without doubting. The word for "doubt," in verse 6, suggests vacillating. We should never come to God like a wave of the sea, blown [horizontally] and tossed [vertically] by the wind.

When we ask something in prayer, we should ask the things Christ would ask for. Our requests should be unselfishly motivated. To ask 'in Jesus' name' means that we ask as one who is dedicated to the same purposes that Jesus Himself is dedicated to; as one who is continually requesting Jesus Christ to work through us; as one who is striving to live the same way of life Jesus lived and does lives.

I am using a lot of principles from John's writings, because he was a wise man in the faith, old in age, and had seen and done a lot, and experienced a tremendous amount.

God the Father respects the name of His Son. There is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved. When a true follower of Jesus Christ makes a request to God in the name of Jesus Christ, God takes notice and responds.

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John 14:13-14 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

We see there that the motivation we should have is that the Father may be glorified in the Son. So whatever we ask, we should always be asking ourselves, "Will this glorify God in what I am asking?"

The phrase, "in My name," as found here in both verses 13 and 14, is not a magical formula of summons. "In my name," is equivalent to saying 'on my account', or 'for my sake.' The phrase in verse 13, "whatever you ask," is a promise that referred especially to the apostles in their work of spreading the gospel; but it is also true of all Christians, if what we ask is in faith, and according to the will of God.

Praying in Jesus' name means praying in a way consistent with His character and His will (a person's name in the ancient world represented what the person was like); it also means coming to God in the authority of Jesus. An intimate relationship with God is the goal of prayer. Effective prayer must ask for and desire what Jesus approves of.

John expanded this teaching in his first epistle.

I John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Human experience confirms that we do not always receive all of the things that we ask from God, even things that seemingly agree with His revealed will. This phrase 'whatever we ask' must be understood in light of other passages of Scripture which show that praying according to God's will includes praying in faith, with patience, in obedience, and in submission to God's greater wisdom.

Illustrated on a human level: If a man who has money in a bank authorizes you to draw it out, you are said to do it in his name. Or, if a son authorizes you to apply to his father for aid because you are his friend, you do it in the name of the son, and the favor will usually be granted to you because of the regard the parent has for his son, and through him to his friends.

In a similar way, we are allowed to apply to God in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, because God is totally pleased with Him, and because we are the friends of His Son, He answers our requests. Even though we are undeserving, He still loves us on account of His Son, and because He sees His image developing in us. No privilege is greater than that of approaching God in the name of His Son. No blessings of salvation can or will be conferred on any who do not come in His name.

To ask 'in Christ's name' is to plead His merit and intercession, and to depend upon that plea. The Old Testament saints had an eye on this when they prayed for the Lord's sake and for the sake of the anointed.

Daniel 9:17-19 Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

'Forgiveness' is "by His name". It restores the relationship between God and the ex-sinner, by providing reconciliation for one who was separated, by sin, from God.

The attributes of God that are most often associated with His forgiveness are: mercy, grace, and steadfast love. In fact, seven times in the Bible, the statement is made that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

God's forgiveness is often characterized by its magnitude and abundance. It is "abounding," not half-hearted. God does not simply remove sin—he removes it "as far as the east is from the west, which shows that His love is as great "as the heavens are high above the earth."

Psalm 103:11-12 says it this way—"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

It is absolutely essential to living God's way of life, that we understand and believe that our life's sins are forgiven at baptism, and continue to be forgiven as we repent and

continue to overcome—not because we have earned the right to have our sins forgiven, but because Christ earned the right. He was, and is, the only perfect sacrifice, and His blood washes away our sins.

Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for sin for us. He has borne our sins, and has died our death, and has risen again to justify us. That is the first thing that every Christian should know—that our sins are forgiven.

The second essential understanding that every Christian should know, is the way that sin can be overcome.

I John 2:13 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 wicked one.

Anything that God inspires to be repeated is important, and here He does it back to back. Look at how John puts it—"I write to you, young men, because you have overcome..."—not because you are going to, but because you have.

What does this mean—'you have?' We should become immediately aware of victory over the wicked one the moment that we truly believe in Jesus Christ—not complete, absolute victory, but victory none the less.

Although we are still conscious of great weakness, the moment that we believe in Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and are baptized into the body of Christ, we have a consciousness that we are somehow or other no longer under the dominion of sin.

Even though the wicked one is tremendously powerful, and we may be afraid of him in our weakness, we know that there is an immediate victory. Though we have not finished with overcoming sin, we are no longer under the dominion of sin and Satan. We are conscious of great weakness on our part, and yet we know that the wicked one is a defeated enemy, and that we are fools if we listen to him.

But we can say, more simply, that those who have faith in Jesus Christ know that they are in Christ; they know that Christ has already defeated the wicked one. What an advantageous thing it is to be confronted by an enemy, and know that the enemy has already been defeated. That is the position of members of God's church; we cannot be beaten by the enemy in combat, because there is Someone standing by us who has done it. We are little children in the victorious army, and we can leave the enemy to

Him.

That is the way to understand this victory over the evil one. John divides it like this: we know that we have been made strong. I John 2:14 'I have written to you, young men, because you are strong ...'

It does not mean that they are strong in and of yourselves, or that they have developed some strange, mystic strength. It is impossible for us to keep the commandments, and to love the brethren, and to hate the antichrist world, unless we have been given strength.

The struggle with temptation is a personal struggle. The apostle John does not speak, in verses 13 and 14, in the abstract of conquering evil; he speaks of conquering the evil one. He sees evil as a personal power that seeks to seduce us from God. It is in Christ that we receive the power to meet and to defeat this attack.

John states here, in verse 14, '... and the word of God abides in you.' Or, another way of putting it is: the Word of God is, and remains, in you; it remains in your heart, mind, and thoughts. It can also be thought of in this way: 'you take-to-heart the Word of God,' or 'you put and guard and keep and observe the Word of God (or what God has said) in your heart.' God speaks His Word and goes on doing so. If we deny and reject it, I John 1:10 says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The word of God is also the word that brings new life to us.

I Peter 1:23-25 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

In verses 24 and 25, Peter cites Isaiah 40:6 and 8, to contrast the weakness of human flesh, with the power of the word of the Lord that has granted new life to the faithful, to believers, to the saints.

"The word of God" is not the material of the new spiritual begetting, but the means. By

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means of the word we receive the incorruptible seed, the Holy Spirit, and in this way become "begotten" as our initial step into membership in the Family of God. We are begotten of the Spirit by the Word of God. The word is the means of transportation of the germinating power.

Peter wrote in verse 23, "having been born again [i.e., begotten now and born again later as spirit beings], not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,"

So the Word of God abiding in our hearts is not a temporary thing, it is something that is placed there permanently. But it can dissipate from us if we do not use it. "If you do not use it you lose it," a common phrase that we have all heard.

The Bible is a living organism, not a haphazard collection of fragments: its parts have a mutual relation and a special function, subordinate to the design of the whole. It is because the Spirit of God accompanies it that the word carries the germ of life. The Word of God is dynamic, not inactive.

They who are spiritually born again live and exist forever, in contrast to those who sow to the flesh. The gospel bears incorruptible fruits, not dead works, because it is itself incorruptible. The word is an eternal power, because even though the sound of the word dissipates and vanishes, there remains the kernel—the truth—understood in the voice. This sinks into the heart, grows, and lives on.

James talks about God's way of life being rooted into us by the word.

James 1:18, 21-25 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. . . . Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

The Word of God comes into us and gives us life, and it abides, and the life grows. We can think of this word also as the 'sword of the spirit.' When Paul tells the Ephesians to

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put on the whole armor of God, he gives a list and refers to the 'sword of the spirit,' with which we are to fight the enemy. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul tells us to put on the weapon of God: 'the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.'

How is it that this Word of God makes us strong to fight sin? It shows us the horrible nature of sin, and while the Word of God abides in us, it reveals sin in all its ugliness and selfishness and perversion—and we hate it. It also teaches us about the destiny of those who are the slaves of sin. It shows the power of God, and of Christ. Christ has defeated the enemy already, and He comes into us, and makes us strong, and enables us to become more than conquerors against all these spiritual things that assault us.

If we feel that the demands of this Christian life are too high or impossible, it shows ignorance and a lack of faith. In a sense, we have no right to be weak, no business to be failures when all of this is offered to us.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

This is why the apostle John says, 'So then, I am writing to you because you know these things and because you know that these things are facts.' Therefore, we must have this knowledge of the power of Christ, and the ability to overcome sin. Every Christian should know the way that sin can be overcome.

And that brings me to the third and last essential understanding, that we must all have the right knowledge of the Father and of the Son. This is the basic truth of John's whole epistle. I John 2:13, "I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning."

"Him who is from the beginning" is Jesus Christ, who is mentioned in, I John 1:1, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life."

Then, the last phrase, in verse 13, we find that we must know the Father—"I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father."

This is the essential knowledge that every Christian must have; a true knowledge of God—not God primarily as some great power—but God as Father, God who has loved

us with an everlasting love, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting that mainstream Christianity generally focus so much on Jesus Christ, and they tend to neglect God the Father.

This is the Great God, who so loves us, that He counts the very hairs of our head, the God who causes the sun to rise and set every day. This amazing Father-God wants us to know Him. And if we know Him, we do not feel that His commandments are a sacrifice; we know that they are for our own good, and for the good of all.

We know that God has given us His commandments because He wants to bless us, and because He wants us to conform to the image of His own Son. So it is a right knowledge of the Father, and likewise a right knowledge of His Son Jesus Christ, that we must have. This knowledge of God means that we feel that He is near in our time of need, and in temptation, so that we can rise above it.

This is a gift of the increasing knowledge of God. This knowledge is not merely an intellectual thing. To know God, is not merely to know Him as the philosopher knows Him; it is to know Him as a benevolent father, as an intimate friend, and as the sovereign personification of love.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

In our getting to know God the Father, of course, we need to know Jesus Christ, because we get to know God the Father through Jesus Christ. We need to get to know Jesus Christ as much as we can, so that we do see God. It is essential to our membership in the family of God that we have the right intimate relationship with the Father and the Son.

Those are the three basic things that every Christian must know: that our sins are forgiven for His name's sake, that God gives us the spiritual power to overcome sin, and that we can and must intimately know God the Father and God the Son, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us take a moment to compare these things to different age groups in a literal sense. While we are new and young in God's church, and feel so weak and small, the one thing

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that we really want to know is that God is our Father, that God loves us, and that our sins are forgiven. The apostle John emphasizes that in writing to 'little children.'

In that early stage, all we really want to know is that we can, in a manner of speaking, recline in safety in the loving arms of God.

At the beginning of living God's way of life we do not understand very much, so God gives us everything. God is the Father, and the spiritual child is given everything: 'Little children, you know your sins are forgiven.' Obviously that is not talking about little children, but in the spiritual sense the new in the church.

Then you live on a little bit, and you become a young man; you find now there is a fight involved, and 'young men' in the Christian life are conscious of that fight, and the enemy is attacking them. In the beginning God's way of life was somewhat easy; now there is a conflict and difficulties. But God can make you strong, and you can overcome the wicked one, and the Word of God will abide in you, so that when you are in this middle stage of God's way of life you have to remember this—the young man, must especially hold on to this—that you are not left to yourself.

This is the time of the temptation of the pride of intellectual knowledge that is in a sense the middle age of being a member of God's church, when a person has learned enough about God's truth to succumb to his own personal understanding and personal biblical interpretation, not realizing that Satan is leading him astray by feeding his conceit. Many have gone out of God's church for this reason.

Young men, the Word of God abides in you, and Christ who has defeated the enemy can enable you to overcome. All Christians are somewhat like 'young men,' because all have a vigorous strength to fight and win their battles against the tempter and his power.

And, fathers have the mature wisdom that living God's way of life and experience can bring. All Christians are somewhat like 'fathers', like full-grown, responsible men, because all can think and learn their way deeper and deeper into the knowledge of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Fathers, the old in age and, or old in the length of time in the church, you no longer, as children, can expect everything to come automatically. You have gone beyond the stage of the day to day struggle and conflicts. You are no longer interested in the gifts themselves, no longer interested in the fight, though you are still fighting. What matters to you is the knowledge of and intimacy with the Giver Himself. You know Him that is from the beginning.

As a child you thought of gifts; and now you are thinking more of the giver. You have gone through the struggles, and you have overcome; you know all about that; now what you are thinking about is the ultimate gift and reward of salvation and eternal life, and how to be the best example possible as a witness of God's way of life.

So you dwell more and more on your personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, as you feel more and more like a member of the family of God. So what you long for is to intimately know the Father your God and your Savior better.

Those who are now Christians have passed out of death into life. We did not do this on our own ability; God loves us and sent Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins. God then caused us to be begotten, giving us life. With life, God gave the Spirit and spiritual understanding, with the result that we are no longer "of the world" or "of the devil" but we are "of God" and "of the truth." God now abides in us, His Word abides in us, and we abide in God; thus we abide in the light, because God is light.

Another way of describing this relationship is to say that we know and love God. Being made alive, receiving the Spirit, and knowing God naturally results in transformed behavior, which the apostle John describes in terms of loving God, obeying God, and loving one another.

I John 2:12-17 I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 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 wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one. And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The blessings of each group are the blessings of all the groups, and each one of us finds himself included in all of them, generally speaking. In a very important sense, as members of God's church, we are all His children.

I John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

But more specifically, there are steps and stages in the Christian's life; and whatever stage we are in, there is an aspect of the truth that speaks specifically and especially to us, some basic doctrine for us all, and a special word of encouragement according to our individual position.

How blessed we are to stand on such solid ground, where we have the knowledge of the forgiveness of sin, the knowledge of how to overcome sin, and above all, the knowledge of God the Father and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, His Son.