

“This is How We Know: The True God” (1 John Pt. 4)
(1 John 5:12-21)

• **A Surprising Ending**

- Connection Church Family, I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving! Whether it was busy or quiet, I hope you had time to just *be thankful* and praise God for all His gifts. We're here today to praise God for the greatest gift of His Son, and the eternal life we have through Him, and the living Word that points us to Him. *1 John* is all about those things. We could've spent half a year working through this book, but we've covered a lot in just 4 short weeks. As we finish today, we're looking at 1 John Ch. 5, mainly verses 12-21. *Before we dig in, let's pause and pray...*
- We're going to start with the *end*. Conclusions are important, right? What you leave people with makes a big impact. An iconic finish to a book, song, or movie can make or break a masterpiece. The *Braveheart* “Freedom!” finish. The mind-bending *6th Sense* plot twist where you find out Bruce Willis is a ghost. *The Breakfast Club* fist in the air (“*Don't you forget about me*”). *Indiana Jones* riding off in the sunset (*da-da-da-da, da-da-da!*) *The Avengers*, Tony Stark *snap*.
- So how do you end an epic message like *1 John*? The Apostle has taken us on a journey through some deep waters: the Word of life, God is Light, God is Love. How's he going to finish this? It's actually one of the most interesting and surprising conclusions in the Bible. Let's read the final section so you can see how it all lands: **“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” (5:18-20)** Awesome! Now are you ready for the big finish? **“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (5:21)**
- *The end, roll credits*. There's John's grand finale. That's what he wants to leave us with after *all he took us through*. It seems surprising, and kind of random, right? After all that, he throws this out there with no explanation, and it's over: *By the way...keep yourselves from idols*. This is the *only* time John mentions idols in all his writings! It must be important.

• **In the Beginning**

- To understand why John ends this way, you have to go back to how he started: **“That which was from the beginning...this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” (1 John 1:1)** That takes us back quite a long way, doesn't it? All the way back to: **“In the beginning...God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1)** God, the one true God, the only One worthy of all the worship, all the honor, all the glory, because *He's the Creator all*. And in his Gospel account, John looks at the beginning and adds: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” (John 1:1-4)**
- *Everything that has been made*. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Blessed Trinity, the author, source, sustainer and redeemer of all things. Think of all the good gifts: we just celebrated Thanksgiving so this should be fresh on our minds! *Everything you can imagine to possibly be grateful for has its source in Him—it was His idea, His creation!* Friendship, family, children, loved ones. The shining sun, the blue skies above, the moon and stars at night. Trees and forests, flowers and fields, oceans and rivers, mountains and valleys. Food, music, art. Laughter, lovemaking, storytelling, celebrating. All the colors you can think of, all the creatures of the earth, all the magnificent hidden places waiting to be discovered. The glory and the wonder of everything. *Life itself, yours and mine. In the beginning...God created.*
- That's how John opened this letter: **“That which was from the beginning...this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” (1 John 1:1-2)**

- Now, look at how it all fits together: after opening with the revelation of Christ, John took us through profound lessons on who God is and how we live in His truth. Then he moves toward the conclusion in Ch. 5 with this powerful summary statement: **“And this is the testimony: God has given 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. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (5:11-13)**
 - God did not create us *for death*. God created us *for life*. But we know that in the beginning, the first humans were deceived by the Evil One—that’s his main strategy, *deception*. Humans bought the lie that we could find the life we desired apart from the True God, by becoming our own gods. But instead of life, all it brought us was *death*. Since then, we’ve been trying to find life outside of God. Instead of worshiping the Creator, we’ve made idols of his creation—we worship the things made rather than the One who made them. And since He is the only source of life, turning away from Him leads to death. C.S. Lewis wrote: **“There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to him, and bad when it turns from him.”**
 - The Son of God stepped into our world to redeem us, to bring us back to the true God and true life. *He is life, eternal life is in Him*. To have Jesus is to have life, to reject Him is to reject life.
- So, why does John leave us with a warning about idols? *Because that’s the only thing that can ultimately keep us from enjoying life in God*. Think about what an idol is: an idol is anything other than God which we give *ultimate worth to*. The word “worship” comes from the Old English word, *worshship*. Idolatry is giving *ultimate worth* to something that is *not ultimately worthy*. N.T. Wright says, **“An idol is anything that, though not itself divine, invites worship and service as if it were. 1 John is all about wrong views of Jesus, which are ultimately wrong views of God, and about the behavior which follows from worshipping that which is not the true God.”** The Voice Bible translation drives it home: **“If we look carefully at our culture and into our own hearts, we will find that we are ultimately concerned about ourselves, our entertainment, our comforts, and our wallets. None of these are worthy of our highest devotion; but we put more time, energy, money and emotion into these than we do into the one true God. So, John’s warning should be heeded: watch out for the steady impulse to love other things more than God.”**
- **On Guard**
 - Once you see how it all fits together, you can really appreciate how hard the conclusion of 1 John hits: **“...we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little Children, keep yourselves from idols.” (5:20-21)** The only thing that can thwart His life in us is turning aside to false substitutes. *Jesus Christ, He is the true God and eternal life...therefore, keep yourselves from idols!* There is *the True God*, and there are counterfeits. There is *Ture Life*, and there is death. So, John warns us—as a wise guide, an eye-witness, a father in the faith—he warns us, *keep yourselves from idols*. The Greek word for “keep” here is a strong one: it has the connotation of being watchful and vigilant, standing guard—like shepherds guard their flocks or soldiers keep watch through the night.
 - If this is what John wants to leave us with, we need to ask ourselves a big question: **How are you keeping watch against the counterfeit gods that threaten your life with the true God?**
 - If a group of soldiers went on a mission through hostile territory, how watchful would they be? They would take shifts, standing through the watches of the night; they would be vigilant through the day with every step. Do you realize that you too are on a mission through Enemy occupied territory? John made that perfectly clear: *We are no longer under the power of the Evil One—but we live in a world that is under the power of the Evil One*. We should be on guard. The Enemy likes to come in the ways we least expect, when we’re not paying attention.
 - Look around this world, pay attention. Idol worship is alive and well. The gods worshipped in ancient Rome when John wrote represented the basic things we continue to worship: *power and pleasure*. Power as in *strength, dominance, security, wealth*. Pleasure as in *sex, beauty, food, alcohol, entertainment*. They aren’t evil in themselves—rightly understood, they’re gifts from God. They become idols when we make them *ultimate*.

- For anyone who watched the commercials during the Macy's Day parade or the football games, how often did you see the themes of power and pleasure? How often did you see them lifted up as *ultimate sources of purpose*?
- One way to tell if something is an idol versus just a gift to be enjoyed is to observe how people respond when you challenge or threaten that thing—watch how *you* respond. How does our culture tend to react when you question or threaten things like sexual expression, or security, or wealth? If you ask me, we most often respond like those things are gods rather than gifts—we go into fight mode. Because we don't just view these things as good gifts from a good God—rather, we view them as ultimate goods in themselves, on which our lives depend.
- *Dear children...be watchful, be on guard, be vigilant, beware, keep yourselves from idols.* Because Jesus is the true God and He is eternal life. The one who has Him, has life, the one who does not have Him, does not have life. *It's life and death out here.*
- What if this morning, as we enter another big holiday season, we take stock of our lives? We ask God to expose and dethrone any idols. We renew our watchfulness against anything that would try to sneak into our hearts and homes to distract us from *the one true God*, who is our ultimate good, who is our life. When you have to expose and tear down some idols, it may seem like you're losing something. But the truth is, when you throw down your idols and renounce the world and the Evil One, you are *gaining the only thing that really leads to the life you long for!* You're gaining God and His Kingdom. So, why not pray, and turn away from every falsehood and counterfeit, and turn wholly toward the True God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- *The one who has Him has life, the one who doesn't have Him, doesn't have life.* Let's pray.