

THE ULTIMATE BATTLEGROUND **(1 John 5:18-21 June 6, 1999)**

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

Imagine a world where the government has carried out the plans that some including churches, are now urging on them. Drugs have not just been legalised, they are supplied free to those who request them. Within a few years everyone is on some form of hard drug. Society doesn't know what it is like to think clearly. No one knows what it is like to have a head free of acid and crack. Children are born, grow old and die high on drugs.

Then out of the blue, you are grabbed in a back alley. Someone shoots Naltrexone into you and for the first time in your life your head clears and you can think soberly.

You see this man with a grin from ear to ear. "Welcome to the land of the living," he says.

Over the next few days, you see this world for what it is. Men and women are destroying their lives with drugs *and they don't even care!* You go to your friends and family and beg them to give up. But they just look at you like you are crazy. Who would want to give up these drugs that make you feel so good?

You shake your head. How could I have been so blind? How could they be so blind? Why can't they see the truth?

Not a pretty picture to paint. But it actually reflects the truth of this world. In this world there are two and *only two* groups. Those who are born of God and those who are in the power of the devil. Those in the power of the devil are trapped. They live in a world where they cannot see the truth. But it seems a velvet cage. They quite enjoy it and don't realise that the path they are on leads to destruction.

And what separates these two groups is only the fact that God drew some out of the world and caused them to understand the truth about Christ, and sin, and life. Christians now know this world for what it really is.

The Apostle John understood this. He understood it only too well. You are either with Christ or against Him. There is no middle ground.

John wrote the book of 1 John to try and protect the churches of Asia Minor against deceivers who claimed to belong to God but denied the truth about Christ. Their teaching was poison. Not just dangerous – it was pure unadulterated poison.

John's point throughout this entire book has been the same. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And whoever does not believe that Jesus is the Christ is of the antichrist. There is no middle ground.

If you believe *most* of the truths about Christ, but not all of them – you are not saved. Worse than that. You might think you belong to God but in fact you belong to Satan. That is what makes this issue so vital. It is a matter of eternal life and eternal death.

John wrote to his beloved churches of Asia Minor, he wrote to us – and his plea is the same – cling to the faith delivered once for all to the saints. Never compromise. Never play with it.

Compromise on this point and you are of the devil and you don't want to be there.

As he ends this book, John wraps up all that he has said. These final four verses of 1 John are meant to be an encouragement. They are meant to remind you of the privilege you have as a child of God. But, they are also meant to be a warning. A warning that there is no place for compromise in any way on the fundamentals of the faith in the life of a child of God.

John begins with three unchanging facts about our life in Christ.

Look with me at 1 John 5:18 for the first fact:

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

The population of this world is divided into two camps. Those who belong to God and those who belong to Satan. And Satan cannot touch those who belong to God. They are outside of his reach.

The evil one cannot touch him. This truth is great comfort for every believer.

It is comfort because every one of us understands that if the battle came down to a bare-knuckle fight with Satan and our lusts on one side and our own ability to resist temptation on the other – we would lose every time.

But, we do not stand in the battle alone. Christ Himself stands shoulder to shoulder with us in the breach. It is Christ who covers us, protects us and strengthens us to ward off the devil.

This should be an incredible reassurance to us because we **know** the power of our own sin. We know that left to our own devices our sin would consume us.

The way an Eskimo kills a wolf is a lot like the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin.

First the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood.

Next, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait he licks it, tasting the fresh, frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare.

Feverishly now, harder and harder the wolf licks the blade in the Arctic night. So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf doesn't notice the razor sharp sting of the naked blade on his tongue nor does he recognise the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his own warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more -- until the dawn finds him dead in the snow!

That is us! Satan is the hunter. He panders to our lusts and feeds. We never recognise the danger until it is too late. Alone – we are incapable of standing against the Devil.

But we do not stand alone. Christ is with us. And because of this reason and for no other reason – we can stand against the world the flesh and the devil.

Unfortunately, the KJV does not bring this out. The middle part of this verse reads like this in the KJV:

He that is begotten of God keepeth himself.

This seems to indicate that the believer keeps Himself from sin and Satan. However, this is not John's point. His point is that Christ is the One who keeps us from sinning and protects us from Satan. The better translation is that of the NASB:

He who was born of God [that is Christ] keeps him [the believer].

Nowhere do we find that believers keep themselves from sin and Satan. Instead 1 Peter 1:5 tells us that believers are protected by the power of God, not by their own efforts.

John says that both Christ and believers are born of God, but he uses this same term in different ways and with a different tense to distinguish them.

We are born of God in that the Spirit of God causes us to be born again.

Jesus was born of God in that the Father caused Him to be born a man from the womb of Mary.

We were born of God in that we left the state of sin for the state of righteousness.

Christ was born of God in that he who knew no sin became man that he could become sin for us.

But the role of Christ did not end when he took our sins. Christ has the task of keeping us from sinning even now. How does He do this? How does Jesus aid us in this battle?

He sent His Spirit to encourage us, to strengthen us and to indwell us.

He gave us the armour of God

He gave gifted men to the church to guide her toward holiness.

He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father.

He has opened our eyes and freed us from the dominance of sin.

And it is because of this aid given by Christ that John can say that, “no one who is born of God sins.” We have no excuse to continue in the sin we were rescued from.

Don't mistake John here. He is not indicating perfectionism. He is not saying that the child of God will never sin after salvation. In fact in verse 16, we saw that John spoke of a brother who committed a sin that did not lead to death. Christians most certainly do sin.

John uses the present tense of the verb here in verse 18. It speaks of a **habit** rather than a single event. It looks at the tenor of one's life rather than any one single episode.

It is the habit, the custom of the child of God to be righteous. He desires to be godly. He hates his sin. When he does sin he is greatly grieved at the affront he has caused to a holy God. He mourns over his failures and strives to live like Christ.

When John says that, “no one who is born of God sins” – we might paraphrase his thought like this:

The child of God understands that Christ bled and died for his sins. The child of God knows that it was his sin that nailed Christ to the cross. Therefore, the child of God earnestly desires to live a holy, righteous life. The child of God will not wallow in sin without his soul groaning for the affront it is to the living Christ.

Is this you? Let me ask you this question. Which statement better summarises your heart's desire:

- a. You desire not to sin at all.
- b. You desire not to sin overly much.

For many of us, we enjoy a little bit of sin. We wash our conscience by telling ourselves that we are doing pretty well and anyway until glory we just have to accept the fact that we sin a little.

When we consider what Christ did for us – we should hate **all** sin. We should groan over every sin. We should never rest our fight against sin. The one born of God will desire not to sin and will not continue enjoying his habitual sin.

But we only have the resources to fight sin because Christ keeps us. And not only that, but because Christ keeps us, the evil one does not touch us.

Satan hates believers. We are the one thing that he does not have mastery of in this world. We are in Christ's hand and he cannot harm us. Oh he has his fiery darts and temptations. He wins a few minor skirmishes with us. But the war was lost on Calvary many years ago. He **cannot** have us. We are Christ's and nothing will alter that fact.

I love zoos. I remember once standing outside the cage where the monkeys were held and a boy was tempting the apes. He had some nuts he was waving just out of their reach. They screamed and pushed their arms out as far as they would go – but they just couldn't get there.

It is like that with Satan. He can tempt. He can twist. He can win a few minor victories. But we are hid in Christ who came to destroy the works of the Devil. No one can snatch us from Christ's hand. Try what he may, he will not possess us. And it drives him crazy.

And the determining factor as to whether Satan can touch us or not is whether we have accepted the truth about Christ. That is why John is so vehement in his insistence that we never compromise on this issue.

John then gives a second fact about our life in Christ. Verse 19:

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

Where would those in the world rather be – would they rather belong to God or would they rather lie in the power of the evil one?

If you stop the average man or woman and ask – would you rather belong to God or Satan? – most would say, “Oh I would rather be God's.”

But put the question another way. Ask them if they want their R-rated movies, their gambling and alcohol or if they want holiness, self-discipline and self-sacrifice.

To most of the world, the Christian life sounds like hell on earth. To them the equation sounds like this.

Sunday morning pagan style versus Christian style.

I can sleep in. Have a leisurely breakfast. Read the paper. Watch *Sportscene* and relax.

Or I could get up early. Get the kids ready. Rush to Sunday School. Drone a few hymns. Give my precious money. Doze through a sermon and all in all waste my day off!

They don't want Christ and the things of Christ. Sure they would choose heaven over hell, but only for selfish reasons not because they wanted Christ.

The truth is the world is very content to lie in the arms of the devil. He titillates them. He feeds their lusts. He tells them they are the most important thing in the world. He tells them there is no hurry, to just enjoy each day. He has them totally deceived.

The world isn't fighting to be free from Satan. The world does not want to give up its vices. Like an addict, it remains hooked.

Thomas Costain's book, *THE THREE EDWARDS*, tells of the life of Raynald III, a fourteenth-century duke in what is now Belgium.

Grossly overweight, Raynald was commonly called by his Latin nickname, Crassus, which means "fat."

After a violent quarrel, Raynald's younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the Nieuwkerk castle and promised him he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room.

This would not have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size, and none was locked or barred. The problem was Raynald's size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother, and each day he sent a variety of delicious foods. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew fatter. When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer: "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills."

That is the world. It chooses the temporary pleasures of this life over the eternal pleasure of Christ.

We were there. But God opened our eyes, and we were shocked! What we saw was this.

A world that hates the Creator. A world that loves sin. A world that will one day bear the fruit of its rebellion – and it doesn't seem to care.

The picture is this. Satan knew the right buttons to push to get Eve to respond. He still knows the right buttons today. And man in his fallen state is absolutely unable to resist. The whole world is listening to the siren song.

When they hear the truth, the gospel, they reject it. It doesn't sound as good as the lie. In fact no one would ever accept the truth if God did not batter down their defences and make them pay attention.

But once our eyes are opened, we are shocked to see the lie that the world has swallowed. We are shocked they can't see it. We are shocked that the world is heading to hell and no one seems to care.

But, this truth makes us ever more grateful that God called us, opened our eyes and protects us.

We are either of God or of Satan. And whether we have accepted the truth about Christ determines whose power we are in. This is not an issue we can flirt with in any way.

There is a third fact about our life in Christ. Verse 20:

And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

In Serbia, the people there do not know that their army has forced 1,000,000 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. They are ignorant of the atrocities Slobodan Milosevic has caused. They don't know why NATO has done what they have done. Why? Because their media only tells them what Milosevic wants them to know.

How can they know the truth about this war which has devastated their country? Only if Western journalists broadcast the truth to them.

We are like the Serbs. We were kept ignorant of the truth by our own sin and deception and by the lies of Satan.

So how did we come to know the truth about this world? We came to know it because someone from outside this world told us the truth. And more than that this truth-teller gave us a spiritual heart transplant so that we could accept the truth.

This is what Jesus did for us. He opened our eyes to the truth of this world. And when our eyes were opened, we knew three things about this world.

First, the Son of God has come.

Just think what this means. What the Bible teaches is that a child conceived out of wedlock and born around 4 BC to an impoverished teenage Jewess was indeed the creator of the heavens and the earth. Contained within that flesh and blood body was One who had the attributes of being omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

He lived a normal life for thirty years but then manifested miracles of extraordinary power. Despite being a good man and only helping others, the authorities of the day deemed Him a criminal and executed Him.

But God the Father raised Him from the dead as the firstfruits of all who have faith in the God-man. His death would enable those who trust Him to escape the fires of damnation.

This is the gospel. You can't test it in a laboratory. It makes little sense logically. It is totally out of step with our self-centred society. The world has a name for those who accept it as truth – fools. They snigger at the idiocy of Christians.

However, for those who have their eyes opened to the truth – it is not foolishness, it is the power of God unto salvation. It is life itself. It is more true than the rising of the sun. We **know** that the Son of God has come. We know that Jesus of Nazareth **is** the Son of God. All we are rests on this truth. Take it away and we are nothing.

The Gnostics told the church of John's day that it was sheer and utter foolishness to accept the fairytale of God becoming man.

The Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses tell us this same lie in a different wrapping today.

We hear the arguments of liberals who tell us in no uncertain terms that we are weak-minded fools to accept the validity of Scripture. It is all an allegory to explain to world we live in and comfort the hearts of the less sophisticated.

And John would say to us, "Beloved children, you have the word of God and the Spirit of God who will guide you into the truth of the word." And the truth is that Jesus, the Son of God **has** come!

There is a second fact the child of God knows – Jesus gave us understanding so that we may know Him who is true.

God cannot be discovered in a laboratory or observed in a telescope.

The distance between God and man is greater than that between man and a virus. Our minds could no more understand God than a virus could understand the theory of relativity.

Left to our own devices, man would live and die and **never** know God.

Some might surmise that there must be some type of Creator and Sustainer. But we could never have a relationship with Him.

But because Jesus came – we can know God, we can relate to Him.

Jesus gave us understanding. He told us about the Father. In Him we saw the Father. He sent the Spirit to open our minds. **Therefore** we can know Him who is true. We know the true God as opposed to the myriad of false gods the imaginations of men have dredged up.

And because Jesus has come and because we know Him who is true, there is a third fact the child of God knows – we are in Him who is true because we are in His Son Jesus Christ.

We know we are united with God and have fellowship with God. We know we have become children of God. And we enter into this privileged state only because our faith united us with Christ.

Every privilege we have in this life is built upon the foundation of our faith in Christ. If we fail to trust in the truth about Christ, if we fail to trust that the Son of God has come and given us understanding – then we are not united to God the Father. Instead we are in the power of the evil one. We are vulnerable to Satan.

That is why John adds this last line in verse 20. **This** is the true God and eternal life.

All throughout this epistle, John has been arguing against those who denied the deity of Christ. Now as he wraps up this epistle, he makes one of the clearest declarations in Scripture as to the nature of Jesus – He is the true God and eternal life.

The man who lived, walked and bled 2000 years ago is none other than God Himself. Accept this truth and enter into every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. Deny this truth and you stand alone – vulnerable to the evil one, in his power and without the aid of union with God.

This is the watershed of faith.

The truth about Christ is nothing to be trifled at. It is the foundation of everything you and I hold dear.

Then to close out this book, John makes one final impassioned plea. It is short but to the point.

Verse 21:

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Little children, beloved, precious ones – guard yourselves from idols!

We often think of idols as carved lumps of wood or stone. But, Scripture presents idols as anything that draws our heart away from the worship of the true God.

Think about Colossians 3:5-6:

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, **which amounts to idolatry**. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience.

Here Paul lists immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed as examples of idolatry. The sin of idolatry is broad. Idolatry is **anything** which draws our hearts and passions from God.

Anything which dulls our vision of the world to come. Anything which interferes with our longing for God.

In the context of this book, there is one specific area of idolatry that John has in mind here. It is the idolatry of worshipping a false Christ. The idolatry of replacing the truth about Christ with anything other than what is revealed in the Scriptures.

There is something very seductive about twisting the truth concerning Christ.

We make Him just a good teacher and our logic sleeps easier at night.

We deny His humanity and He fits our idea of God better.

We fashion Him in our own image and we like Him better.

Error has always found a fertile ground because we want to accept it.

But, God did not leave His church defenceless against these heresies. God gave us the truth in His word.

That is why in 1 John 4:1-6, John basically said, “Beloved children, you have the word of God and the Spirit of God who will guide you into the truth of the word.” Test every spirit by the divine measuring stick of the word.

We are surrounded by spirits of the age. Even within the church, we have men who claim to be prophets, denominations founded on new prophecy, liberals who deny the word and those who claim to be wise in the ways of this age.

They present these teachings and our heads spin. Our humanity wants to water down the truth about Christ.

We turn on our televisions and find out that the faith teachers now have ‘proof’ that what they teach is true. They deny the deity of Christ and say they can prove they are of God because fillings in teeth miraculously turn to gold. We look at these so called golden anointings and wonder – is that where truth lies.

We read of young Jehovah’s Witnesses willing to die instead of receive a blood transfusion. We think of such faith and wonder – maybe they have the truth.

We hear the arguments of science and the logic of denying the miraculous and we wonder – maybe they are right.

And John would say to us, “Beloved children, you have the word of God and the Spirit of God who will guide you into the truth of the word.” Test every spirit by this divine measuring stick of the word. Be Bereans! See if these teachings match the Scriptures!

To accept anything else is idolatry. Accept anything else and you will sacrifice every blessing we have in Christ.

We are in a spiritual battle. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul described this battle for the hearts of men:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Brothers and sisters, there is a battle going on for your hearts and minds. The Spirit of God within you calls you to the simplicity of the truth. But there is another call – the call of the spirit of error. It comes from Satan through the world and appeals to our flesh. It calls to our logic, our emotions, our desires. It calls to the part of us that desires to be in the world.

It comes in many forms. But every form has at its base spiritual error of one form or another. Spiritual error concerning the person and work of Christ.

Men and women are susceptible to error. Ever since Eve listened to the serpent we see a litany of Satanic deception. Many false prophets in many guises, with many messages have gone out into the world. And John says the only antidote is to test the spirits by the word.

The truth is that the gospel grates against men. Our eyes are blinded by the god of this age and it just doesn't gel.

But John would remind us that Christ **had** to become man to live and die for us. There is no other gospel. If Christ did not become man, there is no cross, no death in our place for our sins and thus, no salvation. As the God-man He is our sacrifice, Saviour, High Priest and mediator.

Christ becoming flesh is not shocking. It is magnificent. It is the greatest act of love imaginable. It is the heart of the gospel. And the Spirit of God loves to draw the hearts of men to this truth.

Alter this truth in any way and you do not have 90% truth – you have 100% error.

I want to read for you part of the *Nicene Creed*. This creed sums up what the saints of every age have always believed about Christ:

[I believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made;

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man, and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;

He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose again
according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;

And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead;

Whose kingdom shall have no end.

This is the truth about Christ. Satan is very happy for us to believe none of this, half of this, 90% of this – but never 100%. Satan knows that those who accept part of the Scriptural teaching about Christ are not saved. They are his.

So he delights to feed this lie. The liberals claim to have shaken off the superstitions of fundamentalist belief. Jesus was not God – just a good man from whom we can learn much.

The Mormons appeal to our pride by saying that we are little gods in the same way that Jesus is a little god.

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim Jesus to be none other than the archangel Michael, a created being.

These heresies appeal to us. Often the words sound the same. Christ died for us. His blood atones for us. We are saved by faith. But the Christ they teach is **not** the Christ of Scripture.

Satan would not mind a world full of religious people.

But, he minds very much when God plucks some of those heading to destruction – causes them to be born again, causes them to know the truth and unites them with Him. He detests those who trust in the old, old story that the saints have always clung to.

For these saints are beyond his reach. He cannot touch them.

And that is why the dividing line of faith alone in the Christ of the Scriptures has always been the watershed that battles have raged over. Christ proclaimed this truth. John wrote this whole epistle on this truth. Men and women have died to protect this truth.

And now this truth is in your hands. There is no inquisition in Australia that will kill you for holding to this truth. You won't be directly persecuted for this truth.

But, you will be pressured to let this truth slip. To compromise. To ignore it. To water it down.

Little children, guard yourselves from idols!

The stakes are still the same as they were 2,000 years ago. Move on this point. Compromise on who Christ is – and you are in the power of the evil one. Your destiny is hell. Your life is not hid in Christ.

Never move. Never compromise. Never budge an iota. Whatever it might cost – don't move.

For if you cling to the cross and the Christ of the cross, He will sustain you in the fight, He will protect you day and night, He will hide your life in Him and He will claim you on that final day.