

THROUGH THE BIBLE

1 JOHN 4:7-5:21

On August 7, 2007 San Francisco Giant's slugger, Barry Bonds, hit lifetime home run #756 - breaking the record formerly set by Braves' star, Hank Aaron.

The celebration lasted mere seconds.

Immediately a cry went out that questioned the legitimacy of Bonds achievement. Bonds was an alleged user of performance enhancing steroids.

Baseball enthusiasts called for a asterisk to be placed next to Bonds' name in the record book. They wanted to permanently identify the record as tainted.

The man who bought the actual baseball Bonds hit had the same idea. Mark Ecko branded the ball with an asterisk and donated it to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Today Ecko's ball is on display - but rather than immortalize Bond's achievement - it reminds visitors of just how suspect people view his accomplishments.

Sadly, this is how many Christians view their salvation - *with an asterisk*. They lack assurance.

They feel suspect. After all they've done, the harm they've caused, the sin of which their guilty - how can God save them? They come to church, and hang out with God's family, but they feel they carry an asterisk.

This is what John is writing to prevent. He saw firsthand the love of Jesus. He experienced His love.

John called himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

John knew the bountiful supply of grace and mercy found in Christ. And he wants us to be *confident Christians*. To know that we know that our sins have been forgiven and we belong to God and His family.

He doesn't want us living under an asterisk!

Tonight, we join John's thought in verse 7, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

Love is the believer's birthmark!

Let's say a mom has jet black wavy hair and when her baby comes she has jet black wavy hair - we all marvel, “There's no doubt as to that baby's mother.”

Or a dad has a long, lanky frame - his son's has the exact build. We say, “No question as to that boy's dad.”

When a child shares a parent's most distinguishable trait you can be confident they were born to that parent. They have that parent's nature and bloodline.

And this is true with us. God's most distinguishable trait is love. All true love “*is of God.*” Thus, you would expect those who are born of God to love as He loves.

It's love for one another that blots out the asterisk.

And certainly, the reverse is also true. “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Understand, here in verse 8 when John says, “*God is love,*” he's not reducing the concept of “*God*” to a mere emotion or force in the world. The Bible reveals God as a

person capable of exhibiting a full range of emotions - love but also anger - joy and grief - wrath and patience... Yet God's dominant emotion - that which lies closest to the surface - is love! It's said, "Love does not define God, but God defines love."

When you think it through, that "*God is love*" necessitates the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible teaches that God is one God, yet He exists in three distinct persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For love to exist it has to have an object. So for an eternal God to have always been characterized by love there had to have always been someone for Him to love.

Before time began and creation commenced - the members of the Godhead dwelt together in beautiful, harmonious love. Today, for reasons unknown to us, God has amazingly focused that love on you and me!

Verse 9, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us..." "*Manifested*" means "put on display."

Like a grocery store display that sits in the middle of the aisle to grab your attention, God has put His love for us on display... *But where can you see God's love?*

"That God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." Don't look for God's display of love in the middle of the aisle... look in a Bethlehem manger - look to a border town known as Nazareth - look on the shores of Lake Galilee - look in the Jerusalem streets or in Temple porticos. You can even find God's love on display on a hill called Calvary.

God's love for us, and the life He offers us - is on display in His Son, Jesus. God's plan points to Jesus!

God's **empathy** is seen in His coming as a man.

God's **wisdom** is revealed in His teachings.

God's **power** was on display in His miracles.

God's **mercy and grace** was visible in His dying.

God's **redemption** was unveiled in His resurrection.

Lost men shopping for life should look to Jesus - *He is love on display*. In Him you pull down life and love.

It's sad that so often, people talk about their great love for God. *The sacrifice they made - the gift they gave - the extremes to which they went...* Ah, hush!

Verse 10 tells us, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." CS Lewis once gave great advice, "On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him."

Our love for God is nothing compared to His love for us. It's a drop from a eyedropper. His love is an ocean!

It's been said, "Love always flows downward.

A parent's love for his kid is always far more powerful than the love of the kid for his parent. Likewise, who among men ever loved God with a thousandth of the love with which He has loved us?" This is love... God loved us enough to send His Son to die in our place.

I love you guys - I love you a bunch - but I don't love any of you enough to sacrifice one of my three sons.

If it were you or one of my boys I'd make sure you got a good funeral service - but I'm sorry, I could never sacrifice one of my sons. I would sooner lay down my own life for you, than offer up one of my sons.

There's an episode of "America's Funniest Home Videos" where a boy and his little sister are walking down the street. They come to a crack in the sidewalk. It's a long step, and the crack is a couple of feet deep.

The brother easily jumps over the crack, but the little girl begins to cry. She refuses to jump.

After several failed attempts to reason with her the little boy drops to his knees and stretches out over the gap in the sidewalk. The boy's body forms a human bridge over which his sister crawls across safely.

And this is the Gospel, the salvation God engineered for us. We stand at the edge of a chasm called sin, unable to cross over into God's acceptance.

Jesus is the human bridge over which we can crawl to safety. Through the work of Jesus we pass from death to life - darkness to light - bondage to freedom.

Verse 10 calls Jesus our "*propitiation.*" It means "*a place of mercy.*" *And it is for those who trust in Him!*

Verse 11, "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*" It's true, *God's love for us* is infinitely stronger than *our love for Him* - yet how can we be exposed to such love, without being lifted by it!

Remember the old hymn, “When nothing else could help, love lifted me.” Love has a lifting power.

A common theme in the old sci-fi films was the space ship traveling too close, and getting pulled into the orbit of a hostile planet. Well, God’s love has that same gravitational pull. It pulls us into His atmosphere of love. Once your heart is captured in the orbit of God’s love you’ll begin to extend that same love to others.

“No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” God is spirit. He is invisible to the physical eye. The closest this world comes to actually seeing God is by observing His love flow through our lives. You reveal God when you demonstrate His love.

I heard of a Salvation Army worker who met a bag lady on the street. She invited the destitute woman into the chapel to receive help. The woman ignored her invitation - until the volunteer did something unusual.

She said later she’d never done it before. But a divine impulse caused her to reach down and kiss the bag lady on the cheek. The woman began to sob. She came into the chapel, and that night received Christ.

Later the bag lady shared her testimony, “You told me that God loved me, but it wasn’t until you showed me that God loved me that I wanted to be saved.”

“By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” And remember Galatians 5:22, “the fruit of the Spirit is love...”

God’s love comes to us in three ways - *He speaks it to us... He does it for us... Then He puts it in us...*

He **speaks it** to us through His Word.

He **does it** for us on the cross.

He **puts it in** us by sending His Spirit to dwell in us.

The love of God is *proclaimed* in the Bible - it's *proven* on the cross – and it's *perfected* in our hearts.

The Greek word in verse 12 translated “*perfected*” means “*complete*.” The love of God comes full circle. God proclaims it, and proves it, but then it finds its ultimate destination when it fills our needy hearts.

As I said earlier, love always has an object – and today the object of God's love is you!

Verse 14, “**And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**” In other words, *you can't be wrong about Jesus, and be right with God.*

The true God abides only in the heart of the person who's embraced what the Bible teaches about Jesus.

“**And we have known and believed the love that God has for us.**” The love of God is not speculation. I'm not just hoping God loves me - I've *known* His love.

I'm certain. *And how do I know?* Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross and said, “**I love you this much!**”

We can be assured of God's love by trusting Jesus.

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” God teams up with the person who loves. If you want to dance with God, put on a love song! God is love - *He loves to love!* When you love others God sees to it His love flows through you.

“He who abides in love abides in God, and God in Him.” God partners with those who love.

Verse 17, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.”

Jesus was despised and rejected - unappreciated for who He was. And “*as He is, so are we in this world.*” Only when He returns will God’s kids be revealed.

This world is frightened by the thought of judgment, *but not the believer.* On the cross our sin has already been judged. The penalty has already been paid.

Believers in Jesus look forward to standing before God. The love of God has absolved all our fears.

We are assured of His forgiveness... We have confidence in His love... We know that we know Him because we want to obey Him, and walk in His love.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” Verse 18 is one of my favorite verses. It’s set me free from so much pain.

Here’s a little snippet of my testimony...

I grew up terrorized by fear. The kids on the school bus picked on me and called me names. I had big, floppy, elephant ears. Kids would flick them until they turned beet red. Eventually my parents paid for cosmetic surgery to have my ears pinned back - but I lived my elementary years with a deep-seated fear.

During those years I was an easy target. I let other kids pick on me. I lacked the courage to defend myself.

Finally, I decided the pain of being picked on was far worse than the pain I would feel if I got beat up, so I started fighting back. If anyone crossed me I'd do my best to punch them out. I went from coward to hothead.

But neither approach conquered my fears.

Realize, fighters aren't fearless people. In fact, fear is the primary reason most fighters fight.

Former heavyweight boxing champion, Floyd Patterson, once said, "I am a coward. My fighting has little to do with the fact, though. I mean you can be a fighter - and a winning fighter - and still be a coward."

That's what I became. A fighter in bondage to fear.

It wasn't until I embraced the love of Jesus that I overcame my fears. Perfect love vanquished my fear.

When you know that you know! When you're certain God loves you - *that He'll protect you, that He cares for you, that nothing can happen to you His love doesn't allow* - then and only then will you have nothing to fear!

When you can see your enemy as God sees him. *When you begin to love your enemy with God's love - then God's love for him will replace your fear of him.*

Only the love of God can drive out our fears.

There's no *fear of failure* when you're assured of *God's accepting love*... There's no *fear of people* when you're certain of *God's protecting love*... And there's no *fear of the unknown* when you've tasted of *God's everlasting love*... **“Perfect love casts out fear.”**

And verse 19, **“We love Him because He first loved us.”** The source of my love for God is His love for me.

Would your child love you if you didn't love your child? Of course not! And neither would you love God if He had not first loved you! Romans 2:4 drives home this point, **“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”**

I grew up on a kind of religion designed to scare you into repentance - hellfire and damnation. You'd come home from church and have to brush off the ashes.

The wrath and judgment of God may've temporarily kept us in check, but it did little to capture our hearts.

But when I discovered God's love for me, it drew me. God's love caused me to love Him in return.

Today, when I sense my passion for God growing cold I recall His love for me. It re-fuels my love for Him. This is why Jude tells us, **“keep yourself in the love of God.”** The key to loving God is letting God love you!

Verse 20, "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also." Again, the believer's birthmark is love.

Don't say you love God, if you cannot love a brother.

Chapter 5, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ (*"Christ"* means *"the Anointed of God," "the King of kings"*) is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him."

The greatest kindness you can give me is to be nice to my kids. Give one of my sons a job - or babysit for my daughter - and I feel like you've done me a favor.

And so it is with God. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God... You and I born of God spiritually. But Jesus is God's only physically begotten Son. The Spirit hovered over the womb of a virgin and God became a man.

Thus, to love God is to love His Son Jesus.

And the opposite is true. Deny or defame God's only begotten Son, and you reveal your hatred for God.

This is what you realize when you stand before the Dome of the Rock in the heart of Jerusalem. Across the eave of the building are the words, written in Arabic, "God does not beget and God is not begotten."

It's a direct denial of God's Son and His unique birth. It reveals Islam's root hatred for the Christian God.

Verse 2, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.” Again, how do we know our salvation is legitimate - *do we love God and do we obey Him?*

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” It’s funny, I can tell my son, Mack, to wash and wax my car - vacuum the interior - armor-all the tires and upholstery. And by his negative reaction, you’d think I had asked Mack to walk on the moon.

But let’s say he has a date, and he wants to use my car. I don’t have to ask. It’s amazing the time he puts into sprucing up my car. You’d think he was in the detailing business. *And what’s the difference?*

One word - “*love.*” This is why God’s commands are never burdensome. When you love God you’ll want to obey Him. Better yet, you’ll look for ways to please the person that you love. *What a difference love makes!*

Verse 4, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.” The world is applying outside pressure for us to conform and *give in to sin* - but God has planted His Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit mounts an inner resistance.

Thus, the key to being an overcomer is learning how to live from the inside out. Our strength is on the inside.

The life of God is growing in us - His peace, His joy, His power, His wisdom - is swelling up within us.

The Christian life is like a helium balloon. Fill a balloon with helium and it rises, despite the gravity that wants to keep it down. The life of the Spirit gives us such a

buoyancy - such a spiritual lift - that it not only helps us *undergo hardships*, but *overcome hardships*.

“**And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.**” What’s the key to inside out living? It’s *faith!*

Our trust in Jesus activates His life and power...

“**Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**” John writes, “*this is the victory...*” that overcomes the world... it’s by faith... but not just faith - faith in Jesus, God’s Son.

Its interesting, the Greek word translated “*victory*” in verse 4 is “*nike*,” which was also the name of the Greek goddess of victory. Apparently, she wore fancy sneakers, and a swoosh logo... Hey, whenever you see the Nike swoosh - *and you won’t have to look far, it’s all around* - let it remind you of our victory in Christ.

Literally we could read verse 4, “**And this is the *nike* that has overcome the world**” And if you’re thinking of the shoe manufacturer you might conclude “*just do it.*”

But the opposite attitude should be true of Christians.

God doesn’t want us to *just do it*. We’re told, “***This is the nike that has overcome the world - our faith.***”

Jesus did the work for us, and we should trust in Him. It’s our faith that unlocks His power in our lives.

Remember from our two previous weeks in 1 John, this letter was written to address the dangerous heresy of Gnosticism. Yet there were two types of Gnosticism.

Both named after the men who championed them...

First, was **Docetic Gnosticism**. It taught that Jesus was a ghost, a phantom. He had not really come in the flesh. His body was only an illusion - an apparition.

The other branch was **Cerinthian Gnosticism**. It taught that the Spirit of Christ came on the man, Jesus, at His baptism. But departed before He was crucified.

Here in a single verse John blasts both divisions...

Verse 6, **“This is He who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.”** The water refers to Jesus’ birth. Mary’s water broke. Jesus was born of a human birth. He was not a phantom. He was flesh and bone.

The blood refers to His death. The Savior of men, the Son of God, spilled literally blood upon the cross.

“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” Because verse 7 appears in just a couple of very late Greek manuscripts its authenticity has been questioned. Many of the newer translations leave it out. The King James translators chose to include the verse.

It is interesting that none of the early church fathers used this verse to defend the doctrine of the Trinity.

That's strange since it offers such a clear declaration of the doctrine. It's possible verse 7 wasn't available to the early church, and was added later - in the 14th or 15th century AD. *And thus, it shouldn't be in the Bible.*

Realize if that's true, it means the King James translators made a mistake - *not John, and not God.* The original writings are inerrant. God made sure that what was written was exactly what He had intended.

The question of verse 7 is one of *translation* not *inspiration*. Was it the work of an over-zealous scribe who got carried away? Or was it penned by John?

It was probably the scribe. But it doesn't teach anything not repeated in the rest of the Scripture...

The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one God.

“And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.” Jesus was born a man - of water. The Holy Spirit came upon Him as a dove at His baptism. And Jesus remained both God and man on the cross.

Thus, all three witnesses - the Spirit, the water, and the blood - His baptism, His birth, and His death - all agree on the dual-nature of Jesus. He's fully divine and fully human - He's 100-proof God, and 100-proof man.

Verse 9, **“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar,**

because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.” The Spirit, water, blood - testified of Jesus. This was God’s objective stamp of approval on Jesus.

But the fourth witness is the indwelling Holy Spirit. A true believer has an inner, subjective witness of Jesus.

Christians have the inner assurance Jesus is God.

Verse 11, “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” I’ve seen men kick back by the lake with a fishing pole in hand and declare to the world that “This is the life!” - *but is it?*

Years ago Starbuck’s Coffee ran an advertisement for a new gourmet tea. It read, “The wind in your hair, the sun in your face, and a straw in your mouth.”

As if their tea was the pinnacle of a life well lived. I thought, “*Wow, some folks are satisfied with so little.*”

If participating in a momentary pleasure, or a circumstantial thrill, or a temporary achievement causes you to say, “*This is the life!*” - then think again!

If all life is to you is scratching an itch - how sad!

Real life is being touched by the God who created you... Real life is brushing up against eternity. And knowing your life will count forever... “*He who has the Son has life.*” Real life is encountering Jesus Christ.

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” John wants us to know we have eternal life. He removes the asterisk. *“Continue to believe”* and you should rest assured.

Verse 14, *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him...”* and speaking of confidence, prayer is the one area in which God has given us great confidence...

“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.” If God hears our prayers we can be confident that He’ll answer them in His time and way. *So, the key to prayer is to make sure that our prayers get heard!...*

But doesn’t God hear all our prayers? The answer to that is *“yes”* and *“no.”* Sure God is omniscient. He sees all - knows all - hears all! But in another sense He doesn’t hear every prayer - *and we should be glad!*

Here’s a riddle for you, *“What do you get when you cross a termite with a praying mantas? An insect that says grace before he eats your house.”* You hope God doesn’t hear the prayer of that termite.

There are prayers I’ve prayed I’m glad God didn’t hear. After I prayed I wished I could take it back.

If you have kids you know when they’re little they whine a lot. They ask for everything, and when they don’t get it they ask again. When my kids were little, and would start to whine - I’d respond, *“I can’t hear you!”* I would refused to entertain their quibbling. *I’m glad God takes the same approach with adult whiners.*

God answers only the prayers He really hears – that make it past His ears and down into His heart.

This is why when we pray according to God's will, that's when we're certain our prayers will be answered.

“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.

There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.” The Bible is full of examples of sins that led directly to someone's death.

In **Leviticus 10**, priests, Nadab and Abihu, pollute the worship of God, and are struck dead on the spot.

In **Numbers 16** the ground swallowed up Korah and his rebels, for defying their God-appointed authority.

In **2 Samuel 6** Uzzah was struck down dead when he touched the sacred Ark with sinful hands.

And even in the NT there are sins leading to death.

In **Acts 5**, Ananias and Sapphira died when they pretended to be more spiritual than they really were.

They played the hypocrite, and lied to the Holy Spirit.

The sin that leads to death is not always the same sin - and a person who commits the same sin under a different set of circumstances may be spared.

Let's face it, if everybody who played the hypocrite and claimed to be more spiritual than they are, were struck dead we'd have a smaller crowd here tonight.

But there are *certain acts* that in *certain situations* prove to be such a blight on the Body of Christ that God sees fit to arrange an early exit for the perpetrator!

John's point is if you see a brother sin pray for him. If it's leading to death you'll know soon enough. If it's not, then your prayer might just be what turns him around.

Verse 18, "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." I hope you don't believe the devil lives in Hell - Hell is his hangout. Satan doesn't want to go Hell anymore than we do.

The book of Job teaches us that Satan is going "To and fro on the earth, and... walking back and forth on it." Apparently, the whole world is his turf. John put it, "*the whole world lies under the sway of (Satan).*"

At the moment the devil is alive and well on planet earth. He has been allowed a very broad latitude.

But there is one place the devil and his demons can't intrude without God's specific approval. That's a man who's been born of God! We're "the untouchables."

Remember, Satan couldn't harm a hair on Job's head until he had first received God's permission.

One year our High School football team went to play a game in Forsyth County. At the time Forsyth had a reputation for being a bigoted and prejudiced area.

That year we had a African-American running back who was upset about going to such a hostile place.

I'll never forget Coach Johnson calling Keith into his office. He said, "Keith, if anyone wants to lay a hand on you he's got to get through me first." Keith breathed a sigh of relief - then he added, "But Keith if he get past me - well, you're on your own!" At least he was honest.

But we don't have to worry about Satan getting through our Coach! I hope you've memorized 4:4, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

God is greater than Satan and all his hordes.

At times God may allow Satan to tempt us, or test us, but if so you can be sure it's for a good purpose.

Verse 20, "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true..." Throughout this book John has dropped reasons why Jesus came into the world...

In 3:5, "He was manifested to take away our sins..."

In 3:8, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." In 4:9, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."

And now here in 5:20 John tells us, *“the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him...”* Jesus came to reveal God to us.

God has revealed Himself to man in His written Word, the Bible - and in His living Word, Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us **God is love**... but Jesus touched a leper’s skin, and forgave a woman the crowd wanted to stone, and gave a dead daughter back to her dad.

The Scriptures speak of **God’s patience**... but Jesus forgives a broken Peter on the shores of Galilee and recommissions him even after the ultimate failure.

The OT spends page after page telling us about our God - but it’s not the same as seeing Him in action.

You could say, the Bible is the book. Jesus is the movie... The Bible tells us what God is like, but Jesus showed us. It’s *the declaration* and *the illustration*.

“And we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” Jesus was more than a man. He is the true God. He alone has eternal life. We need to fall at His feet and worship!

Today’s notion that it really doesn’t matter what you believe in, as long as you believe in something, is ludicrous. Our faith is only as good as its object.

To say it doesn’t matter what a man believes as long as he’s sincere, is like telling a doctor his diagnosis doesn’t really matter as long as he tries his best...

Or it’s like telling a pharmacist it doesn’t really matter if the prescription he fills is accurate, as long as he sincerely believes he’s trying to help his patient.

Take a chemist for example. He jots down a wrong formula. No big deal. Hey, the chemist was sincere.

Don't tell that to Jimmy Brown! You've heard of Jimmy! "Shed a tear for Jimmy Brown; poor Jimmy is no more. For what he thought was H₂O was H₂SO₄."

Ask Jimmy, a sincere effort doesn't make up for the wrong formula. H₂O is water. H₂SO₄ is sulphuric acid.

The wrong formula can be lethal. And the same is true in matters of faith. John is clear, there is one true God – Jesus Christ – and He alone has eternal life.

John ends his letter, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen." Don't think idolatry was an ancient problem, with no relevance to modern Americans.

We're just as vulnerable to idolatry as the pagan with the statue on his mantle. Anything we value in life more highly than Jesus has in essence become our idol.

St. Augustine's definition of idolatry as always been helpful to me. "Idolatry is worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshipped." Material possessions are tools to be used for God's glory - but when we forget they're a means to an ends, and treat them as ends in themselves we've made them an idol... *"Keep yourselves from idols."*