

1 JOHN 5:20, 21 WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

“We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”¹

“**T**he trouble with world is not that people know too little, but that they know so many things that ain’t so.”² Even among the professed people of God, much of what we profess to know “ain’t so.” If only we would restrict ourselves to what we know to be true, our message would be so much more powerful, and our appeals to the lost would be so much more effective. I have often encouraged believers to carry their beliefs lightly on their fingertips, to be gracious when disagreeing about issues of doctrine with fellow saints. We are taught, “Live in peace with one another” [1 THESSALONIANS 3:13b ISV].

If you are a Christian, you now know many things that were once impossible to know. You know God. I don’t mean you know about God—*you know God!* You are on speaking terms with the Creator of all things—He calls you His child. You know His awesome power; though you may not see that power displayed in its fullness, you do witness it on a continual basis as you walk with Him and as you do His will. You know the forgiveness of sin; and you know the sorrow and pain that attends life when you stumble into sin. You know the smile of heaven; and you have experienced genuine distress when sin has darkened your life. Though we long to live perfect lives, we cannot do so at this time; nevertheless, we know the Son of God. We know we are accepted in Him; and we know He is perfect.

CEREBRATIONS ON KNOWLEDGE — Take a moment to think about knowledge, thinking especially how we acquire knowledge. In broad terms, knowledge may be innate, or it may be acquired. Think first about what is meant when speaking of innate knowledge. Innate knowledge is that knowledge possessed because we are. This is, if you will, God-given knowledge. Let’s think about innate knowledge for a moment. Perhaps one of the most readily recognisable forms of knowledge that could be considered innate, is presented in the American Declaration of Independence. In that document, as originally penned by Thomas Jefferson, the following line was found. “We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable, that all men are created equal and independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and unalienable, among which are the preservation of life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Of course, the Committee of Five edited Jefferson’s initial draft to read, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”³

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Quote attributed to Mark Twain

³ “The Declaration of Independence,” “Comparison of the First Draft, the Reported Draft and the Engrossed Copy of the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America,”

<http://www.ushistory.org/Declaration/document/compare.htm>, accessed 6 February 2018; the Committee of Five was composed of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston—“The Declaration of Independence,” “Chronology of Events,” www.ushistory.org/declaration/timeline.html, accessed 6 February 2018

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Continuing these ruminations on innate knowledge, you know that no one taught you to breathe—the regular contractions of smooth muscles controlling the diaphragm is controlled by your very existence. Peristaltic action of the gut is not something that one learns, it is innate to life itself. In significant measure, the blink reflex, the gag reflex and salivation are innate to life. Failure to exhibit these reactions likely indicate serious physical deficits. Though there are undoubtedly other, and perhaps superior, examples of innate knowledge, these provide examples of muscular knowledge that are unlearned.

Now, let's focus briefly on the matter of acquired knowledge, thinking also of the corollary, wisdom, that should attend acquisition of knowledge. Acquired knowledge comes primarily through *experience, observation* or *instruction*. As we mature, we gain knowledge *through experience*. Growing up as the son of a Kansas blacksmith, I saw a surprising number of people learn metallurgical facts through experience. My dad worked at a forge, heating iron and shaping it for various uses. After heating the iron until it glowed, he would shape it through beating with a four-pound maul, using various chisels and tools to shape the iron and so forth.

After achieving the shape desired, if the item was not to be tempered, dad would toss the hot iron piece into the dust in front of the anvil. I don't know how many times I saw people, even older individuals that should have known better, reach down to pick up the still hot metal. Though it was no longer glowing, it was hot—hot enough to cook human skin. There would be an anguished scream, the metal would be thrown down, followed by vigorous shaking of the hand. Dad would always ask the same question, "Was that hot?" Those grasping the hot metal learned quickly that iron retains heat and conducts it quite well. For those that are wondering if I ever grabbed any of those metal pieces, I'll simply say that it doesn't take me long to look at a piece of metal. That was an example of experiential acquisition of knowledge.

Knowledge may be acquired through observation. We can observe the transit of the moon around the earth or the movement of the earth around the sun, and we observe a high degree of regularity. Thus, time and the chronologic divisions derive from observational knowledge. The Laws of Thermodynamics were never drafted by a parliament or a congress; these inviolate laws are formulated and understood through observation. The Law of Biogenesis is a law derived from observation. Perhaps a person with an X chromosome and a Y chromosome could be a female, but that such a condition has never been observed in human history. So long as the SRY gene is present on the Y chromosome, the individual will produce testosterone as well as Müllerian-inhibiting hormone. In short, biology is determined by genetics and not by feelings. Again, this is knowledge obtained through repeated observation.

Of course, we each recognise that knowledge is acquired through receiving instruction. In reality, this concept simply describes communicating what someone has experienced or observed. As their experience or observation is communicated to a receptive audience, the knowledge is added to the compendium that already exists for those willing to receive this new knowledge. One of the primary roles for a pastor is teaching—communicating the knowledge (and wisdom) revealed through the Word of God. Those individuals who are receptive to that knowledge will receive what is said, adding it to their own knowledge base so they can avoid being forced to learn through their personal experience and/or observation.

The advice of the Wise Man still holds.

“Buy truth, and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.”

[PROVERBS 23:23]

Instruction is crucial, associated as it is with wisdom and understanding. Knowledge is essential to success in life. Again, the Wise Man has noted:

“The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge,
but the mouths of fools feed on folly.”

[PROVERBS 15:14]

“An intelligent heart acquires knowledge,
and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

[PROVERBS 18:15]

Yet, after encouraging the acquisition of knowledge, I confess that innate knowledge, that knowledge conferred by the presence of God’s Spirit, is essential for a successful life. In our text, John speaks of innate certainty that is characteristic of all Christians. If you are a child of God, if you are one of the twice-born sons of the Living God, certain truths mark your life. John names three vital truths that do not require anyone to teach you, if you are a follower of the Christ. These truths are inherent in your twice-born status.

CHRISTIANS KNOW CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD — “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true.” The Apostle of Love states that we Christians know intuitively the reality of Jesus’ presence, just as we are assured that He is very God in human flesh. We Christians do not serve a figment of desperate and fevered imaginations—we know the Risen Son of God. We know this Risen Saviour in great measure because He has given us understanding. Saints of an earlier day rightly asked, “If God is dead, Who is this that I speak with each morning?”

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified in weakness and raised in strength from the dead, is the central reason for this letter which John wrote. John points out various false doctrines that were bruited about as Christian, correcting each by presenting the truth of Christ the Lord. Now, the Apostle of Love draws the letter to a conclusion by bringing readers back to the heart of the Gospel—Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

As he began the letter, John focused on “the Word of Life.” He emphasised how he and the other disciples had verified the reality of Jesus’ existence as a man through their own examination, the use of their senses. The disciples heard Him, they saw Him, they scrutinised Him and they touched Him. “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—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” [1 JOHN 1:1-3].

Earlier in this brief letter, John spoke of Jesus’ coming when he wrote, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already” [1 JOHN 4:1-3].

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Jesus Christ came in the flesh and He ascended into the Glory in the flesh. The disciples had gathered on a hill outside of Jerusalem. They had witnessed Him, observing that He was truly alive. Doctor Luke, writing a summary account of the labours of the Apostles following Jesus' Ascension, testified, "[Jesus] presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" [ACTS 1:3].

Two disciples were walking toward the village of Emmaus on the day the Master rose from the tomb. As they trudged along, they became aware of a stranger who matched their pace. The stranger asked what they were speaking about. They responded by pouring out a sad tale of woe concerning Jesus, whom they knew to have been crucified. The stranger began to rebuke them, pointing them to the Scriptures. They were so taken by the stranger's articulate mastery of the Scriptures that they invited him to join them for dinner. As they were seated, the stranger took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures'" [LUKE 24:31, 32]?

These two disciples left everything to hurry back the ten kilometers or so to Jerusalem so that they could find the other disciples and tell them what had happened. When they found the others, the disciples were reporting that, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon" [LUKE 24:34]!

Then, there were some truly amazing incidents that occurred following these initial appearances. Think about some of these. "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.'

"Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.'

"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" [JOHN 20:19-29].

Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, spoke of this Gospel as he wrote the Corinthian saints. He wrote, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8]. Jesus, the Son of God, rose from the dead and He appeared, "not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" [ACTS 10:41].

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There are many people who do not believe that Jesus conquered death and rose from the dead. Yet, over five hundred believers at one time saw Him after the Resurrection. If they were suffering from some sort of mass hallucination, wouldn't you think that at least one of them would question what they saw? Such a doubt would have been published far and wide by the enemies of Christ. The members of the Jewish Council, those men who hated Jesus with such intensity, would never remain silent if such knowledge were generally known. That is precisely what they attempted to do after Jesus came out of the tomb.

Their deceit is recounted at the close of Matthew's Gospel. There, we read, "Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men" [MATTHEW 28:1-4].

"While [the women] were going [to tell the others], behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep." And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So, they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day" [MATTHEW 28:11-15].

Great story! A group of disciples so frightened that they fled for their lives rather than stay with the Master [see MARK 14:50], one of whom, purported to be a leader of the group, quailed before a servant girl [see MARK 14:69-71] and all of whom were hiding behind locked doors [see JOHN 20:19], rushed a group of armed soldiers to defy the might of the empire in order to steal a body. If you believe that story... I can see the headlines now: ***Frightened Disciples Get Enough Courage to Fight an Army***. That is just what anyone would believe!

The Twelve and Paul suffered greatly because of their insistence that Jesus was alive. Doesn't it seem reasonable that if they made up this story that under the persecution experienced, at least one would recant his testimony? However, all were willing to die rather than deny that the Lord had risen from the dead. Their consistent testimony was that He was very God in flesh and that He was alive.

In his final missive to have been included in the canon of Scripture, the Apostle Paul wrote of how he had been deserted and forced to stand alone. He testified to Timothy, "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia... At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So, I was rescued from the lion's mouth" [2 TIMOTHY 4:10, 16, 17].

This was not the first time the Risen Master had stood by Paul. Of course, he had witnessed His glorious presence when he was set apart to God's service [see ACTS 9:1-7]. There had been that night when Paul had reason to question how he should respond after a vicious assault from the Jewish Council. Paul was rushed out of the presence of the Council by the Romans, because he was in danger of being "torn to pieces" [see ACTS 23:10]. Then, we read, "The following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome'" [ACTS 23:11]. The Lord stood by the Apostle. Oh, yes, the Lord Jesus was very real to Paul.

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You may recall another instance when Paul was facing intense opposition in Corinth. Paul had witnessed great power in his preaching—so great, that the Jewish leaders were vigorously pushing back against him and against his message. We get the idea that the Apostle may have been second-guessing his service in that wicked city, until God stepped in to set things straight. “The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” [ACTS 18:9-11]. Someone may argue that it was but a vision. I’ll gladly take a vision of the Saviour, so long as I’m fulfilling the ministry God assigned and so long as He stands with me. God is with His people—always! These are the promises of Scripture.

There is a point here that is not readily apparent in our English translations. When the text says, “the Son of God has come,” the verb is present tense. It is a strong statement affirming not only that the Son of God came, but that He is always present with us. As surely as Jesus stood by Paul on that dark night in Jerusalem, so the Son of God stands with you, even when you think you are alone. This is the promise that He gave to His own beloved people. Preparing to ascend into the heavens, the Lord charged those who would follow Him, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” To encourage His beloved people, He then gave a precious promise, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. This is fulfilment of the promise of the Living God, who named this One “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us” [see MATTHEW 1:23].

Perhaps you will recall Jesus’ promise to the disciples, and consequently a promise to us as we fulfil the ministry He gives us as an assembly. Jesus had just commanded His people, gathered as a congregation, to hold one another accountable to walk according to righteousness. He had just instructed His disciples that when they acted to discipline the wayward, their actions carried the imprimatur of Heaven. Authenticating His words concerning the authority of His people, Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” [MATTHEW 18:20].

One has to be thrilled to read the promise given concerning our service to the Lord. Jesus said, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also” [JOHN 12:26]. We watch to see where Jesus is working; then, as we move to that place where He works, we know that we are standing with the Risen Saviour. Our service is not mere busy work—this is divine labour carried out in the power and with the authority of the Risen Master.

In the High Priestly prayer Jesus offered immediately before His Passion, Jesus concluded by asking, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” [JOHN 17:24-26].

If you imagine that this request is solely for His people to finally be with Him in Heaven, you have missed what is written in the Word. Without question, we will see His unveiled glory at His return; but, we witness His glory in the church now! Writing the saints in Corinth, Paul testified, “If [the whole church prophesies], and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:24, 25].

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People of God, there is a glory that is not witnessed among the faithful nearly often enough! Listen to the Apostle. “If the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

“Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” Scope in on this final verse. It reveals what is happening even as we worship week-by-week. Paul’s words encourage us to see ourselves and what we do with fresh eyes! “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” [2 CORINTHIANS 3:7-18].

The Christian does not have to guess if he has placed faith in the right Person. John asserts “He has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true.” God has given us His Spirit, and the Spirit was given for our good and for God’s glory. Jesus testified, “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” [JOHN 14:26]. I do need One to teach me; but I also need One who will keep me in the path in which I should walk.

Therefore, Jesus promised, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” [JOHN 16:13, 14]. God’s Spirit, living in the child of God, guides the believer into all truth.

The Psalmist prayed,

“Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.”

[PSALM 25:5]

The presence of the Holy Spirit living in the twice-born child of God is the answer to the prayer that the Psalmist offered in this Psalm. God’s Spirit teaches the child of God all things, and He guides the one who follows the Master into all truth. Because the Spirit of God lives in us, and because He is teaching us and impelling us to speak the truth, those who are of God hear us. John writes, “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore, they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error” [1 JOHN 4:4-6].

CHRISTIANS KNOW THEY ARE SECURE IN CHRIST — “We know that ... we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” The child of God is secure in Christ. I understand that some are hesitant to make such an assertion; nevertheless, the Word of God goes to some lengths to assure the people of God. In our text, John is careful to assure us that “we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.” It is possible that one reading this could understand that John is saying that we are in God *and* in Jesus Christ His Son. However, the way in which the assertion is phrased and the statement that follows makes it obvious to me that John is asserting that we are in Christ the Lord.

That the child of God is in Christ cannot be questioned if we appeal to the Word of God. On one occasion, Jesus was challenged by the Jewish leaders; they demanded that He tell them once and for all whether He was the Christ. This was Jesus’ answer: “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” Then, asserting His full identity with the Father, Jesus testified, “I and the Father are one” [JOHN 10:25-30]. If He is not very God in human flesh, Jesus delivered what must be considered an incredible falsehood!

Jesus’ testimony fits with John’s assertion: “This one is the true God and eternal life” [NET BIBLE]. We know that “The Father has life in Himself” [JOHN 5:26a]. Likewise, we know that “In [the Word] was life” [JOHN 1:4a]. We are also assured of God’s testimony when John writes, “This is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” [1 JOHN 5:11, 12]. Jesus testified, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” [JOHN 11:25, 26]. Jesus also testified, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” [JOHN 14:6a]. “Life” is never predicated of the Father elsewhere in Scripture, though it is predicated of Jesus. Uniting what is written in the text with the prologue, it is best to understand that “This One” refers to Jesus. Of him, John wrote, “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” [1 JOHN 1:2].

Consider how essential it is that we be “in Christ” and what we have “in Christ.” *Salvation* is “in Christ” [2 TIMOTHY 2:10]. *Grace* is “in Christ” [2 TIMOTHY 2:1]. *Faith and love* are “in Christ” [2 TIMOTHY 1:13; 1 TIMOTHY 1:14]. *Life* is “in Christ” [2 TIMOTHY 1:1]. Christians have *riches in glory* “in Christ” [PHILIPPIANS 4:19]. Christians have *forgiveness* “in Christ” [EPHESIANS 4:32]. *God’s eternal purpose* for us is realized “in Christ” [EPHESIANS 3:11]. We who believe are *God’s workmanship* “in Christ” [EPHESIANS 2:10]. We Christians are now blessed with *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places* “in Christ” [EPHESIANS 1:3]. “In Christ,” the *blessing of Abraham* is secure [GALATIANS 3:14]. “In Christ,” we are *justified* [GALATIANS 2:16, 17]. We are *led in triumphal procession* “in Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 2:14]. “In Christ,” we who believe have *hope in this life and in the life to come* [1 CORINTHIANS 15:18, 19]. Christians have *wisdom, righteousness and sanctification* “in Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:30]. We Christians are *alive to God* “in Christ” [ROMANS 6:11]. We have *redemption* “in Christ” [ROMANS 3:24].

Dear saints, we are united with Christ, we are one with Him. This is the teaching of the Word. This was the testimony of your baptism: “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” [ROMANS 6:5].

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Listen to the affirmation of the Apostle: “He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:17].

Because we are one with Him, we have His mind. Recall the Apostle’s admonition found in the Letter to Philippian Christians. “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11].

CHRISTIANS KNOW THEY ARE TO HONOUR HIM — We know that [we are to] ... “keep [yourselves from idols.” This final statement may seem unnecessary; but, I am of the conviction that there are no superfluous admonitions in the Word of God. When God warns of some particular evil, we must take note of His warning; we are susceptible to idolatry.

At God’s direction, Moses made a serpent on a pole [see NUMBERS 21:8, 9]; it became a snare for all Israel as the people began to worship the snake on a stick [see 2 KINGS 18:4]. After defeating the Midianites, Gideon received the gold earrings and the crescent ornaments. With these, he made an ephod. Listen to the warning communicated through the Word of God. “Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family” [JUDGES 8:27]. Even God’s Temple proved to be a snare to Israel. Here is the warning God delivered through the Prophet Jeremiah. “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD’” [JEREMIAH 7:3, 4].

The heart is wicked; there is no limit to the depravity that contaminates the world. Followers of the Risen Son of God are susceptible to stumbling into gross sin if they fail to watch their heart. We are warned, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]. While we are to admonish one another, we must be careful not to be contaminated ourselves [see GALATIANS 6:1; JUDE 22, 23]. Even we who preach the Gospel of peace must be wary. Paul warned Timothy, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” [1 TIMOTHY 4:16].

I am not particularly concerned that Christians who listen to me will construct an idol of wood, of stone or of metal. I am concerned that all of us are susceptible to creating idols. Usually, our idols are good things that have supplanted love for the Master. *Pride* can lead us to depose Christ as Master over our lives. How many saints have ceased serving because their pride was wounded. Often, these wayward saints excuse their wicked actions by claiming concern for the fellowship, but they are actually angry that they were not given a place of honour, or because they were not acknowledged for their superior intellect, or because they felt they were not appreciated when they didn’t get their way. Watch out, or pride will be your downfall, as it has been the downfall of many of the people of God.

Pleasure often becomes an idol. How many professed saints of the Living God are committed to church—so long as it is not hunting season, so long as the fishing is slow, so long as snow sledding is not possible? A good movie showing on television? Church will always be there. A final instalment of the latest soap opera scheduled? Guess we'll have to miss church. Tragically, we can always find a reason to skip worship. We console ourselves that we work hard and we really need some time for ourselves. Are we not spiritual beings as well as physical beings? What is this other than idolatry?

Power and *position* can be an aphrodisiac. Anyone who doubts that statement need but tap into current news to see the subtle subversion of many good people (both male and female) who take advantage of their position to sexually abuse some who are under them. Churches are not immune to the erosion of character when people have begun to worship at the altar of power and position.

Property has too often become an idol for Christians. I vividly recall an incident that occurred in a mega-church Lynda and I visited on one occasion. I had arrived early for services and taken a seat. A few minutes before the service began, I felt someone tapping me on the shoulder. It was an elderly woman who informed me that I was in her seat. There were over 3500 seats in the auditorium, but I was in her seat. She informed me that she had sat in that seat for over sixty years and she couldn't worship if she was seated anywhere else. I commented, "Far be it from me to violate such hallowed history." With that, I moved to another seat. Though she would likely deny that she had stumbled into idolatry, it is difficult to view her demand as anything less than idolatry. Many of us are in a similar condition. We can't allow God to work because it would mean moving from old first church, which we love so dearly. Dear people, just as Israel was condemned for worshipping the Temple rather than the God who directed Solomon to build the Temple, so God's people today often fall into a trap of worshipping a building.

Preachers and even *preaching styles* can become idols for God's people. For this reason, Paul censured the Corinthians. "I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?"

"What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building" [1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9].

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols" [1 JOHN 5:21 CSV] is necessary instruction. Failure to heed what is written can only dishonour the Master whom we serve. Let each child of God examine himself or herself. Are we constructing idols in our heart? Are we dishonouring the Son of God through allowing ourselves to enshrine in our hearts some attitude, some person, some thing as more important than it should be? I want to ensure that Christ is central to each life. I long for God's holy people to rest secure in Him. I cannot make us secure, but I can encourage us to rest secure in Christ. I would urge each listener to flee from idolatry. May Christ be praised. Amen.