



The Epistle of 1 John

“THE DANGER OF DIVINE SUBSTITUTES”

1 John 5:20-21

Theme: Outside of Jesus Christ, there is no other being to whom man can turn for eternal life.

I. The Identity of God – 5:20

A. THE ESSENTIAL UNITY OF THE GODHEAD

1. As we observed last time, John clearly wants us to know that it is the Lord Jesus Christ that makes the difference – our position of fellowship with God is only through the mediation of the Son of God – Jesus Christ.
2. John says: “... *we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.*”
3. To know Christ is to know God, the Father – cp. *John 10:30; 17:11, 21*
4. The essential unity of the Godhead is part of the doctrine known as the Trinity – a main theological truth of Christianity.
5. The Trinity is the teaching that we have one God existing in three distinguishable persons but are singular in essence.
6. The Athanasian Creed reads: “*We worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons, nor separating the substance.*” Cp. *Deuteronomy 6:4; 2 Corinthians 13:14*
7. Because there is only one God, to be in the Son of God – Christ Jesus – is to be in the Father.

B. THE EXCLUSIVE UNIQUENESS OF GOD

1. John says: “*This is the true God ...*” – that is, He is the exclusive divine reality – there is none beside Him – cp. *1 Corinthians 8:4-6*

The Epistle of 1 John

2. There is no room for man to create of god of his own choosing – cp. ***Isaiah 46:9***
3. The creation of other gods is a work of folly – cp. ***Jeremiah 10:1-11***
4. The fact of the matter is that only God is God!

II. **The Issue of the Gift** – **5:20**

A. THE ESSENCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

1. The thought of eternal life produces visions of an unending, conscious existence running on forever and ever.
2. However this is true, it is the least part of the meaning.
3. Eternal life refers more to the manner of living than to the term or duration; the character or nature of life than to the continuance – cp. ***Matthew 25:46***
4. So, what is this *“eternal life?”*
5. Certainly it goes beyond merely existing forever ...
 - a. It necessarily includes the abolition of death – our having passed from death to life – connoting that there is no more condemnation for sin – ***John 5:24***
 - b. It also clearly involves the endowment of a power or capacity to live in harmony with God – the conformity to the image of the Son of God – cp ***Romans 8:28***.

B. THE EXCLUSIVITY OF ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST

1. Eternal life is inextricably tied to the Person of Christ Jesus – *“This is the true God and eternal life.”*
2. Previously, this direct connection was provided us when were told that *“he who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”* – ***1 John 5:12***
3. The resurrection of Christ is here seen to be most significant.

The Epistle of 1 John

4. The importance of knowing that Jesus Christ is living, does not rest solely in the idea that He exists, but that He has life in Himself and the ability to impart life to those who come to Him by faith.
5. John began this epistle by talking about the Lord Jesus being the source of life to Whom he was attempting to lead us: *“and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us ...”- 1 John 1:2*
6. Hence, Jesus identified Himself as the sole means by which this quality of eternal life can be obtained – cp. *John 14:6*.

III. The Instruction for the Godly – *5:21*

A. THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN

1. In light of what he just stated, John comes back with a tender yet pointed admonition: *“Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”*
2. The construction of this imperative emphasizes the duty of every believer to exert personal effort to protect their hearts from chasing after false gods.
3. Every believer has the responsibility to refrain from attempting to recreate God in the form of man’s own devising.
4. What all false gods have in common, however widely differing in their nature, and their effects upon their devotees, is that *“they are all attempts to give actual form and substance, true and living embodiment and realizations, as it were, to their own conceptions of deity – those conceptions which otherwise are apt to be so indistinct, indefinite, misty, shadowy, as to be for the most part practically all but uninfluential.”¹*
5. It is our responsibility to allow God to reveal Himself as

¹ Candlish, p. 439.

The Epistle of 1 John

He has chosen through His Word and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ – cp. *John 1:14-18*

B. THE DEFINITION OF IDOLATRY

1. So, what is this idolatry from which we must guard ourselves?
2. Basically, whatever friendship or fellowship, system or society, work or way, habit or occupation that is of such a sort in itself, or has such influence over you, that you cannot be in it and at the same time be in God, as little children in a loving Father – that to you is idolatry – cp. *2 Corinthians 10:5*.
3. Idolatry is whatever receives your warmest affection or firmest embrace.