

Assurance of Salvation in 1 John

Introduction:

The thesis statement of the Gospel of John is found in John 20:28-31:

John 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

John 20:29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.

John 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

The Gospel of John climaxes with Christ's revelation of Himself as the risen Lord to Thomas, and Thomas's faithful surrender to Christ as Lord and God, a picture of the nature of saving faith, which includes surrender to Christ as God and Lord as well as faith in His cross and resurrection. This is part of what is involved in believing that Jesus is the Christ, and that in believing receiving life through Christ's name. John 20:31 sets forth a dual purpose to the Gospel; first, the reception of spiritual life at the moment of believing in the Lord Jesus, and, secondly, that through continuing growth in faith, through deeper believing, the Christian might grow in his measure of spiritual life (e. g., the present participle "believing" in "that believing ye might have life").

The purpose statement of 1 John is likewise found near the end of the book, namely, in 1 John 5:13:

1John 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

The Apostle John wrote 1 John to those who were believers, in order that they might "know" that they had eternal life—that is, in order that they might possess assurance of salvation. Furthermore, through their possession of assurance, their faith in Christ would grow deeper—as they "know that ye have eternal life," the result is deeper faith, "that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

1 John, then, is the book of assurance of salvation—of "knowing" that one has eternal life.

It is important to distinguish between eternal security and assurance. Eternal security refers to the believer's unchanging standing in the sight of God. All Christians, from the strongest to the weakest, are certain to enter the New Jerusalem. Their justification cannot be lost. This state, eternal security, does not depend upon the

believer's actions, feelings, thoughts, etc., but upon God's purposes and grace alone. Every born-again Christian has eternal security, whether he knows it or not, whether he feels saved or not.

Assurance, by contrast, as we will be discussing it in this sermon, refers to how the believer "knows" that he has eternal life. All believers are secure, but not all believers have assurance of salvation, and not all believers have assurance to the same degree. Believers who lack assurance can get it, and those who have it can lose it. Assurance refers not to the believer's standing before God, but to his knowledge of his standing. Personal assurance of salvation is not of the essence of saving faith, but it is of the well-being of saving faith—as we can see in 1 John 5:13, those who "know" that they have eternal life are thus able to believe more deeply in the Son of God, and we know from John 20:28-31 that deeper faith in the Son of God brings a greater measure of spiritual life. God wants believers to have assurance.

For the overwhelming majority of church history, 1 John has been viewed as describing tests of life—that is, identifying marks that all believers possess. These marks are more evident in some believers than in others, but they all are present in every true child of God. The Apostle John points out what these marks are, and states that those who have them can "know" that they have eternal life because only true believers can possess these marks, while no unbeliever can truly have them. This is the Biblical (and Baptist) view of 1 John, and, as we will shortly see, it is the only exegetically tenable view. Furthermore, this view is simply the exposition of what the Apostle John records Christ as teaching in his gospel, e. g.,: "As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:30-32). Christ told those who had believed on Him that continuance was the evidence that they were currently His disciples, that is, that they had passed from spiritual death to spiritual life and become His followers, and were now free by means of the truth instead of being in bondage. The John 15 abiding in the vine metaphor is similar;¹ those, like Judas, who do not abide are cast into hell fire and are burned, because perseverance / continuance / abiding is the evidence of genuine conversion. 1 John essentially develops this theme from John 8, John 15, and other places in Christ's teaching under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sent by the risen Christ in accordance with the decree of the Father.

However, there are two other views—very dangerous and very false views—that have in recent times crept into independent Baptist churches.

The first false view is that those who repeat the sinner's prayer or ask Jesus to come into their heart should have assurance of salvation because they did so. An example of this method of obtaining assurance is as follows:

Immediately after leading the lost person to repeat the "sinner's prayer" and ask Christ into his heart, the "soulwinner" is supposed to do the following, according to this

¹ See "A Study of *Meno*, 'to abide,' in the New Testament," Elec. acc. <http://faithsaves.net/abide/>.

instruction manual dedicated to Jack Hyles:

EXAMPLE: John, according to this verse (pointing to Revelation 3:20) where would you go if you were to die right now? (To heaven.) Why would you go to heaven? (Because Jesus came into my heart.) Well, John, how do you know that He came into your heart? (Because He said so right here.) In other words you are taking Christ at His promise today? You believe then that since you have opened your heart for Jesus, you are convinced that he has kept his promise and has come into your heart and saved you? (Yes.) Alright, John, tell me, who saved you? (Jesus did.) What did He save you from? (Sin and Hell.) That is right. And John, since Jesus has come into your heart today, what has He given you? (Eternal life.) That's right, eternal life. If it is eternal, how long will you have it? (Forever.)

John. suppose that someone tomorrow would ask you, John, are you a Christian? What would you say? (Yes.) Suppose they ask you when you became a Christian. What would you say? (Yesterday.) In other words you believe that right here today is the time at you have gotten it settled for men and eternity? (Yes.) You believe that today as been your day of salvation? (Yes.) John, this is what I would do if I were you I would take my Bible and write in the front cover today's date. Put down, June 19, 1969, at 3:40 P.M., in my living room. I would also write Revelation 3:20, the promise that you claimed today. And John. jot another verse down there, Hebrews 13:5, where Jesus says that He will never forsake nor leave us. If He came into your heart today, and He has promised never to leave you, then He is yours forever. If you are tempted to doubt your salvation later, you can come back to your Bible and open it to these two verses and stand on His precious promises.²

Assurance based on repeating the “sinner’s prayer” to ask Christ into one’s heart is also taught in the Campus Crusade for Christ / CRU “Four Spiritual Laws” evangelistic tract. After leading a lost person to ask Christ into his heart, it reads:

How to Know That Christ Is in Your Life

Did you receive Christ into your life? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said that He would come into your life and be your friend so you can know Him personally. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)

The idea that assurance comes by asking Jesus into one’s heart and remembering that one repeated the sinner’s prayer is grossly unscriptural and extremely dangerous.³ 1 John never, ever states or implies that one gets assurance of salvation by remembering that one repeated the sinner’s prayer to ask Christ into one’s heart. Nobody in the Bible ever asked Jesus to come into his heart at all, much less concluded that asking Christ in was the way to get assurance of salvation. Revelation 3:20 is ripped out of its context to support such an affirmation—the verse is not about Jesus knocking on the door of one’s

² Buddy Murphrey, *Drawing The Net*, (Corpus Christi, TX: Buddy Murphrey, 1969) 34-39.

³ See “Will I Be Saved If I Ask Jesus to Come into my Heart or Repeat the Sinner’s Prayer?” elec. acc. <http://faithsaves.net/sinners-prayer/>.

heart so that when one repeats the sinner's prayer He will come in, but about Christ being outside of the "door" of the church of the Laodiceans, and the way He would come into the church is by their repentance, not by their asking Him to come in. The verse does not even say Christ will come "into" anything, but He will come "in" "to" fellowship with the person who repents. Nor is Romans 10:9-13 a promise that the lost will be saved if they repeat the "sinner's prayer."⁴ Indeed, the "sinner's prayer" method of evangelism and assurance is absent from the overwhelming majority of church history.⁵ Literally millions of people have been deluded by the lie that assurance comes from remembering that one repeated the sinner's prayer. This view of assurance will not receive further interaction in this sermon, since it really is just pulled out of thin air and has no exegetical support whatever.

The **second false view** is that assurance of salvation has nothing to do with one's life, and there are no marks that distinguish genuine believers from the unregenerate. 1 John allegedly only distinguishes a subcategory of Christians who are "abiding" and have entered into the Higher Life from the larger mass of Christians living on the lower plane who do not have the marks of 1 John. This view was popularized by Zane Hodges, who taught at Dallas Theological Seminary for many years and is a leading advocate of the anti-Lordship salvation (so-called) "free grace" movement. Hodges wrote a book called *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love*, in which he tried to overturn the Christian consensus that 1 John presents marks of spiritual life, affirming, instead, that only Christians on the higher plane have the marks of 1 John. Hodges' view of 1 John did not exist in print for approximately 95% of church history; it is not the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3); it only came into existence in about the middle to later middle portion of the twentieth century, and it only began to infect independent Baptist churches in around the 1970s. It is worth noting that Hodges, almost certainly an unregenerate false teacher who is in hell today unless he repented of his false gospel and other heresies before he died—something for which we have no evidence—went even further off the deep end, coming to teach heresies such as:⁶

1. Zane Hodges teaches that a multitude of people will not inherit the kingdom of God, even though they have been washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).⁷

2. Zane Hodges teaches that a large portion of the saved people will be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁸

⁴ See "An Exegesis and Application of Romans 10:9-14 for Soulwinning Churches and Christians," elec. acc. <http://faithsaves.net/romans-10-sinners-prayer/>.

⁵ See Paul Chitwood, *The Sinners Prayer: A Historical and Theological Analysis* (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), elec. acc. <http://faithsaves.net/the-sinners-prayer/>.

⁶ See "The Unusual and Troubling Teachings of Zane Hodges," elec. acc. <http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/doctrine/hodgesho.htm>, for the points below.

⁷ See Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Seige*, Chapter 9, "Who are the Heirs?" Note: I have also had this view advocated by James Hollandsworth, a former professor at the Independent Baptist school Baptist College of Ministry.

⁸ See Zane Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, Chapter 9, "The Darkness Outside," and see also Chapter 8.

3. Hebrews 12:6-8 says, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” This text is very clear. God loves everyone of His sons and He chastens every single one of them. But Hodges teaches that there are multitudes of saved people who are bastards or illegitimate and who are not chastened by the Father (even though they are saved people).⁹

4. Hodges teaches that true Christians (those who are really saved) can be described as “children of the devil.” Hodges says, “The question might be raised whether a truly regenerate person could ever be called a ‘child of the devil.’ . . . [T]he answer must be Yes.”¹⁰

5. Hodges teaches that the antichrists mentioned in 1 John 2:18-19, 22-23 could very well be saved people!¹¹

6. The Bible speaks of some unconverted persons in the following terms: “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16). Hodges says that this is a description of “redeemed and justified people.”¹² Of course, professing to know God is not necessarily the same as knowing God (see Matthew 7:21-23).

7. Hodges has no problem saying that a person who totally abandons the Christian faith can be saved. He gives the following illustration:

I have a friend, and more than a friend, a man who labored with me side by side in the ministry of God’s Word in the little group that has become _____ Bible chapel and this friend has fallen away from the Christian faith. He graduated from Bob Jones University and from Dallas Theological Seminary. And about the time when he and his wife left Dallas his wife contracted a very serious illness which over the years got progressively worse until she was reduced to being a complete invalid, and after the death of his wife I visited my friend (who now lives in the Midwest and who teaches Ancient History in a secular university). And as we sat in the living room together, face to face, he told me very frankly but graciously THAT HE NO LONGER CLAIMED TO BE A CHRISTIAN AT ALL, THAT HE NO LONGER BELIEVED THE THINGS THAT HE ONCE PREACHED AND TAUGHT, and the situation was even worse than he described because I heard through others that in the classroom on the university campus he often mocked and ridiculed the Christian faith. As I sat in that living room I was very painfully

⁹ Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985) 810.

¹⁰ Zane Clark Hodges, *The Epistle of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999) 145.

¹¹ Zane Clark Hodges, *The Epistle of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999) 108ff.

¹² Zane Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, pgs. 68-69.

aware that it was impossible for me to talk that man into changing his mind.¹³

Hodges insists that this man is truly saved, and that although he lost his faith, Christ did not lose him. However, it is very obvious that this man believed only for a while, had no root, and when trials came (the illness and death of his wife), he fell away (Luke 8:13). *Hodges explanation for this is that the stony ground, the thorny ground and the good ground (in Christ's parable of the sower) all represent saved individuals!*¹⁴ The fact that Hodges' friend attended a fundamental college and Dallas Seminary, and seemed to be a believer, does not prove anything. Judas fooled everyone except the Lord, and even on the night of the betrayal his fellow disciples did not know that he was the traitor. Did not the Lord Jesus teach us that the tares would be difficult to distinguish from the wheat? Does not Satan have his “ministers of righteousness” who can easily appear to be genuine ministers of God (2 Corinthians 11:15)? Since Hodges’ friend did not hold fast or “keep in memory” (1 Corinthians 15:2) the gospel, his faith was in vain (1 Cor. 15:1-2)—he was never truly born again.

8. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 9). Hodges teaches that this is a description of a saved person!¹⁵ Hodges seems to teach that if anyone professes Christ, then they must possess Christ. But here is a case where a person does not even possess God (“hath not God”) and yet Hodges still insists that the person is saved!

9. “Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 10-11). Verse 10 is a description of wicked Diotrephes—but Hodges says he was a saved man! Hodges insists that a true believer may do evil continually and may be described as one who “hath not God.” Apparently, all you need to do to convince Hodges that you are saved is to be in a church and claim to be a believer, regardless how you act and regardless how you live! But the Lord Jesus Christ said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

10. Hodges teaches a “cross-less” gospel. That is, he teaches that it is not necessary for a sinner to believe that Christ died for his sins and rose again in order to be saved. The only thing a sinner needs to believe is that Christ guarantees eternal life to whoever believes (John 6:47). A knowledge of who Christ is and what He accomplished on the cross is not necessary.¹⁶ This teaching is serious and cuts to the very heart of the gospel

¹³ Hodges’ illustration was given in a tape series which he delivered while speaking at the Church of the Open Door which at the time was pastored by G. Michael Cocoris. The series of tapes is entitled, “Great Themes in the Book of Hebrews” (available through Redencion Viva Publishers).

¹⁴ See Zane Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*.

¹⁵ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 891.

¹⁶ See Zane Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message” (*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn, 2000) 3-12.

(1 Corinthians 15:3-4). There are those even within the anti-Lordship or so-called “free grace” group who are very concerned about Hodges’ teaching on the gospel (and concerned about the similar teachings of Bob Wilkin as well). John 6:47 is a wonderful salvation promise, but is it really the full gospel? Is faith in the work Christ accomplished on the cross a necessary part of the content of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4)? Is faith in the resurrection essential (Romans 10:9-10)? Hodges insists that it is not necessary for a sinner to believe in Christ’s death for our sins and in His resurrection in order to be saved, nor does he even believe it is necessary to believe that Jesus is the Son of God!

Hodges’ view of 1 John infected the independent Baptist movement through Bible colleges and other organizations opposed to the Biblical and classic Baptist doctrine of repentance and Lordship in connection with the receipt of the gospel, influenced by Keswick and Higher Life theology, and other serious errors. For example, John Van Gelderen, on the *Revival Focus* blog, writes:

Many use 1 John to deal with evidences of salvation. But this can get very confusing, because unsaved moralists can pass many of the tests from an external standpoint. Is salvation really the issue in 1 John?

My understanding is that the purpose of 1 John is fellowship and fullness of joy (1:3-4). . . . But if you primarily emphasize assurance by evidences, then you are (perhaps unwittingly) making assurance by works. This is not very “sure” because we don’t always live right. Since justification is by grace through faith and sanctification is by grace through faith, how can assurance be by works? Two keys help to have a right perspective.

First, the word often translated “abide” changes the focus of the “evidences.” It occurs over 20 times in chapters 2-4. . . . The “evidences” of 1 John are actually evidences of abiding, not salvation.¹⁷

This view that 1 John does not give evidences of salvation, but only of “abiding,” which allegedly is characteristic of only some believers, is very strongly taught at Baptist College of Ministry. It is also taught by at least some at Ambassador Baptist College, promoted by men such as Rick Flanders,¹⁸ etc. Sadly, some sincere and godly men have been caught up in promoting Zane Hodges’ heretical view of 1 John, and are now promoting Hodges’ lie in independent Baptist churches.

So, how do we know what the truth is? First, we will survey what 1 John teaches about assurance, and then we will rebut the arguments made by Hodges and the Independent Baptists who follow him that the marks in 1 John pertain only to a portion of believers.

Overview of 1 John

¹⁷ John Van Geldren, “Fruits and Assurance,” elec. acc. <https://revivalfocus.org/q2-fruits-and-assurance/>.

¹⁸ Rick Flanders, “Ought,” elec. acc. <http://drickflanders.com/2013/10/ought/>.

1 John goes through three cycles, explaining that assurance comes from the Christian passing the tests of continuing righteousness, continuing love, and continuing belief. Each cycle elaborates upon this same theme. Some professing false converts had separated themselves from the church to which 1 John was written, adopting a sort of proto-Gnosticism. This proto-Gnosticism affirmed that the material world was inherently evil, and, consequently, that Christ had not truly united humanity to His divine Person in the incarnation—those who adopted this proto-Gnosticism were not continuing in true belief, and in this manner they were evidencing that they were unregenerate. Similarly, if the material is inherently evil and is separated from the spiritual, immaterial world that is good, one can do all sorts of evil with one's body and it did not matter, since the Gnostic thought his spirit was undefiled by such things. So sexual immorality and other sins were OK. In contrast to this, the Apostle John set forth the test of continuing righteousness as a mark of true salvation. Finally, those that had separated from the church to adopt the proto-Gnostic heresy did not manifest love for the believers, rejecting them, and rejecting any need to minister to their needs. In contrast to this, the Apostle John set forth genuine love for the brethren as a mark of the regenerate. Those who manifest true righteousness, love, and continuing true belief should be assured of salvation, the Apostle taught, because only those who are born again can manifest these evidences of the new nature, while those who do not have these marks should not be assured of salvation because they do not have salvation.

After the prologue in 1:1-4, the first cycle is 1:5-2:28, where the Christian life is manifested as fellowship with God, conditioned and tested by walking in the light. In 1:6-2:6, walking in the light is tested by one's attitude to sin and righteousness. In 2:7-17, walking in the light is manifested by loving one's brother and not loving the world. In 2:18-28, walking in the light is manifested by continuing belief of true doctrine.

The second cycle in 1 John is 2:29-4:6, where the Apostle John indicates that the Christian life, as one of Divine Sonship, is approved by these same three tests of righteousness, love, and true belief. In 2:29-3:10a he indicates that Divine sonship is tested by righteousness. In 3:10b-24a, Divine sonship is tested by love. In 3:24c-4:6 Divine sonship is tested by belief.

Finally, the third cycle in 1 John is 4:7-5:21, providing a closer correlation of righteousness, love, and belief. 4:7-5:3a expands more on love; 5:3b-21 expands more on belief, with the relationship of righteousness to the Christian and to both love and belief being likewise interwoven within this section.

As this message is a survey, we do not have time to complete a verse-by-verse exposition of the entire book of 1 John. We will, however, examine a number of texts where it is evident that the following description by one commentator on 1 John is seen to be the truth:

As we have seen, Life, according to the Johannine conception, is the essence or animating principle that underlies the whole phenomena of conscious Christian experience, and cannot itself be the object of direct consciousness. Its possession is a matter of inference, its presence certified only by its appropriate effects. . . .

[I]t may be tested generically, by its properties, as the kind of tree is known by the kind of its fruit. The Epistle adopts exclusively the latter method. It bids its readers try themselves, not as to the fulness and fruitfulness of their spiritual life, but as to their exhibiting those qualities which belong essentially to the Life of God. [Note that important distinction—these qualities do not distinguish fulness of life from lesser life, but the essential qualities of life from lack of life.] God is righteous, therefore whosoever has the Divine Life in him doeth righteousness. God is Love, therefore His life in men exhibits itself in love. God is conscious of Himself in His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, therefore His life is manifested in men by their Belief,—their perception of the Divine in Jesus.

But God is not only Life, He is Light; and fellowship with Him is not only essential participation in the Divine Life; it is also conscious and ethical—“walking in the Light, as He is in the Light” (1:7). It is this thought of “walking in the Light” that governs the first Cycle of the Epistle as a whole.¹⁹

It is very, very clear that 1 John distinguishes those who have life from those who do not by explaining qualities essential to life itself, rather than distinguishing characteristics that divide abiding believers from allegedly non-abiding believers. Consider the following texts:

1John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

1John 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, **is a liar, and the truth is not in him.**

1John 2:3 καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν.

1John 2:4 ὁ λέγων, Ἐγνώκα αὐτόν, καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, **ψεύστης ἐστί, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν.**

Note that in 1 John 2:4, “the truth is not in him” is the phraseology of John 8:44:

John 8:44 Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because **there is no truth in him.** When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for **he is a liar,** and the father of it.

John 8:44 ὑμεῖς ἐκ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστέ, καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν. ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐχ ἔστηκεν, ὅτι **οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ.** ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐκ τῶν ιδίων λαλεῖ· ὅτι **ψεύστης ἐστί** καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ.

¹⁹ Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909), 208–209.

The one who says that he knows God but does not keep His commandments is not just failing to live the Higher Life. He hasn't just failed to discover the spiritual secret taught in Keswick theology. He is a child of the devil, not a child of God.

1John 2:9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

Note that the one who hates his brother is not a Christian who is not obedient enough, someone who has come into the light and then gone back into some degree of darkness. On the contrary, the one who hates his brother has never come out of spiritual darkness, but whatever he says, he really has always been and continues to be in darkness.

1John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

The one who apostatizes and separates from Christianity did not pass from being “of us” to being “not of us,” but simply “made manifest” that he never was of them. “Continued” is the pluperfect of *meno*, to abide; the verb tense indicates that those who are true believers will abide/continue/persevere (same idea) while these, because they did not do so, are not true believers. All believers abide in Christ, according to the Apostle John, something we will see further as we continue on.

1John 2:22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

1John 2:23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: *(but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*

Here those who do not persevere in true belief are antichrists who do not have the Son or the Father, set in contrast to those who persevere in true belief and who have the Father and the Son. Note the “who is a liar” phrase ties back into 1 John 2:4 where the one who does not keep Christ's commandments is a liar. The tests of perseverance in righteous actions and in right belief are related, and if one wants to say that a true Christian can fail to keep Christ's commandments, then he can also be an antichrist who does not have the Son or the Father.

Zane Hodges recognizes the connection, and he goes ahead and is consistent with his anti-Lordship position by stating that one can be an antichrist and still be saved! Commenting on this passage, he wrote: “Such a statement is often taken to mean that the antichrists were unsaved . . . it is hazardous to press the language used here too far . . . the person in question [could either be] unregenerate or a believer who had ‘departed’ from

the faith.”²⁰ (Note, of course, that in the book of Revelation the Antichrist goes to the lake of fire—he is not just someone who is backslidden but goes to heaven!)

1John 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

Note that in this text possession of the Holy Spirit—the “anointing” that all the children of God have—guarantees that “ye shall abide in him.” 1 John 2:27 refers back to Christ’s teaching in John 14:26, where the Holy Spirit teaches believers all things and preserves them: “But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” Note in 1 John 2:27 that abiding is a promise to the born again. The text does not say “ye may abide in him if you continue to meet the requirements of the Higher Life.” It says “ye **SHALL** abide in him,” a promise. It does not promise that all believers will abide to the same degree, but it does promise that all believers will abide. This text rips the heart out of the false view that 1 John distinguishes abiding believers from supposedly non-abiding believers. (It should be noted that the fact that the verse following commands believers to abide does not mean that it is possible that they will not, anymore than a command not to reject Christ and follow antichrists means that true believers may do that. The new birth and the power of the Holy Spirit have changed the “chooser” in believers so that they will freely choose to persevere/abide. In this way we can consistently interpret both 2:27 and 2:28 rather than ignoring the promise of 2:27 in order to read into 2:28 the statement that only some believers will abide when that is not in there.)

1John 2:29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

1John 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

1John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

1John 3:3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Who are the born again? Those who do righteousness. Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him. IFB advocates of the Zane Hodges heretical view of 1 John claim that unsaved people can do genuine righteousness, but the Apostle John says exactly the opposite. An unsaved person can have a kind of morality, but no unsaved person can practice a God-kind of righteousness. That is what God’s Word says, and we should believe the plain statements of God’s Word instead of the made-up nonsense that explicitly contradicts God’s Word in order to get out of the plain teaching of 1 John.

Note also that all believers, not an elite minority, are the sons of God; all true

²⁰ Zane Clark Hodges, *The Epistle of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 113-114.

believers, not an elite minority, will be like Christ when He appears; and all true believers, not an elite minority, purify themselves, striving towards the goal of being pure like Christ is pure.

1John 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

1John 3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

1John 3:7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

1John 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

1John 3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

1John 3:10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

Frequently in 1 John the Greek present tense verbs specify continuing or ongoing action, referring to the habit of life of the person in question. In this passage John promises that those who are united to Christ do not continue in sin. Those who do righteousness, v. 7, are the ones who are judicially righteous by the imputed righteousness of Christ, and thus are righteous even as Christ is righteous. All believers have the imputed righteousness of Christ, and all believers do righteousness. People considering the Zane Hodges position need to hear the warning: "Let no man deceive you." The true children of God and the children of the devil are manifested by doing righteousness and loving the brethren, or lack thereof, v. 10.

Hodgeites attempt to get out of this fact by claiming that 1 John 3:6 specifies that the elite group of abiding Christians have ceased from sinning. However, that verse speaks of all believers, for those who do not abide have never seen or known Christ. Greek perfect tense verbs are used, indicating that those who do not abide have never experienced the point action of the new birth with its continuing results in seeing and knowing Christ. The "sinneth not," like many other present tenses in 1 John, do not specify literal sinlessness, for then John would contradict what he had said in 1:8-10, that true believers admit their sin and characteristically confess their sins. All it means is that those who are born again, and therefore abide, do not characteristically sin.

Hodgeites also claim that 1 John 3:9, "cannot sin," refers to a portion of the believer that is regenerate. Supposedly the new birth does not change the entire person, but only his spirit; he gets a sinless regenerate spirit, while the rest of him is unchanged. That 1/3 of the person that is regenerate cannot sin, while the rest of the person can sin, and as one slips in and out of the Higher Life one moves between control by the sinless spirit and control by the sinful flesh. However, that simply is not at all what 1 John 3:9 teaches. The verse actually promises that true believers cannot continually sin. First, the verse speaks of all who are born of God: "Whosoever" is born of God are the ones who cannot

sin, not only some of them. Second, all who are born of God have the Divine seed in them—they have the new nature and the new life from the Father. This is true for all believers. The “cannot sin” clause simply means “cannot continue in sin” or “cannot continually sin,” like so many other present tenses in John. The verse is true for all who are “born of God,” not an elite minority. Furthermore, the verse says nothing about a sinless spirit that alone is allegedly born again. On the contrary, the verse says “whosoever” is born of God, “he” cannot sin, and “he” is born of God. The verse refers to the entire person, not just 1/3 of him, the spirit. It did not say “the spirit that is born of God is sinless, while the rest of the person is unchanged by the new birth,” but the entire person—“whosoever is born of God”—“he”—the person—cannot continually sin, because the new nature is powerful and the work of God in the saint is effectual! (Furthermore, the false view of 3:9 simply cannot explain 3:10).

The true view of 3:9-10 also explains:

1John 5:18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

It is the person, “whosoever,” that is born of God who “sinneth not,” that is, who does not continually sin. It is “himself” who does not continually sin, not only 1/3 of the person, his spirit.

Note that Zane Hodges sees what the 1 John 3 passage requires, and in his commentary on this passage actually says that some saved people are children of the devil!:

*The same principle applies to **the children of the devil**. There is no good reason to take this phrase as a reference to unsaved people generally. . . . It does not designate a person as unregenerate . . . [t]he question might be raised whether a truly regenerate person could, in the sense we are discussing, ever be called a “child of the devil” . . . the answer must be Yes.²¹*

Zane Hodges says that some saved people are children of the devil. Rather, he is a child of the devil and his false gospel leads many others to not become children of God but remain children of the devil.

1John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

1John 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Love for the brethren does not distinguish those who have the Higher Life from those who do not. It distinguishes those who have passed from death to life from those who abide in death. The Apostle alludes to Christ’s teaching in John 5:24: “Verily, verily, I

²¹ Zane Clark Hodges, *The Epistle of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999) 145.

say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but **is passed from death unto life.**” All believers have passed from death unto life; none of them abide in death; so all of them love the brethren. Those who do not love the brethren are murderers, like Satan. The Apostle John here alludes again to John 8:44, the only other NT text with this word “murderer”: “Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. **He was a murderer** from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” Clearly, the contrast is the children of God versus the children of the devil.

1John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1John 3:19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

Here I simply wish to point out that the way we are to “assure our hearts” is by knowing we are “of the truth,” a phrase distinguishing all true believers. Nothing about entering into the Higher Life is here; rather, by knowing that we are “of the truth” by manifesting true, God-like love, we “assure our hearts.”

1John 3:24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Note that the person who characteristically keeps God’s commandments has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. All believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Note that the same group has the Holy Spirit and the whole Trinity dwelling in them and they themselves are living in God / the Trinity / Christ / the Holy Spirit. The same group has the Holy Spirit indwelling as is the group that is abiding. Since all believers are indwelt, all believers abide, and all believers keep God’s commandments.

1John 4:6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

The person who listens to the Apostolic teaching instead of the demonic spirits of 4:1-5 is the one who “knows God” and is “of God.” Again, a saved/lost distinction is obvious.

1John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

1John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Having a God-kind of love shows one is born of God, and the one without that kind of love is unregenerate and does not know God. It is not just that he has not entered into the Higher Life.

1John 4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

The verb translated “dwell” here is *meno*, the word for “abide.” All believers have been given the Holy Spirit; all believers have God dwelling/abiding in them; and, John asserts, all believers abide/dwell, not only an elite minority. The believer’s abiding, God’s abiding in the believer, and the indwelling of the Spirit are all connected. If one wants to make only some believers abide, he needs to say only some believers are indwelt by the Spirit and only some believers have God in them.

1John 4:15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

1John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Those who confess true doctrine abide/dwell (again, *meno*) in God and God dwells/abides in them. Here again having the Spirit or God within one is the same category of persons as the category that abides/dwells himself. (If one has the Spirit within he has God within, because the Spirit has the undivided Divine essence possessed also by the Father and the Son.) v. 16 teaches the same thing—those who love are indwelt by God and also abide. All believers abide/dwell, not only some of them.

1John 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

1John 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

1John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

Note the connection of continuing belief and continuing love—perseverance in true doctrine and perseverance in true love both pertain to the same people, all believers, all who are born of God. Note that this verse is not talking about how one becomes born again, but is saying that those who have been born again continue to believe true doctrine about Jesus. They believe Jesus is the Christ, the Messianic King. So should we say that people who deny Christ’s Lordship/Kingship, are they denying that Jesus is really the King or the Christ? Should we treat them like they have been born of God if they stubbornly hold to this heresy and refuse to repent?

Notice also how the Apostle John ties together all three tests he has expounded earlier in the book—the test of righteousness, of persevering belief, and of love, in vv. 1-3. Those who believe love, and those who love keep God’s commandments.

1John 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

1John 5:5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

Notice that all believers—all who are born of God—overcome the world, with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). True faith shows up

in overcoming by the power of God.

1John 5:10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

1John 5:11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

1John 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

1John 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

When one gets to vv. 10-12, note that vv.1-3ff explain what is involved here. Those who have true belief, who have the Son, are the people who also love and do righteousness, as explained in the first part of the chapter. Those who do not believe, love, and do righteousness are those who do not have the Son. Hodgeites cannot isolate vv. 10-12 from what comes right before it and claim that all those who have intellectually assented to the gospel should have assurance. That grossly and totally violates everything that John has talked about in the whole chapter and in the whole book.

Summary

From all of the above, it is very clear that the Zane Hodges view of 1 John is in error. The view that was taught for the first 95% of church history is correct—the Apostle John gives three tests of life—continuing belief, continuing love, and continuing practice of righteousness. Those who have these marks have been born of God, and those who do not have them have not been born of God. The book is not about those who have entered into a Keswick Higher Life or an elite subcategory of believers who allegedly are the only ones who abide. Independent Baptist schools and churches need to stop teaching this lie.

Objections

Exegetical objections to the true view of 1 John have already been dealt with as we have gone through the book. There is only one more serious objection to examine, and then there are quibbles/fake objections.

The **only serious objection** is that 1 John 5:13 is allegedly not what the book is about. For example, John Van Gelderen says that the purpose of 1 John is given in 1 John 1:3-4,²² so it is about having joy, not about assurance of salvation. Then, supposedly, all the marks in the book only distinguish those who should have joy from those who do not.

This view is impossible for a number of reasons. First, the texts themselves

²² John Van Geldren, “Fruits and Assurance,” elec. acc. <https://revivalfocus.org/q2-fruits-and-assurance/>.

clearly distinguish those who are born of God and those who are not. Even if the main point of 1 John were to say who should have joy and who should be miserable, it would be saying that those who are born again will manifest the new birth in righteousness, true belief, and love, and those who do not should be miserable, not because they don't have the Keswick second blessing, but because they are not born again.

Now John actually has a number of purpose statements in 1 John. In 1:4 he says, "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." In 2:1 he says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" (2:12). Then, in 2:26 John adds, "These *things* have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you." But these are secondary or subordinate to the main purpose of the book, which comes at 5:13: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

The main purpose of 1 John is stated in 5:13 just like it is at the end of John's Gospel in 20:30-31, just like the prologue of 1 John (1:1-4) is comparable to the prologue of John's Gospel (1:1-18). By the believers knowing that they have eternal life, 5:13, they will also believe more deeply on the name of the Son of God (5:13), will have full joy (1:4), will be protected from sin (2:1), and will be protected from false teachers (2:26), as John also writes them because their sins are forgiven (2:12), because they have known God (2:13), etc. There are many great benefits to having assurance of salvation which are elaborated earlier in 1 John, but they are all subordinate to the main purpose of the book, that believers might know that they have eternal life (5:13). Denying this fact requires ignoring the plain comparison with the Gospel of John and the structure of 1 John itself. All the "written" statements are reasons the Apostle John wrote 1 John, but they are subordinate reasons to having assurance. That fits the three-cycle structure of 1 John and the comparison with John's Gospel. Denying that 5:13 is the overarching purpose requires torturing the structure and argument of the epistle.

There are then a variety of **non-serious objections**. They are not serious because they do not even claim to deal with the evidence of the text. For example, advocates of the Hodges view have said that the truth about 1 John takes all the joy out of the gospel. The answer to this is that the Apostle John says it brings full joy, so this objection is simply wrong. Advocates of the Hodges view claim nobody can tell if he is really characteristically doing righteousness or not, asking, "where exactly is the line?" Sometimes if a person is very near to death it is hard to tell if he is really alive or not, but nobody uses that to claim that we can't tell if someone who is stone cold and has not moved for several weeks, has no heartbeat and no breath, is dead, while someone who is getting up each day and going to work and playing with his kids is alive. Advocates of the Hodges view also say that the historic view of 1 John is self-depedence. Supposedly you are looking at yourself and thinking that you are better than everyone else if you believe what the epistle actually teaches. However, the continuing belief, continuing love, and continuing practice of righteousness do not come because a person looks to himself but because of the grace of God and because he is in union with Christ, and because the Holy Spirit is working the life of God and its fruits in the person who has been born again

not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. God gets all the glory for the changes He produces in the believer. It does not glorify God more to deny what 1 John actually says or to say that His Spirit and the new nature He gives sometimes fail to produce anything.

This sort of thing is just foolishness, or, better, rebellion against what the text of 1 John actually says. We are not to get doctrine from whatever we make up, but from the careful study of God's Word.

I need to briefly hit on a **misunderstanding of 1 John 1**.²³ Before the rise of Keswick, 1 John's "fellowship" was apparently universally understood as being salvation, not a higher life of only some of God's people. The Greek word used in 1 John 1:3, 6, and 7 (as well as 15 other times in the NT) is *koinonia*. The fundamental idea of the word group as meaning "to have something in common with someone." As it is used in the New Testament, *koinonia* generally means "to have in common, to share, to be a joint participant, a partner with someone else." Compare Jude 3 for the word group (here the adjective *koinos*):

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the **common** salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Ἀγαπητοί, πάσαν σπουδὴν ποιούμενος γράφειν ὑμῖν περὶ τῆς **κοινῆς** σωτηρίας, ἀνάγκην ἔσχον γράψαι ὑμῖν, παρακαλῶν ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι τῇ ἅπαξ παραδοθείσῃ τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστει.

Thus, *koinonia* means to commonly share or participate in something, a sense of the word "fellowship" that is rarer today. In the sense of 1 John 1, all believers are in *koinonia* or "fellowship" with God. What they all commonly participate/have *koinonia* in is the very life of Christ, eternal life, 1 John 1:1-3. Chapter 1 gives a test of life in the believer's attitude toward sin. Those who pass the test continue in fellowship with the Trinity, with the Apostle John, and with the church (1:3) while those who do not apostatize and evidence they are unregenerate. The test begins with v. 5; those who recognize that God is light see He is holy, and those who share in the common life / have *koinonina* / fellowship with God reflect the character of God. Therefore, in 1:6-10, they manifest the right attitude towards sin. In v. 6, the one who does not practice the truth does not have the right attitude toward sin, while the one who does practice it shows he does have common life with God. In v. 8, the one who says he is inherently good is unconverted, while the regenerate recognize they still have indwelling sin. If we say that we live without committing individual sins, v. 10, we are also unconverted liars, while true believers recognize that they still have indwelling sin (v. 8) and commit individual acts of sin (v. 10), although these are no longer in control like before they were born again.

²³ Compare William W. Combs, "The Meaning Of Fellowship In 1 John" (*Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 13 [2008] 13-16.

In contrast to these erroneous views of sin, v. 9 says the genuine believer, that is, the one who has fellowship with God, will have a proper attitude toward sin—a sin-confessing attitude or disposition: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The object of confession in v. 9 is “sins.” The plural shows that John is speaking of individual acts of sin. The Keswick view of fellowship says that a believer who is out of fellowship with God is brought back into fellowship by confession of the sin that caused the fellowship to be broken. However, v. 9 says nothing about restoration of fellowship or being out of *koinonia*. It DOES say that God forgives the sins of the one who regularly confesses them. He does this in the sense that the one who regularly confesses his sins is a genuine, justified believer, and He also does this in that He strengthens the relationship within His family of the one who confesses his sins. Verse 9 simply gives the proper attitude of a genuine believer toward sin. He *will* confess sin, that is, he will have a sin-confessing attitude. Such an attitude should give assurance of salvation.

But why does a believer have to confess his sins to God? After all, v. 7 says, “but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Those who walk in the light, like Christ is in the light—all true believers—commonly participate in Christ’s life/*koinonia/fellowship*, and the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses them from sin. We have a perfect standing in the righteousness of Christ. But our relationship to God can also be viewed in a familial sense—we are children in the family of God. As such we sin against God and God convicts, and we must confess. That is what progressive sanctification is all about. As we progress in holiness we strive to sin less and less. But until we reach that state of ultimate sanctification (glorification), we must confess our sins and receive forgiveness in God’s family. As John 13 teaches, we are clean every whit, but we still need to wash our feet.

All believers have *koinonia* with the Trinity in 1 John 1, because they all share in eternal life with God and other believers. Nevertheless, believers confess their sins because sin is still an affront to God. And even though it does not diminish our standing in justification before God—we will always be his children, members of the family of God—sin does affect our relationship in the family. God is working sanctification in us—progressive sanctification—we are progressing in holiness, and that means being set apart from sin, mortifying sin on a daily basis, and confessing sin—agreeing with God that sin is evil and wicked—all accompanied by a determination to turn from and forsake it. A genuine Christian will have a sin-confessing attitude. Certainly it is true we can backslide and become carnal for a time. But ultimately a true Christian will repent and confess his sins to God. Those who do not have no reason to be assured of their salvation. Sin no longer dominates our lives as it does the unbeliever. But we must still do battle with sin every day, and that involves confession to God where we fail. The genuine believer will have a sin-confessing attitude. And if we do, it gives us assurance that we truly have fellowship with God, that we are genuine believers.

While it is a legitimate application of 1 John 1:9 that if we confess individual sins as believers God will cleanse us from those specific sins, the actual teaching of the passage

is that true believers will characteristically confess their sins, and those who do so are those who have the common life of God/are in fellowship with God.

Applications

1.) Reject the false view of 1 John, because:

a.) It is not what God said, so it dishonors Him.

b.) It provides false assurance to people who are not saved. Millions of people will be in hell because instead of being awakened to the fact that they were unregenerate by the truth of 1 John they were lulled to sleep by “soulwinners” and “counsellors” who told them to see if they remembered saying the sinner’s prayer or who were just told to rededicate their lives when they needed to be born again.

c.) This heresy destroys true churches as it allows unregenerate people to join the church. When they do not show evidence of conversion, it is chalked up to their just needing to enter into the Higher Life, rather than their need to be converted. When enough people who are unconverted get in this way, it will destroy the church.

d.) People who lack assurance should not be encouraged to “make sure” of their salvation by just saying the sinner’s prayer again. Repentance involves agreeing with God, and if a person is lost, he needs to come to God as a lost sinner, not as an “I don’t know if I am lost” person. That is not agreeing with God. Someone lacking assurance should study 1 John carefully with an open mind and heart, asking God to show him the truth through His Word. God will make it clear whether or not he is saved. If he is saved but is holding on to some sins, he needs to confess those to get assurance back again. If he is not saved, telling God he is not sure if he is saved and asking Christ to come into his heart a second, or third, or two-hundredth, time is not the answer. The answer is to agree with God that he is lost, if that is what the study of 1 John shows, and then to genuinely repent and entrust himself to Christ as Lord and Savior.

2.) Reprove and separate from those who teach the false view of 1 John and, when confronted, are unwilling to repent of their error.

3.) Recognize that the marks of 1 John are not asking the impossible, and the book is one meant to comfort believers, not confuse them or take away their assurance. Do not react against the Hodges heresy by preaching 1 John in such a way that true believers have assurance taken from them. The marks are all there in true believers, but so, 1 John 1:8-10 teaches, is indwelling sin and individual acts of sin. The true believer does not need to say “I have conquered all my sins and have obtained angelic perfection,” but, in the words of John Newton, “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world, but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”²⁴

²⁴ cf. J. C. Ryle, *Knots Untied: Being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in Religion* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1885) 126.