

DIGGING DEEPER
1, 2 & 3 JOHN



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Deeper
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Study Guide

Acknowledgments

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1 JOHN

Introduction

- The First Epistle of John was written by the Apostle John sometime in the 80's or 90's of the first century. John, the son of Zebedee, most likely wrote this letter prior to being banished to the island of Patmos by the Roman Emperor Domitian.
- It appears John's aim was to strengthen his reader's relationship with Christ.
- The basis for understanding 1 John is to know that the apostle is not addressing the issue of our salvation, but rather our relationship/fellowship with Christ. The key word in this first epistle of John is "abide" and it is used 26 times.
- Therefore, it is appropriate to approach the book of 1 John through our position in Christ.

1 JOHN

CHAPTER 1

A. Personally Knowing God through Christ

Read 1 John 1:1.

- All of this verse would obviously be a reference to Jesus Christ. Notice again how verse 1 begins, “*That which was from the beginning.*” In **John 1:1** we read, “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*” Another reference to the fact that Jesus Christ has always been—from eternity and to eternity.
- Returning to **1 John 1:1**, remember John lived and traveled with Jesus for three years. He did hear Him. He did see Him. There’s a big difference between just seeing someone and having actually looked upon (observed) them. They walked and talked and lived with Him.
- What John is communicating here is the idea of a true relationship with Jesus Christ—our lives in touch with His life—not just knowing about Christ but truly knowing and abiding in Him.
- Some years ago, I began meeting with a fellow-Christian who was struggling in life. His wife had recently left him and he had lost his job. I asked him one day where God was in all of this. He responded by asking, “Why does God keep punishing me?” I mentioned to him if that was his thinking, he didn’t know God. He immediately shot back, “Don’t tell me that I don’t know God. I read my Bible every day, I go to church every Sunday and Wednesday; don’t tell me that I don’t know God.” I said, “You read the newspaper every day and you know about President

Clinton, but you don't know him. And I believe that you read your Bible every day, and you know *about* God, but you really don't know Him." We went on with our study pertaining to the characteristics of God, and at one point as we looked at the "love of God" he said, "Is that my God? Is He really a God of love? I said "yes." He went on to say, "You are right, I don't know Him. I know nothing of a God of love; all I know about is a God of wrath."

Read 1 John 1:2.

- Again, the emphasis here is on truly *knowing* Jesus. It would appear John had a closer and deeper relationship with Jesus than the other disciples. It was John who leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper and made reference to the fact that Jesus loved him (**John 21:20**). It was John to whom Jesus entrusted His mother (**John 19:26-27**).
- It appears John's great desire in this first letter is to communicate to his readers what he knew about Jesus so that all could experience a deeper relationship with their Savior.
- Take note again of John's comment, "*the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness you.*"

Read 1 John 1:3.

- John desires to reveal Jesus, whom he knew so well, to all who will hear.
- Notice his purpose is that we may have fellowship one with another—a fellowship that is centered in Christ. However, even beyond our fellowship with one another, John says, "*truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ.*"

- Compare **1 Corinthians 1:9**: “*God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” The Lord desires fellowship with us; He desires an abiding relationship. This fellowship with Christ will spring from our truly knowing Him, not just knowing about Him. Now back to **1 John 1:3** (paraphrased), “*That which we have seen and heard, we declare unto you so that you also can have that fellowship, not only with us but through Him and with Him.*”

Read 1 John 1:4.

- Notice John’s purpose for writing—so that our joy may be full.
- Jesus spoke often of joy—a constant overflowing “life in all its fullness” (**John 15:11; 16:22-24; 17:3**).
- Paul wrote the book of Philippians from prison; however, the theme is “joy” which appears approximately 16 times in the epistle (**Philippians 1:4; 2:16-18; 3:1**).
- Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace), and fullness of joy comes from a true knowledge of Christ. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and the Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Christ in us, the outcome will be the fruit of the Spirit or in this case “joy.”

B. Abiding in Christ by Walking in the Light (Truth)

Read 1 John 1:5.

- “*God is light.*” There’s no darkness at all in God. Going back to **John 3:19-20** we read, “*And this is that condemnation that light has come into the world and*

men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. For every one that does evil hates the light neither comes to the light lest his deeds be reprov'd." Everyone who does evil wants God out of their lives, and they won't come to God, neither will they be drawn to Him lest their deeds should be exposed. **John 3:21**—"*But he that does truth comes to the light (comes to God), that his deeds may be made manifest that they are actually coming from God*" (Psalm 36:9; Proverbs 4:18).

Read 1 John 1:6.

- John's comment "*if we say that we have fellowship with Him*" does not mean we are actually having fellowship with Him—we're just saying we have fellowship with Him, but we're really walking in darkness. When are we walking in darkness? The answer—when we are walking in the flesh. So, if we say we have fellowship with Him but we're really walking in the flesh, we lie and do not tell the truth. In other words, we're deceiving others. We're acting out a lie.
- Remembering back again to verse 5, "*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*" Someone asks, "How are you doing?" The response, "Great, I'm consistently having my daily devotions and in fellowship with Him." However, I'm really doing it all in the power of the flesh; I am acting out a lie and deceiving others.

Read 1 John 1:7.

- If we are abiding in Christ, and if Christ is living His life in and through us, then we are walking in the light as He is in the light and the outcome is that we will

have fellowship one with another. However, if we have been walking in darkness (in the flesh), and we're feeling a bit guilty, right here is the remedy for that guilt—the blood of Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

- In **Leviticus 17:11** we read, “*Life is in the blood and I’ve given you blood to make payment for your soul.*” God is the one who set down the penalty for sin—death, and the payment is blood. So whenever we do sin, the payment is the blood of Christ which cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Our part is merely to believe this truth and rest in the blood. God is totally satisfied with the blood of His Son on our behalf, but often we're not satisfied. We sin and we confess it and we feel guilty and so we confess it again and we still feel guilty and so we confess it again and we still feel guilty, etc. Sometimes it goes on for days, weeks, months, and sometimes for a lifetime. But when we by faith rest in what Christ has done for us, His blood has made payment for our sins, then **Hebrews 10:19** says that we can boldly approach the throne of grace because of the blood of Christ. So here in **1 John 1:7** the thought is that if we “*walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another*”; however, if we have been walking in darkness, then look up because the blood of Christ has cleansed us from all sin.

C. Unconfessed Sin Hinders Abiding in Christ

Read 1 John 1:8.

- If we say that we have fellowship with Him but walk in darkness, we are lying to others. It's interesting to watch the progression in verses 6, 8, and 10; we start out by lying to others, but now here in verse 8, we're believing our own lies. We're deceiving ourselves.

- Possibly, the best Old Testament example of this could be Job. His three friends came accusing him of sin in his life; but Job said “no,” and proceeded to defend his righteousness for thirty chapters. In the end, God finally spoke to Job by saying, “***Who is it that darkens counsel with words without knowledge?***” In other words, “Who is it down there who is opening his mouth and doesn’t know what he’s talking about? Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Where were you when I laid out the line?” When God finished speaking, Job said, “***I am vile.***” God continued speaking again for another chapter or so and in Chapter 42:6, Job makes this comment: “***I abhor myself***”; he was no longer deceiving himself.
- It’s interesting that the verse before Job made this statement was “***I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen you.***” He had heard about God, he knew of Him, but now he truly knew Him, which is the point that John is trying to make here in the book of 1 John.

Read 1 John 1:9.

- So, fellow Christian, if you happen to be in a situation where you are deceiving others by saying that you’re walking in fellowship with Him when you’re actually not, or if you’re deceiving yourself into thinking that you really have no sin and all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit convicts you that this is what you are doing, then here is God’s remedy: just confess it to the Lord. Acknowledging and trusting in the blood of Christ, and He is faithful and just to forgive all our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

Read 1 John 1:10.

- We start out by lying to others, then we believe our own lie, and now we're trying to make God a liar. We've deceived others, we've deceived ourselves, now we're trying to deceive God. In **Romans 3:10** we read, "*none are righteous no not one.*" And in verse 23 Paul states, "*All have sinned.*"

1 JOHN

CHAPTER 2

A. Abiding Restored and Maintained through the Advocacy of Christ

Read 1 John 2:1.

- In Chapter 1, verses 6, 8, and 10, John exposes man's sinfulness: verse 6 deceiving others, verse 8 deceiving ourselves, and in verse 10 calling God a liar. Immediately following each of these verses we find God's remedy. Verse 7 it's the blood; verse 9 it's confession; and now in Chapter 2 verse 1 the remedy is Jesus Christ.
- In **Romans 8:34** we read, ***"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ that died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."*** So, here's the situation: if we find that we have sinned, and we're actually living in darkness and feeling very guilty and wondering how a Holy God could ever forgive a wretch like you/me, remember the blood, admit to God the fact that it's happened and remember Jesus Christ is our Advocate. He is on our side; He is always before the Father pleading our cause.

Read 1 John 2:2.

- "Propitiation" is a word we don't use much these days and can have multiple meanings. I had a friend who came to Christ some years ago through reading the Bible. He started in Genesis 1:1 and it took him about one year to read all the way through to Romans 3. When he got to verses 24 and 25 and read these words,

“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood through faith,” he said that the word propitiation confused him, so he looked it up in a dictionary. When he saw that the word means substitute, he realized that Jesus was his substitute on the cross and he trusted Christ as his Savior.

- So, in verse 1, Jesus is our “Advocate,” and now here in verse 2 He is our “Propitiation” or substitute or satisfaction. God is totally satisfied with His Son’s substitutionary work on the cross.

B. The Fruit of Abiding in Christ: Love and Obedience

Read 1 John 2:3.

- For many years I saw the book of 1 John as a rather legalistic teaching and this verse 3 was one of the troubling verses for me in those early years. Many Christians would see this as I was seeing it in those days. The thought that was generated in my mind was this: “I will know that I am truly saved if I keep His commandments.” However, remember John’s close relationship with Jesus, the “knowing Him” that he’s speaking of here goes beyond salvation and is a much deeper relationship than just being saved and trying to live the Christian life. In this verse 3 John’s point is; ***“Hereby we do know (we can be certain that we truly have a close personal relationship with and are abiding in) Him if we keep His commandments.”***

Read 1 John 2:4.

- The natural follow-up to verse 3 would be this verse 4. He who says I know Him (really and truly has an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and is abiding in Christ) and does not keep His commandments is once again acting out a lie and attempting to deceive others.
- The contrast to this is in the following verse.

Read 1 John 2:5.

- Compare **2 Corinthians 5:14** where Paul writes “*the love of Christ constrains (compels/controls) us*”—not our love for Christ, but Christ’s love for us—to verse 5. I really enjoy thinking about God’s love being perfected in us. **John 3:16** says, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes...*” Salvation came because of God’s love. Not only did Jesus go to the cross for us but He also took us to the cross and we were co-crucified with Him. It’s all because of God’s love. So when His life is being lived through us, when we are living in the truth that we’re co-crucified with Christ, when we’re abiding in Christ, when we’re occupied with Christ, then His love is being perfected in us and we will keep His commandments because it’s no longer I, but Christ. John continues: “*By this we know that we that we are in Him.*” We are abiding in Him; we are living in our position in Christ; we are keeping His Word, not through our effort or because we’re forced to, but because of our life source, because we are abiding in Him and because He is living His life through us.

Read 1 John 2:6.

- John uses the word “abide” in a number of places in his writings. But if we were to back up to **John 15:4-7**, he uses the word “abide” approximately seven times. ***“Abide in me and I in you...”*** Let’s examine the word “abide.” There’s no “doing” in the word “abide.” It’s a “being” word. John had previously told us in **John 15:1-2** that He is the vine and we are the branches, and our part is to abide in Christ as a branch would abide in the vine. Just by faith the branch rests. If we were to look up the word “abide,” it has the idea that the vine is actually holding the branch in, rather than the branch holding onto the vine. Continuing in **John 15**, ***“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can you except that you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in Me and I in him the same brings forth much fruit. For without me you can do nothing. If a man abides not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered.”***
- If we are abiding in Christ, if we are resting in Him as that branch is in the vine, and it is actually the life of the vine that is being lived out through the branch and it is also Christ’s life that is being lived out through us, then we should be walking as He walked.
- One of the most often used phrases in the New Testament is, “In Christ,” “In Him;” these words have a much deeper meaning than most Christians understand.

Read 1 John 2:7-8.

- What John is communicating here is that he is writing nothing new that has not been from the very beginning (to obey God’s commandments), however he is writing a much deeper truth which is only true “in Him” and

“in us” as we see ourselves positioned in Christ and as Christ is being formed in us.

- Back in **John 1:9** we read, “*That was the true light (Jesus Christ) which gives light to every man that comes into the world.*” Again, in Chapter 8, “*Then spoke Jesus again unto them saying, ‘I am the light of the world.’*” So back in 1 John, because the darkness is passed, that old Adamic life which used to flow through us is now passed, and the true light is now going to shine if we’re truly abiding in Christ, if we’re occupied with Him and His life is being lived out through us.
- Note John’s statement: “*the true light is already shining.*” When Jesus was on earth, His life illuminated the inner lives of His followers. Everywhere He was present, He gave light, and that light penetrated people. John’s message emphasizes that God is light. Let’s give some thought to this word “light;” light enables people to do their work; it produces growth in crops; it reveals beauty; represents what is good, pure, true, holy; reveals; shines; God is so completely light that in Him there is no darkness. Darkness represents what is sinful and evil. In many places in Scripture, the realm of God and the realm of evil are contrasted by the differences between light and darkness (**Isaiah 9:2; John 1:4-5; John 1:9; Acts 26:18; Romans 13:12-14**).

Read 1 John 2:9.

- What John is communicating here is the hypocrisy of Christians who are living a lie. He who says he is abiding in Christ, living in his position in Christ, is occupied with Christ, and Christ is being formed in him and yet hates his brother, he really is not abiding

in the light. He is in darkness. He's operating in the flesh.

- The next few verses highlight the contrast between light and darkness, love and hate, God and the world. The two contrasts cannot co-exist. For instance, one cannot have light and also be in darkness at the same time. One cannot love and hate the same person. One cannot have God and hang on to the world system. These verses teach that a person who claims to be in the light should then also be filled with love. John's writings stress the centrality of believers showing love to one another (**John 13:34; John 15:17; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11; 2 John 5**).

Read 1 John 2:10.

- He who loves his brother is abiding in Christ; he's occupied with Christ. It's interesting to give some thought to the fact that our love for one another reaches beyond the community of believers and actually is observed and draws unbelievers in. Back in **John 13:35** we read, "*By this shall all men know that you are my disciples...*" Notice it says "*all men shall know*"—believers and unbelievers—"*that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.*" It might be good to give thought to the last part of this verse. "*He who loves his brother abides in the light, there is no cause for stumbling in him.*" The thought here is that if we're abiding in Christ, if we're abiding in the light, we're seeing clearly and nothing will stumble or trip us up.

Read 1 John 2:11.

- We could read verse 11 this way: "He that hates his brother is not walking in the light; he is walking in the

flesh and when we're walking in the flesh we don't have any idea where that thing will lead us. Our eyes have been blinded by the flesh, and we're just basically wandering in spiritual darkness, we've lost our sense of direction because the darkness has blinded us."

- In **Ephesians 4:17**, Paul speaks to the church at Ephesus and makes this statement: "***Walk not as the Gentiles walk in the vanity of their minds, having their understanding darkened.***" Of course, "walking in the vanity of our minds" is just pursuing worthless things in the flesh. Once we begin pursuing fleshly desires and worthless things, there is a downward spiral of sin that takes place, which then leads to the next step of having our understanding darkened. As we go back to **1 John 2:11**, we are told that the darkness has blinded our eyes; spiritual understanding is now gone, and it comes from walking in the flesh.
- Let's sum up John's point here in verses 9-11. Those Christians who claim to love God but hate their brother are really wandering in spiritual darkness and are floundering around in the flesh. John seems to have changed the focus of his teaching now, going from loving one another to warning believers against worldliness, against the love of this world. One cannot love God and love the world.

C. Three Stages of Christian Growth

Read 1 John 2:12-14.

- John begins by mentioning three types of Christians: "little children" (new Christians), "fathers" (the mature ones), "young men" (those who are maturing). This exhortation is to all maturity levels of Christians. The "Him" he is referring to is a reference to Jesus Christ,

and not just knowing Him for salvation, but an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, abiding in Him.

- The thought here is that a maturing Christian can stand firm in the faith as the Word of God (**Jesus Christ—John 1:1**) abides in him as Christ is being formed in him. When a believer is standing strong in the faith as Christ is being formed in him, then that maturing Christian will overcome the wicked one. John now moves on to an exhortation to all groups of Christians, including the new believer, the maturing Christian, as well as the mature Christian.

D. God's Children Warned Not to Love This World System

Read 1 John 2:15.

- In **James 4:4**, we read, ***“You adulterers and adulteresses. Know you not that friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”*** Notice that James refers to people who have a friendship with the world as adulterers and adulteresses. We could say they are committing spiritual adultery. So John’s exhortation in **1 John 2:15** is directed to all groups of Christians, ***“Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man loves the world, the loves of the Father is not in him.”*** John’s point is that those who love the world’s things, then the love of God is not being perfected in them, and they are committing spiritual adultery; they are worshipping other gods.

Read 1 John 2:16.

- In **Genesis 3** when Satan, through the serpent, was tempting Eve, he used these same three worldly temptation—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. In **Genesis 3:6**, Satan said the fruit on the tree was good to eat (lust of the flesh); looked good to the eyes (lust of the eyes); a fruit to make one wise (pride of life). In **Matthew 4:1-11**, when Christ was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, he had not eaten in 40 days and the devil asked him to “*turn the stones into bread*” (lust of the flesh); the next temptation, “*Look at all these kingdoms that are all mine; I’ll give them to you if you bow down and worship me*” (lust of the eyes); and finally the devil took him up on top of the temple and said, “*Cast yourself down, make yourself a hero, Jesus*” (pride of life). Again, John writes and we’ll paraphrase, “Don’t love the world or the things that are in the world because all that the world has to offer is merely the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. This is not from the Father; it’s from the world.” It’s just temporal and will pass away.

Read 1 John 2:17.

- The implication here is that the world is temporal as well as our desire for it, but he that does the will of God, that has eternal value. Keep in mind when John speaks of the world, he is speaking of the world system which is based on Satanic principles such as power, greed, lust, etc. It’s interesting to think that those of us who live chasing after worldly desires are finding those desires unfulfilled. We’re focusing on a world that is already passing away. The workaholic will die unfulfilled; the greedy politician will die in despair; the pleasure seeking party-goer will find his or her life ruined by drugs and alcohol. We are continually

discovering that indulging in this world never satisfies. It's passing away.

E. God's Children Warned Against False “Christs”

Read 1 John 2:18.

- The term “last time” or “last hour” is used only in the New Testament and refers to the last days or the end times—the time between Christ’s first and second comings. The first century readers of 1 John lived in the last days as do we today. The word “last” also gives a sense of urgency. The idea is that Christ will return soon. John’s use of the phrase “*as you have heard*” refers to the teachings from the apostles that the antichrist is coming. Paul wrote about this in **2 Thessalonians 2:3-10**; the antichrist will be completely against Christ.
- The person called antichrist is perhaps the same as the man of lawlessness in **2 Thessalonians 2:3** or the beast in **Revelation 13:1-10**. It’s dangerous to label any person as the antichrist and try to predict Christ’s return based on those assumptions. John mentioned that the antichrist is coming not so that believers would try to identify the person, but so that they might be ready for anything that may threaten their faith. John also mentions that already such persons who would fit that description have come on the scene: “*even now are there many antichrists.*” These are merely ones that come before the one antichrist.
- All throughout history there have been individuals who were totally evil and hostile to everything for which Christ stands, and we could definitely refer to them as antichrists. They’ve lived in every generation and will continue to work their evil. We could put in that

category cult leaders, false teachers, etc. During the last times these antichrists, these false teachers who pretend to be believers and who lure weak Christians away from Christ will continue to be active just as they were in John's days.

Read 1 John 2:19.

- This is John's first direct statement about those who had left the churches. These false teachers, these antichrists, were not total strangers to the churches. They had been part of the church community fellowshiping with John and other believers; however, when their teachings were not accepted by the Christians and those in leadership, they left and became promoters of false teachings about Jesus. John explained that they never really belonged among the Christians in the first place; when they left, it revealed that they did not belong to the Christian community. They never were true believers; if they had been true believers, they would have stayed.

Read 1 John 2:20.

- "Anointing" usually refers to the consecration (dedicating someone or something to God) of a certain individual for service. Unlike the false teachers, John tells the believers that they possessed a special anointing from the Holy Spirit and that anointing gave them knowledge and discernment of truth. Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is the teacher who will guide us into all truth (**John 14:26; 16:13-14**). This anointing of the Holy Spirit refers to the fact that the Holy Spirit has been given to each believer by Jesus.

Read 1 John 2:21.

- Those with the indwelling Holy Spirit not only know the truth about the Father and the Son but can also detect what does not measure up to the standard of truth. Therefore, John explained that he was not writing to them because they don't know truth but because they do know it. He was not giving them further teaching, the false teachers were attempting to do that; instead, he was reaffirming the truth that had already been taught to them and that they had believed.

Read 1 John 2:22.

- The great truth is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh to die for sin. Apparently, the antichrists in John's day were claiming faith in God while denying and opposing Christ. To do so, John states, is impossible because Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah. To deny Christ rejects God's way of revealing Himself to the world. However, those who accept Christ as God's Son will accept God the Father also; the two cannot be separated. Many cultists today call themselves Christians, but they deny the deity of Christ. Some churches, such as the Unitarian Church deny the status of Christ as the Son of God. Remember, those who reject the Son can never know the Father since the Father is known only by the Son (**Matthew 11:27; John 14:6-9**).

Read 1 John 2:23.

- Simply stated, denying Jesus means denying God, and then the opposite is also true—anyone who confesses the Son has the Father also. John is encouraging all Christians to hold on to the Christian truth that has changed all of our lives. All believers must grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and

deepen our understanding through study in the Scriptures, but we must never abandon the basic truths about Christ. Jesus will always be God's Son and His sacrifice for sins is permanent. No truth will ever contradict this basic teaching in the Bible.

Read 1 John 2:24.

- Once again, the word “abide” is central to John's thinking. If these Christians abide in the basic truths which they had heard from John (Christ died for you/you died with Christ/the Spirit's in control), then they would continue to abide/rest in Christ. John's encouragement to all Christians everywhere is to hold tight, by grace through faith, to the truth that has changed our lives and resist the lies of the false teachers.

Read 1 John 2:25.

- **John 3:16—“*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*”** God has promised that those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ will have life eternal; our part is only to believe, to rest in the character of God who made these promises, and trust the He will fulfill them.

Read 1 John 2:26.

- The false teachers were trying to lead people astray and to move them away from the basic gospel that had been taught in the beginning. John wrote as he did to warn Christians about those who wanted to lead them astray and move them away from the basic teachings down a rabbit trail that would take them away from Christ.

Read 1 John 2:27.

- The anointing here refers to the Holy Spirit, and that Holy Spirit remains in each true believer. John goes on to say that we don't need anyone to teach us because the Holy Spirit dwelling within teaches us truth. This doesn't mean that we Christians should turn away from the teachings of faithful ministers and attempt to make it on our own. In fact, that often leads us astray when we have an unteachable spirit, but it does mean that Christians can discern truth and reject the false teachings of the false teachers. Notice the bottom line to verse 27 – ***“It is truth and is no lie and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”***

Read 1 John 2:28.

- The whole idea of abiding is acknowledging, trusting, resting, and depending just like the branch in the vine in **John 15**. The deeper truth here is that as we are abiding in Him and whenever He does appear, we will be able to confidently approach Him with boldness because our relationship is secure in Him.

F. Knowing God Results in Righteous Doing

Read 1 John 2:29.

- The word “if” could also be translated “since.” Believers know that God is righteous. John argues that God is righteous; therefore, He is the source of our righteousness. The thought here is that if a person's actions demonstrate righteousness, he or she acquired this righteousness from God, certainly not from any effort of ours to become righteous because He tells us

back in Isaiah that all of our righteousness is as filthy rags. Instead of believing or teaching that people become children of God by doing right, John is saying that doing right is the sign that people are born of God. This verse does not say that everyone who is born of God continually lives righteously. We know that believers can walk in the flesh and sin. It is saying that right behavior provides visible truth or proof of actually being a Christian. Good deeds cannot produce salvation, but they are proof that true faith is actually present. We could look at **James 2:14-18**—the bottom line to that Scripture is “***I will show you my faith by my works.***” In other words, if you want to see what I really believe, then take a good look at my life.

1 JOHN

CHAPTER 3

A. Knowing God Results in Righteous Doing (Continued)

Read 1 John 3:1.

- The NIV translates the first part of verse 1 as “*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God.*” The Greek word behind the English expression “how great” actually speaks of something that has come from another country, something rather exotic, something beyond human understanding. The translation actually could read, “Behold what awesome, exotic love the Father has poured on us.” The love of God comes from another world. It seems foreign to the human race. This love has been lavished on us, poured out on us as shown by the fact that God allows us to be called His children. As great as God is, He has brought believers into this loving, intimate relationship of children with their father. John was emphasizing the assurance believers can have that they really are God’s children. But being God’s children separates us from the world. We’re strangers, as though the world does not know us. It can’t because it doesn’t know God. The world does not desire to know God, and it even refused to recognize Christ as God’s Son; believers can hardly expect the world to understand their special relationship with God as His children. An interesting verse to ponder is **John 17:14**, “*I have given them Thy Word, the world has hated them because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world.*”

Read 1 John 3:2.

- John seems to be reinforcing his statement in verse 1 saying again that we are now children of God, not some time in the future, not when Christ returns, but now. God's children have a future, John further explains; it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. Something inconceivably wonderful is awaiting God's children, even more glorious than what we now possess. We Christians have been born into God's family, and we presently enjoy God's kindness and blessings through Christ. In the future we will also fully share in His glory. We're looking through a smoked glass dimly and we don't yet know exactly what it's all going to look like because it hasn't been revealed to us yet; but we do know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him. An interesting thought to ponder: "***As we look at Jesus through the Word, we're changed into the same image***" (2 Corinthians 3:18). God has a natural law in effect that we become like what we focus our attention on. The end of verse 3: "***we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.***" The idea here is that as we look at Christ, when we see Him, He will be revealed not only to His people but also in His people. In all His glory He will be revealed to us and in us. Every believer has this hope of sharing in His glory; even all of creation itself has this hope. The Apostle Paul said in **Romans 8:19** that the whole creation waits for the day when the children of God will be revealed in all their glory reflecting the image of Christ; when this happens, all of creation will see Him as He is.

Read 1 John 3:3.

- Every Christian has the hope that one day we shall be like Him. How is that going to happen? As we look at Christ, we are changed into that same image, and

it's done by the Spirit of the Lord. We have this hope in Him. As we are living in our position in Christ and as we are occupied with Christ, the Holy Spirit is changing us into His same image and, therefore, we are being purified even as He is pure. If Christ is being formed in me and it's no longer I but Christ, then what will come out is Jesus Christ and it will be pure.

Read 1 John 3:4.

- Lawlessness means more than an absence of law; it conveys an active rebellion against God. The Greek word for sin (*hamatia*) means “missing the mark.” God’s law gives people the mark or standard. The law was never given to man to keep because God knew he could not keep it, but rather He gave the law to man for the purpose of revealing his sinfulness and showing him his need for a Savior. So in this verse 4 after defining purity in verse 3, John now defines sin, presenting negatively the same truth he just expressed positively in verses 1-3. Since Christ’s purity demands our occupation with Christ, then a life of sin or continual lack of purity demonstrates that one is not abiding in Christ or occupied with Christ.

Read 1 John 3:5.

- Jesus’ death enabled God not only to forgive sin and to take away the penalty for sin, but it also made it possible for believers to stop living a life of sin. He came to abolish sin and He does this as we trust in our co-crucifixion with Christ. **Romans 6:6** says, “***Know this, that the old man has been crucified***”—in other words, the power of sin has been crucified. Why? “***So that the body of sin might be rendered powerless that henceforth we’re no longer a slave to sin.***”

Read 1 John 3:6.

- Two words to bring to your attention here are “abiding” and “knowing.” These two words are the key to understanding this particular verse. Let’s begin by looking at the phrase “*whoever abides in Him does not sin.*” The idea here is that if we are abiding in Him, we’re occupied with Him and resting in Him. When we are so taken up with Jesus that we’re abiding in Him, His life is being lived out through us and so therefore we will not sin. He goes on to say, “*Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.*” Again, this is an indication of a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, a deeper occupation with Him. In **Matthew 14**, Peter stepped out of the boat and he was so taken up with Jesus that he could actually rise above his circumstances and walk out across that water because he believed Jesus and was totally taken up with Him. But when he saw the wind and he became aware of all his uncontrollable circumstances, his focus faded from Christ to his circumstances and down he went. Here we see “*whoever sins has not seen Him.*” In other words, he’s not really occupied with Him, neither does he know Him. So we’re back to what we talked about earlier regarding knowing Him. It’s not knowing about Him. It’s knowing Christ. It’s that intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Many Christians claim to have a special relationship with God, that they’re walking in fellowship with Him, and that they’re abiding in Him despite their sinful conduct. Think back to Chapter **1:6** to Chapter **2:6**—“Though a man may say he is walking in fellowship with Him, but he’s really walking in darkness.” This is another mention of that kind of lifestyle.

Read 1 John 3:7.

- The false teachers who were denying the doctrine of Christ that we saw back in Chapter 2 were also claiming that they knew God, yet they were living unrighteous lives. John is warning his readers not to let anyone deceive them about this. When people do what is right, it is because they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous. Doing righteousness does not make people righteous, but rather the righteousness is coming from Christ in the same way a tree bearing good fruit indicates that it's a good tree. The fruit doesn't make the tree good; the good fruit just merely shows that the tree is good. In the same way, when a Christian's life is manifesting righteousness, it is an indication of the righteousness of Christ.

Read 1 John 3:8.

- Verse 7 mentions he who does righteousness is righteous and that righteousness is coming from Christ. Here in verse 8 John is clearly saying he who commits sin, it's coming from the devil. Thinking back to **Isaiah 14** when God had created the angels, Lucifer being the most wise and beautiful, became proud. The five "I will" statements he makes in Isaiah 14 culminate with him saying, "***I will be like God.***" In other words, Lucifer wanted to be his own god; he wanted to be in control of his own life; he didn't want anyone telling him what to do. That Lucifer mindset was transferred to man in the Garden of Eden when Lucifer, who entered into the serpent, tempted Eve with that same mindset. He said if you eat from this tree, you'll be like God (**Genesis 3:5**). She ate from the tree, as well as did Adam, and not only were they separated from God, but they also received the Lucifer mindset—that is the way we all come into this world:

with a sin nature, a flesh, the Lucifer mindset. “I want to be my own god; I want to be in control of my own life; I don’t want anyone telling me what to do.” It’s interesting that once we come to Christ, God’s ultimate purpose in all of our lives is to mold us into the image of Christ, to have that Christ-like mindset that Paul talks about in **Philippians 2**: “***Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus who thought it not robbery to be with God.***” In other words, He stripped Himself of the majesty of being God. It’s interesting to note that Lucifer desired to be God and Jesus gave up being God. Lucifer wanted to be in control of his own life. Jesus said, “***I didn’t come to do My own will, I came to do the will of the Father.***” Lucifer didn’t want anyone telling him what to do. Jesus said, “***I only do what the Father tells me to do.***” Here in verse 8 we read, “***He who sins is of the devil.***” A good definition for sin is anything man does that is contrary to God’s will and desires. Again, that comes from the Lucifer mindset. When we are functioning contrary to God’s will, that’s coming from the Lucifer mindset; it’s coming from the flesh which has its root and origin in Satan. John says here that the devil has sinned from the very beginning, and goes on to say, “***For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.***” The word “destroy” does not mean to annihilate or to eradicate; rather it means to break down, to undo, to render ineffective. Though it would have made more sense, humanly speaking, for Christ to have annihilated or obliterated Satan, He didn’t. Instead, Christ came to undo Satan’s work and free people from sin and all of its awful consequences.

Read 1 John 3:9.

- At first glance these words appear to contradict what John had said earlier—*“If we say that we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves...”* This passage states that those who have been born of God do not sin. So, do Christians sin, or don’t they? Let’s try to answer that question by examining this verse a little more closely. John begins the verse by saying, *“Whoever is born of God does not commit sin...”* and then he gives us the reason why: *“...because His seed remains in him.”* The thought here is that Christ is being reproduced in us. Remember, Godliness is not man imitating God; it’s God reproducing Himself in a man. Christlikeness is not man imitating Christ; it’s Jesus Christ being reproduced in a man. John says, *“Whoever is born of God does not sin because His seed (Jesus Christ) remains in him (or is being reproduced in him).”* Give some thought to this: when we were born again, a new life was born inside of us (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). We Christians have this new life; we are born of God. **1 Corinthians 1:30** also tells us that we were positioned in Christ. As we rest in our position in Jesus Christ and Christ is formed in us, it’s no longer I but Christ. And if Christ is the one who is being reproduced and living His life in and through me, I will no longer practice sin.

Read 1 John 3:10.

- It appears that John is speaking in absolutes. He offers no middle ground. A person belongs either to God or to the devil. The conclusion of the matter is that believers can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. The way to tell the pretenders is to see whether they obey God’s commands; of course, we see that back in 2:3-5. Or whether they love other Christians; we see that in 2:7-11. God’s desire is that His children love one another. Let’s look at this thing

realistically—many Christians fail to love their brothers. So often what we find in our churches are envy, strife, jealousy, anger, and divisions, which are the deeds of the flesh (**Galatians 5:19-21**). Many churches struggle with issues that divide the members. Jesus wants His followers to be unified as a powerful witness to the unbelieving world.

B. The Importance and Power of Love Between Christians

Read 1 John 3:11.

- This does not come in the form of a command as in the old Jewish legal system, but rather as an announcement of something good. John's statement here, "*that you have heard from the beginning*" probably refers to the time Jesus first told His disciples to love one another back in **John 13**.

Read 1 John 3:12.

- John's point is not that Cain murdered and became a child of the devil. Rather, because Cain belonged to the evil one, the by-product of that was anger and jealousy, which then drove him to murder (**John 8:44**).

Read 1 John 3:13.

- Don't be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. Jesus had given His disciples the same warning and in the same context. After telling the disciples to love one another in **John 15:18-19**, he reminded them that the world would hate them. Again, the world being the world system that is hostile to God

and hates Christians. The world would prefer that Christians were like them. Because believers are different, the world hates them (**1 Peter 4:3-4**). Why do unbelievers respond so negatively toward people who want to live for God? There are a couple of reasons—the same reasons that Cain wanted to kill his brother. First, we make them feel uncomfortable about how they are living in the present. Our lives act as lights that expose impurity in their own lives, producing guilt and shame, and then they lash out. Christians also make them uncomfortable about what will happen in the future. They don't like thinking about their future destiny and in fear, they try to silence us no matter what that involves.

Read 1 John 3:14.

- It's interesting that John tells us in verse 13 that the world will hate Christians, and now he tells us that Christians are to love Christians. Love for fellow believers is an indication that a Christian has passed from the realm of death to life. Keep in mind that our love does not cause us to earn eternal life; instead, our love is merely evidence that we have already obtained that eternal life. Again, I think there is a deeper meaning in this verse. ***“He that loves not his brother abides in death.”*** In other words, a Christian can be in the flesh and not love his brother because he is abiding in the flesh, in death.

Read 1 John 3:15.

- Again, John uses that word “abide.” If anyone hates another Christian, he is really a murderer at heart. It's like wishing that he were dead and the Lord sees the inner desire as equal to the outward act that would result from it (**Matthew 5:21-22**). It's interesting that

he ends this verse by saying, ***“you know that no murderer has eternal life,”*** or has the life of Jesus Christ abiding in Him. The Holy Spirit is reproducing the life of Christ in us and He is abiding in us. Any thought of hating my brother is not coming from Christ; it’s not coming from the Christ life.

Read 1 John 3:16.

- To understand real love, believers need only to look at Christ as the example. We can know love by this: He laid down His life for all people. Christ’s example shows believers that real love involves dying to self, which, as the next couple of verses point out, will result in death to self-actions. Keep in mind that dying to self, denying self is not something that can be done in our own strength. Back in **Luke 9:23** it says, ***“if you want to follow Me then deny yourself.”*** Most of us have tried dying to self and it doesn’t work. We cannot consistently deny self. Then Luke tells us how—by taking up ***“His”*** cross daily. In other words, by trusting and resting in our co-crucifixion with Christ, knowing that the old man has been crucified, then we can deny ourselves or die to self and follow Him or lay down our lives for one another.

Read 1 John 3:17-18.

- These verses give us an example of how the Lord would have believers lay down our lives for one another. This parallels the teaching of **James 2:14-17**. As Christ lives His life out through us, believers will respond to God’s love for us by loving others, putting other’s needs before our own. Often we find that in Christianity talk is cheap; we say we have faith, but it is faith without works. ***“I’ll show you my faith by my works...”*** (**James 2:18**). So faith not accompanied by

love for others is really not faith. Anyone can claim to have faith, but if his or her lifestyle remains selfish and worldly, then what good are the words and the speech? Truly, if Christ is living His life through us, our true faith in Christ will be expressed in love toward one another.

Read 1 John 3:19-20.

- As we proceed in our Christian lives with Christ, it happens that our hearts will accuse us. Keep in mind that our heart is the seat of our emotions—conscience would be a part of that also. These accusations may come from different sources. It could be conviction from the Holy Spirit or the accuser of the brethren working through the flesh causing an overactive conscience. An interesting comment by John here is that God is greater than our hearts. John understood that it is common for believers to have an overactive conscience. In light of God’s high and holy desire for us to love one another as Christ has loved us, believers may not love a brother or sister and therefore feel like terrible failures or even hypocrites at times. This kind of self-condemnation John wrote should be met by the truth that God is greater than our hearts. In other words, the all-wise God is aware that true believers, even though plagued by fleshly inconsistency, still have an underlying desire to do His will and the point of this passage is don’t be overly hard on yourselves and let guilt overwhelm you. Instead of focusing on our failures, we’re to focus on the Father who knows our deep desire to do His will, and by God’s grace, “***He will give us the power and desire to do His good pleasure***” (Philippians 2:13).

Read 1 John 3:21.

- Christians who are guilt-ridden and unsure of their standing with God will not want to draw near to God, but instead they will turn away from His presence. John's point is that when believers have this assurance, they can approach God. It's interesting back in **1 Timothy 1:18-19**, Paul sent Timothy out to battle with nothing more than faith and a good conscience. Faith and a good conscience are inter-dependent upon one another. If our conscience is unclear, then our faith leaks away and we cannot, as it says in **Hebrews 10:19**, approach the throne of grace boldly. We can approach the throne of grace boldly because of the blood of Christ. Therefore, when we're resting in the blood and believing that it has cleansed us of all unrighteousness, we have a clear conscience. With a clear conscience, we can boldly approach the throne of grace.

Read 1 John 3:22-24.

- In Jesus' final address to His disciples recorded in **John 15:7**, we read ***"If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you can ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you."*** If I'm abiding in Him and His words are abiding in me, then my will is now His will; my desires are His desires and when we're praying according to God's will, He will do that very thing because it's what He desires. In verse 22 we read, ***"Whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."*** What is the only thing that pleases God? **Hebrews 11:6** says, ***"Without faith it's impossible to please Him."*** Then verses 23 and 24: ***"And this is His commandment: that we should***

believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave His commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.” Remember those two often used phrases in the New Testament, “in Christ” and “Christ in you” (**John 14:20; John 15:5; John 17:21-26**). In verse 24 there’s that reciprocal union between us and Christ. The verse ends, *“and by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”* Two thoughts come to mind here. First, in **John 14:16** Jesus said that the Father would give the disciples another comforter. This expression in the Greek means, “another comforter of the same kind as the first” implying that Jesus was the first comforter and the Spirit would be the same kind of comforter. We could read verse 24 in this way: *“and hereby we know He abides in us”* because He sent the Holy Spirit to be in us. Also, it might be good to give some consideration to the fact that the Holy Spirit is the one who produces the life of Christ in us. We read in **2 Corinthians 3:18**, *“as we look at Jesus through the Word of God, we’re changed into that same image and it’s done by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

1 JOHN

CHAPTER 4

A. Warning Against False Teachers

Read 1 John 4:1.

- In **2 Peter 2:1** we read, “*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*”
- So here in **1 John 4**, we read, “*Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God (is it the Holy Spirit or is it the flesh?).*” Thomas Merton wrote, “*When a man thinks his flesh or his pride is the Holy Spirit, his case is hopeless.*” John says, “Test those spirits whether they be of God because many false prophets are going out into the world.”

B. Warning Signs of False Teachers: They Deny Christ’s Deity and Resurrection

Read 1 John 4:2-3.

- The test for discovering whether a certain teacher or prophet belongs to God is a test of his or her beliefs about the person of Jesus Christ. Remembering back to 2:22, who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ; he is antichrist that denies the Father and the Son. In **1 Corinthians 12:3** we read, “*Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the*

Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

Read 1 John 4:4.

- In contrast to these false teachers who were against God, John reassures his readers that they were of and from God. Though these believers may have been feeling weak and confused, they had overcome the false teachers, they had not been won over to their false teaching, and they had not abandoned Christ. An interesting thought to consider is that we Christians don't have to overpower false teachers to conquer them. Rather, we can overcome by recognizing them and refusing to follow their teachings. Yet our victory is not to be flaunted, nor is it something we have done on our own. We only have this victory because of God's Spirit within, because *He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.*

C. Marks of False Teachers: They Promote Worldly Standards and Therefore Face No Persecution

Read 1 John 4:5.

- “They” refers back to the false teachers who belong to this world and not to God. As mentioned before in John's gospel, the term “world” describes the world system of beliefs, which are based on satanic principles such as power, greed, and lust. Keep in mind that the world system opposes God, and so therefore we could translate verse 5 in this way: “These false teachers belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint and the world listens to them.” John is warning Christians who faithfully teach God's Word

that they will not win popularity contests in the world. People don't want to hear their sins denounced. They don't want to listen to demands that they change their behavior. A false teacher will be well received by non-Christians. To sophisticated, educated people, the gospel seems far-fetched. (God becoming a man, an invisible world beyond this world doesn't make much sense). The Christian faith also seems crude and offensive to enlightened men and women—a bloody cross to satisfy a holy God's wrath. Only one way to heaven—how archaic and narrow minded can people be? As we attempt to communicate the gospel to this generation, we are dealing with a captive audience. Captive in the sense that they are blind to God's truth and taken captive by the god of this world (**2 Corinthians 4:4**).

Read 1 John 4:6.

- The false teachers belong to the world and speak from that perspective, but we are from God. The world gladly accepts and listens to false teachers, but the Christian teachers must find another audience, those who know God and desire to listen to Him. This provides another way to determine who has the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. According to the gospel of **John 14:17 and 15:26**, the Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from God and teaches the truth about Christ. All who are indwelt by the Spirit of truth can know truth; however, the spirit of error comes from the father of lies working through the flesh and leads people into error.

D. Knowing the Love of God Enables and Empowers Us to Love as He Does

Read 1 John 4:7.

- John repeats his exhortation for all Christians to continue in love one toward another. It's interesting to give thought to the fact that God is the source of all love; therefore, love comes from God. True, biblical love does not come naturally for us humans (**Titus 2:4**). We are not born with it, neither can we learn it. The phrase, "*anyone who loves is born of God*" means just that—only those who have experienced the new birth are able to have the love described here. In addition to this John says, "*Anyone who loves knows God.*" This speaks of a continual growing in spiritual knowledge of God based on our relationship with Him; therefore, we could say that love is born of God and knows God. We could simplify that by saying everyone who loves has come to a saving knowledge of Christ and is abiding in Christ.

Read 1 John 4:8.

- John has already described God's nature as life and light and here he describes Him as love. Anyone in whom God dwells reflects His character. To claim that we know God while failing to love others is a false claim. It is just as false as claiming to know God who is light and yet still living in darkness. Real love is holy and just and perfect, just like God. Those who truly know God will love as He does. John ends this verse with the phrase "*for God is love.*" Love is God's very essence. It is not one of God's many activities. Instead, all of God's activities are filled with love. When He disciplines or teaches, He does so with love. Conversely, because He loves He disciplines and teaches. Because He is love, He can do nothing

without love. The next verses clarify the meaning of “God is love.”

Read 1 John 4:9.

- This verse declares all the wonderful truth found in **John 3:16**. Like no other, it seems to encapsulate the basic message of the gospel. It is the good news in a nutshell. God showed how much He loved us by sending His only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. The great proof of God’s love is that He sent His only Son, who is life, so that we could live through Him.

Read 1 John 4:10.

- The Greek language has four words to explain four different kinds of love: *eros*—sexual passion; *storge*—family devotion; *philos*—friendship; *agape*—loving kindness. This fourth word is used exclusively by John to characterize God’s love. It speaks of an unconditional love, compassion, unselfishness; and this kind of love is characteristic of God and motivated Him to send His Son into the world to die for undeserving sinners. Notice again what John says, “***this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us.***” The love relationship was initiated by God. People have nothing to do with it. How could we? All people are born dead to God. **Ephesians 2:1** states that we were dead in trespasses and sins. We were separated from Him. He loved us even though we were totally unworthy of His love. He loved us so much that He sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. The supreme manifestation of God’s love was demonstrated in sending His Son to die in order to take away the sins of all who believe. Often couples debate about who loved

whom first. But John makes it clear that when it comes to a person's relationship with God, there is no question about who made the first move. God loved first. He initiated, not in response to our movement toward Him—not because we were lovable or deserving—in fact, the opposite is true. The Apostle Paul observed while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (**Romans 5:8**). This is the mystery of mercy, the miracle of grace. God chose to love a race of rebels and prodigals and it is this kind of love that believers are called to share with the world—a love that actually pursues evil doers until they stop running and then blesses them.

Read 1 John 4:11.

- Because we believers are born of God, we should resemble our Father who is love. As we grow in an understanding of God's love for us, our love for Him and for other Christians will grow as well. The way God loves us—sacrificially, unselfishly, completely—provides the power and desire for our love for others. **2 Corinthians 5:14** states, “*The love of Christ constrains us, (or compels us).*” In **Ephesians 3:17-19** we read, “*Being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passes all knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.*” The idea here is that as we begin to understand God's love for us, it will compel us, constrain us to love others. If we have a godly old grandmother who we know truly loves us, we'll do anything for her. When we begin to understand the breadth and length and depth and height of God's love and become rooted in God's love, it will give us not only the desire, but also the power to love others as God has loved us.

Read 1 John 4:12.

- Let's give some thought to John's statement, "***no one has seen God at any time.***" In **John 1:18**, we read, "***no one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.***" In **Exodus 33:20**, Moses asked to see God's glory, but God explained no human can see God and live. In **John 6:46**, Jesus said, "***no one has seen the Father except he who is of God, this one has seen the Father.***" Now if no one has ever seen God, then how can people ever know Him? Only the Son, who is Himself God, has seen God and can communicate His glory to humanity. Going on in verse 12, "***If we love one another, God abides in us and His love has been perfected in us.***" Through the Holy Spirit, God lives in Christians today. And His love is evident through believers' love for one another. With the Holy Spirit within each believer's life, we Christians can love one another and our love reveals that God Himself is present and we are partaking of that divine nature. When we love one another, the invisible God is revealing Himself through us.

Read 1 John 4:13.

- In **John 14:16-20** we read, "***And I will pray the Father and He will give you another Helper that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day, you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.***" After Jesus'

resurrection the disciples would begin to experience what it meant to live in God and have God live in them once Christ sent to them the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. Thereafter they would know that the Son is in the Father, they were in the Son, and the Son is in them. When we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit. God's presence in our lives is proof that we really belong to God. The only way believers can have this mutual relationship with the Father (we in Him and He in us) is because of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Read 1 John 4:14.

- “We” refers to the apostles and other eyewitnesses of Christ's life on earth. They were appointed by Christ to testify to others about their firsthand eyewitness experiences. Therefore, Christians have two proofs of God's love for them: the indwelling presence of God's Spirit and the eyewitness testimonies of the apostles and those who knew Jesus. The expression, “*Savior of the world*” occurs only one other time in the New Testament. In John's gospel when the Samaritans are recognizing that Jesus is the Messiah, John makes it clear Jesus was not just the Jew's Messiah, but also the Deliverer of all who put their trust in Him (**John 4:42**).

Read 1 John 4:15.

- When people proclaim or confess that Jesus is the Son of God, they are declaring their belief that Jesus is God's one and only Son who came to earth as a human being, died on a cross, rose again, and returned to heaven. They also believe that His death on the cross won forgiveness for sin. Jesus Christ is not a mere human being, nor is He one among many deities. He is God Himself in the flesh. People who believe this about

Jesus have God living in them and they live in God. They are indwelt by God and simultaneously dwell in God. This mutual indwelling experienced by the Father and the Son, we see in verses like **John 10:38; 14:10; 17:21**. It is also a special privilege for Christians (**John 14:20; 15:5; 17:21-24**). There appears to be a bit deeper meaning here in **1 John 4:15** than what would meet the eye: “*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God*”—I look back on my own Christian life and I don’t think I truly understood that Jesus Christ was God Himself until a number of years after believing the Gospel. I had heard it, but looking back see no evidence that it was a heart belief. I think that’s what John is saying here. Whosoever really and truly believes that Jesus Christ is God Himself—not only is God dwelling in him, but He is abiding and resting in God.

Read 1 John 4:16.

- To the degree that we don’t know God, we’ll trust in other things. The picture here is of a Christian who really and truly knows how much God loves him and so, therefore, he is able to trust and rest and depend on that love. It’s interesting to give thought to the fact that the love that God has is not only for His people, but also works through them, producing a responsive love back toward Him and also toward other Christians. When a believer knows God loves him, it totally changes his life. God is love, those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them. To say that God is love does not mean that God merely possesses an unusually great quantity of love. It means that God’s very nature resonates love. Everything God has done and will do from eternity past to eternity future overflows with love. Practically speaking, this truth means that as we relate to God, we can always know we are being treated with

perfect, unconditional love. Our circumstances may be difficult, but behind it all and through it all, God will accomplish His best in our lives because of His great love for us.

Read 1 John 4:17.

- Because of this mutual indwelling—God abiding in believers and we abiding in Him—and because this relationship is grounded in God’s perfect love, then God’s love is made perfect or complete in believers. Why? Because it’s actually God’s love that’s flowing in and through us. This complete, mature, perfect love will produce believers who have a confidence on the Day of Judgment. Of course, confidence means the opposite of fear. Living with Christ and growing more perfect in His love is going to develop a confidence in our relationship with Him. John goes on in the verse, “...*because as He is, so are we in this world.*” The idea here is that because He is abiding in us and we are abiding in Him, we have this boldness to come before the throne of grace in the Day of Judgment for the simple reason that “it is no longer I but Christ”—“as He is, so are we.”

E. The Problem of Fear

Read 1 John 4:18.

- Because believers are becoming like God, they certainly need not fear Him or anything else. The fear that John is talking about is based on consciousness of guilt, anticipating deserved punishment, and thus causes a person to suffer because they are thinking about future punishment. But perfect love cannot co-exist with fear.

An interesting thought is that Christ died to deliver His people from slavery of fear (**Hebrews 2:14-15**). Again, fear cannot co-exist with love. Believers cannot approach God in love and at the same time hide from Him in fear. Keep in mind what John is saying here. Fear has to do with punishment; therefore, it cannot be part of a Christian's experience. He or she has been forgiven because Jesus already took the punishment. An interesting verse to consider would be **Romans 8:15**. We believers ought not to be afraid of the future eternity or God's judgment because of God's love. We know that He loves us perfectly **Romans 8:38-39**).

Read 1 John 4:19.

- It's interesting that some of the earlier manuscripts do not include this word, "Him" and so some of the translations actually read, "***We love because He first loved us.***" The thought here is that a believer's love, whether it be for God or for others, is based on God's love for us. God's love is the source, the initiator. People cannot love in their own power. When we believers abide in God who is love and thus abide in love, then God's love fills us and overflows from us. This love which comes from God then becomes the characteristic of God's people, and we can love as He loves. His love in us overflows to others, who then experience God's love as well.

F. The Problem of Hate

Read 1 John 4:20-21.

- Occasionally, I have heard this question: "If I do not love my brother or sister in Christ, does that mean I am

not saved?” Why would that question arise in someone’s mind? Often, it’s because of what they have read right here in **1 John 4:20-21**. This is a great example of how people are not accurately handling the Scriptures. Let’s consider the book of John and the book of 1 John. We must not confuse the purpose of the gospel of John, with the epistle of 1 John. The gospel of John was written to tell us how we can be certain of eternal life. John acknowledges this in **John 20:31**: *“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”* Thus the word “believe” is used 98 times in the gospel of John. John wants us to know that we obtain eternal life simply by believing, trusting Christ alone to save us. However, 1 John was written to tell us how to be close, or how to have a relationship or fellowship with the One that we have believed in. We saw that back in **1 John 1:3-4**. For this reason, John uses the word “abide” 26 times in the book of 1 John. We know Christ by believing. We get close to Christ by abiding, walking with Him day by day and depending on Him to live His life through us. Now the meaning here of **1 John 4:20-21** becomes clear. You can know God for salvation and hate your brother. How many Christians do we know who struggle in this area? But we cannot love God and hate our brother. If we love the Father, we will also love His family. As **1 John 4:21** stated, *“He who loves God loves his brother also.”* It is not one’s salvation that John is addressing here; it’s his closeness and fellowship with God.

1 JOHN

CHAPTER 5

A. True Love for God the Father Revealed by Love and Obedience toward Christ

Read 1 John 5:1.

- To discern whether a person is a true Christian, one needs to look at what that person believes about Jesus Christ. The true believer believes that Jesus is the Christ. Of course, to believe means to put one's trust and confidence, to be convinced of the truth. So, what is the truth? The truth is that Jesus is the Christ, which means that He is God's Messiah and He was anointed by God's Holy Spirit to die on the cross for sin and be raised from the dead to become the Savior of the world. Now belief that Jesus is the Christ and a love for God that comes from Him as we abide in Him will produce love, not only for God, but also for fellow Christians.

Read 1 John 5:2.

- Just as believers' love for their brothers and sisters is the sign and test of their love for God, so now their love for God which comes from God is the only basis of their love for Christian brothers and sisters. John was not contradicting what he had written in 4:20-21. Rather, he was insisting that love for God and love for fellow believers cannot be separated. Christians cannot truly love God without loving their brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's think about what the verse says again. ***“By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments.”*** Thinking back to what we have

already studied in this book, in chapter 2:3—“*Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.*” Therefore, we can conclude when we truly know God, we will love Him, we will keep His commandments, and we will know that we will also love His children. What would John think of Christians who claim to love God while viewing a fellow Christian as an enemy? To John, such an idea would be unthinkable. Love is not something that we can muster up, that we can measure or parcel out. It cannot be compartmentalized—we can love here and not there. Love is all-encompassing. John wrote that the only way to show love for our invisible God is to love our visible brothers and sisters.

Read 1 John 5:3.

- This echoes what Jesus said to His disciples as recorded in **John 14:15, 21, 23-24, 31** and **John 15:10**. Jesus had one commandment for them—love one another (**John 13:34, 15:17**). This one command is not grievous or burdensome because it is flowing out of God’s love, which is flowing in and through me. Notice again the beginning of this verse, “***For this is the love of God***”—not our love for God but God’s love flowing through me.

B. Faith in Christ = Victorious Living

Read 1 John 5:4.

- I enjoy thinking about this verse because it says, “***this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.***” Back in **Galatians 6:14** Paul writes, “***God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our***

Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world.” As I by faith rest in my co-crucifixion with Christ (**Romans 6:6**), I find that I will have victory and overcome the world; the world will have no power over me, and I will have no desire for the world. ***“This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith”***—faith in the truth that we’ve been crucified unto the world and the world has been crucified unto us.

Read 1 John 5:5.

- This verse confirms verse 4 with a triumphant statement. The ones who believe that Jesus is the Son of God are the only ones who will win this battle against the world. The verse explains John’s numerous warnings against worldly thinking and living. What exactly did he mean when he spoke of overcoming the world? Basically, he meant doing the will of God in a culture bent on doing its own thing. The world, or world-system as we mentioned before, is based on satanic principles of power, greed, and lust. As we by faith believe that Jesus Christ is God and that He not only died on the cross to pay for our sins, but He took us with Him and we were co-crucified with Him, we will overcome the lure of this world. The world will have no power over us; we’ll have no desire for the world.

C. Who Does the Word of God Say Christ Is?

Read 1 John 5:6.

- The one who came by water and blood can be interpreted in this way: the water refers to the

inauguration of Christ's earthly ministry at His baptism by John (**Mark 1:9-11**). The blood refers to the close of His earthly life at His crucifixion. To believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is basic to our Christian lives. How do we know that Jesus Christ really is God? Some of the false teachers in His day called Him a liar and a deceiver (**Matthew 27:63**). Others have suggested He was a religious fanatic, a mad man or perhaps a Jewish patriot who was sincere but sadly mistaken. John's epistle refutes this false teaching and presents three infallible witnesses to prove that Jesus really is God. The first witness is the water. The water refers to His baptism in the Jordan when the Father spoke from heaven and said, "***This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.***" At the same time the Spirit descended like a dove and rested upon Him. Basically, this was the Father placing His seal of approval on His son at the beginning of His ministry. The second witness is the blood. The Father gave further witness as the time drew near for Jesus to die. He spoke audibly to Jesus from heaven and said, "***I have both glorified my name and will glorify it again***" (**John 12:28**). Furthermore, the Father witnessed in miraculous power when Jesus was on the cross—the supernatural darkness, the earthquake, the tearing of the temple veil. No wonder the centurion cried out, "***truly this was the Son of God.***" The third witness is the Spirit. The Spirit was given to also bear witness to Christ (**John 15:26 and 16:14**). We can trust the Spirit's witness because the Spirit is truth. We were not present at the baptism of Jesus, nor at His death, but the Holy Spirit was. The Holy Spirit is the only person active on earth today who was present when Jesus Christ was ministering here.

Read 1 John 5:7.

- It is generally agreed by Bible scholars that this verse has no manuscript authority and has been inserted and does not belong in the letter. But by omitting it, it does not affect the teaching at all.

Read 1 John 5:8.

- This passage really has nothing to do with the trinity. It has to do with those three critical phases in Jesus' life where He was manifested as God incarnate, the Son of God in human form. This was made evident at His baptism, the water; His death, the blood; and His resurrection, the Spirit. At His baptism, Jesus was declared to be God's beloved Son (**Matthew 3:16-17**). At His bloody crucifixion, Jesus was recognized by others as God's Son (**Mark 15:39**). In His resurrection, Jesus was designated the Son of God in power (**Romans 1:3-4**). This three-way testimony is unified in one aspect: each event demonstrated that the man Jesus was truly the Son of God.

Read 1 John 5:9.

- According to the Jewish law, the testimony of one person is not a valid witness. Truth or validity has to be established by two or three witnesses (**Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15**). Since people believe human testimony when validated by two or three witnesses, John explained that, surely, they could believe the testimony that comes from God. The gospels twice record God's clear declaration that Jesus is God's Son. At His baptism (**Matt 3:16-17**) and at His transfiguration (**Matthew 17**). John said if they believe testimony from people, then they can surely rely on the three-fold witness of God in **1 John 5:8**. The three witnesses described in **5:8**—water, blood,

Spirit—are united because God Himself is behind them. All three form a single testimony from God that Jesus is the Christ.

Read 1 John 5:10.

- When people become God's children, God's Spirit which is alive in their spirit, witnesses to the fact that everything Jesus said and did was true. In fact, that is the primary function of the Spirit—to testify and reveal Jesus to every believer (**John 14:25; 15:26; 16:7-13**). However, those who do not believe the testimony that God has given concerning His Son should realize that by rejecting what God has so plainly said, they are basically calling God a liar. John was rebuking the false teachers who claimed to know God but did not believe what God Himself had said concerning His Son.

Read 1 John 5:11.

- This is the testimony that the false teachers refused to believe but the Christians held onto as the truth—that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. It's interesting to look at the number of places in John's gospel where Jesus' own words testify to this fact recorded in **1 John 5:11**—eternal life is found only by believing in Jesus Christ (**John 3:15-16; John 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 5:26; 5:39-40; 6:40; 6:47; 6:54; 6:68; 10:28; 11:25; 14:6; 20:31**).

Read 1 John 5:12.

- Eternal life is a gift. It is not something we can earn. This gift is a person, Jesus Christ. We receive eternal life not only from Christ but also in Christ. He who

has the Son has life, not just life but the life, which is life indeed—eternal life.

D. The Purpose of John's Letter and Closing Conclusions

Read 1 John 5:13.

- John wanted his readers to have no more doubts, but instead to know that they have eternal life. This wording closely parallels **John 20:31**, a verse that provides John's reason for writing what he did in his gospel. But these two parallel verses are slightly different in the original text. The gospel of John, which was written to unbelievers, encouraged them to come to faith in the Son of God as the means to enjoying the divine life. This letter of 1 John written to believers who had been unsettled in their faith by false teachers encouraged them to continue in the faith and to be firm in their possession of eternal life. In both cases, John wanted his readers to know, to be sure, that they had eternal life. Of course, this security is the basis for the other aim of John's letter, that they would abide, have fellowship, and have a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

Read 1 John 5:14-15.

- It is one thing to know that Jesus is God and that we are God's children, but what about the needs and problems of daily life? We believers can have confidence as we approach God that He listens to our prayers and will respond. Notice that the key here is "*according to His will.*" John 15:7 also sheds some light: "*If we abide in Him and His Word abides in us,*

we can ask whatever we want and it will be done for us.” The key is abiding. If we abide in Him—if we are occupied, trusting, and resting in Him and His Word is abiding in us, then we can ask whatever we want and it will be done for us. Why is that? Because if I’m abiding in Him and His Word is abiding in me, then my will is now His will and so therefore whatever I ask, it will be done for me. Definitely a parallel Scripture to these verses 14-15.

Read 1 John 5:16-17.

- This example describes the kind of petition that God will answer. Because believers have love one for another, it follows then that they will care enough to intercede with God in prayer. Intercessory prayer forms a vital part of the fellowship of the church. The question in the Scripture is what is the difference between sinning in a way that does not lead to death and the sin that leads to death? John’s readers apparently understood the difference since John didn’t elaborate further. One has to wonder if John had any idea how much discussion and controversy his comments about sin that leads to death would spark. Who can say with full assurance and authority exactly what these words of John mean? Perhaps he was referring to the truth that God has at various times in history brought a judgment of physical death on His sinning people (**Leviticus 10:1-7; Numbers 16; Joshua 6, 7; 1 Corinthians 11:30**). Maybe he was referring to the spiritual death that comes to all who reject Christ. Whatever the case, it is not our place to become sin hunters. God has not commissioned us to monitor the lives of others and rank their wrong acts, but we are to be concerned enough to pray for them.

Read 1 John 5:18.

- There is little or no security in believers attempting to keep themselves secure. Rather, it is God's Son who securely holds believers. This verse continues with *"the wicked one does not touch them."* Peter's experience with Satan helps us to understand this truth. *"Simon, Simon,"* said Jesus. *"Behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brother"* (Luke 22:31-32).

Read 1 John 5:19.

- Believers can know our position with God and in eternity. We know we are children of God and because of that we have been freed from Satan's power. While the rest of the world is under the control of the evil one, Christians stand apart, separate from the world and from Satan, united together with God. Even those the world considers wise, great, and respectable, are under Satan's domain.

Read 1 John 5:20.

- Again, John reminds believers of what they know to be true. They know that the Son of God has come. The false teachers had done their best to set Christ aside, to make Him unimportant and to have so-called knowledge of God without Christ. But John has been explaining throughout this letter that this is impossible. Jesus Christ is central to true, Christian faith. Jesus came to earth, returned to heaven, and now is present through the Holy Spirit. The Son's purpose in coming to earth was to reveal God the Father and to enable the

believers to know Him experientially. To be in God is to be in His Son, Jesus Christ. When believers are united to the Son, they are also united to the Father.

Read 1 John 5:21.

- The letter closes with a final caution. Given the context of this letter, idols probably refer to false teachings that present false images of Jesus Christ, who is the only true God and eternal life. An idol can be anything that occupies us or takes our focus off Christ. “***Keep yourself from idols***” is John’s way of saying keep yourself from anything that might take God’s place in your heart. In this letter John presented a clear picture of Christ. What Christians think about Jesus Christ is central to their relationship with Him.

Introduction

Truth is hard to find. Consider secular advertisements—we are barraged by spectacular claims for a multitude of products. But are they true? And then there is political rhetoric in an election year, filled with promises, charges, and countercharges. Citizens are often confused as to which way to vote. Joining these voices are the proponents of a wide variety of philosophies and ideologies, all alleging truth.

First-century believers had a very similar experience with false teachers preaching a false gospel. So under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John wrote this strong letter, urging readers to focus on Christ, “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14:6).

2 JOHN

WATCH OUT FOR FALSE TEACHERS–1-11

The opening verses display the typical format for letters in the first century: identification of the writer and identification of the recipients, followed by a blessing. In the first four verses of this short letter, the word “truth” appears five times: “*whom I love in truth*,” “*all those who have known the truth*,” “*because of the truth, which abides in us*,” “*in truth and love*,” and “*walking in the truth*.” False Gnostic teachings were beginning to infiltrate the church prompting John to counter these falsehoods with strong admonitions to the believers about knowing and living in the *truth* concerning Jesus Christ. In 1 John, he explained how the believers could know they were grounded in the truth and how they could discern whether teachers were true or false.

The obvious follow-up, then, was the question of how the believers should act toward the false teachers who had been causing so much trouble in their churches. Both 2 and 3 John focus on “truth” and on refusing to give a hearing, hospitality, or any sort of encouragement to those who do not teach the truth.

Read 2 John 1-2.

- In this informal letter, John did not stand on his authority as an apostle but spoke of himself as an *elder*—one who watched over the believers with loving concern for their spiritual well-being. John had been one of Jesus’ twelve disciples. He wrote the Gospel of John, three letters, and the book of Revelation. He may have been the only remaining living member of the twelve disciples.

- In ancient Greek, all words were written in capital letters. Therefore, one cannot tell from the printed page if “**chosen lady**” (also translated “elect lady”) refers to a specific woman. Most commentators and translators do not identify the recipient of the letter as an individual because the letter does not speak of the woman with any particular details (in contrast to 3 John, which speaks specifically of Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius). Most likely, therefore, “the chosen lady” refers to a local church.
- If the recipient was a woman, then “**her children**” would have been her actual children. As a local church, however, the “children” are the members of the church. At this time, most churches were smaller groups of people that met in homes. Sometimes several house churches would meet in the city at the same time (**Philemon 2**). John dearly loved these believers. In 1 John, he revealed his love by calling them his “dear children” (**1 John 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21**). The corporate love of all believers for one another comes through in John’s words “**whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all those who have known the truth.**” John spoke of this corporate love also in his first letter (**1 John 2:9-11; 3:10-20; 4:7-21; 5:1**). Believers love one another because of the common truth they believe and share. Truth functions as the bond of believers’ fellowship, and it also reveals false teachers.
- “**The truth, which abides in us will be with us forever.**” God gave the truth to people in Jesus Christ, the full expression and embodiment of truth (**John 14:6; Ephesians 4:21**). Jesus says, “**I am truth.**” He doesn’t say “I will teach you truth,” but rather “**I am the Truth.**” Thus, truth dwells in believers because Christ dwells in them (**John 1:17**). “Truth” means much more than correct teachings; truth centers in

Jesus Christ. The truth is the reality of Jesus Christ, as opposed to the lies of the false teachers. Because Christ is eternal, truth is also eternal, not subject to change. Because Christ lives in believers, truth will be with them forever.

Read 2 John 3.

- The words “grace” and “peace” were standard greetings in many letters of the day (**Romans 1:7; Galatians 1:3; Philippians 1:2**). Only in his letter to Timothy, however, did Paul employ all three of the words that John used here—“grace, mercy and peace” (**1 Timothy 1:2**). “Grace” means God’s undeserved favor shown to sinners whereby he saves and gives the power and desire to live the Christian life. The only other time John wrote of grace was in **John 1:16-17**: *“From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* God gives grace to believers as a continual supply (**Romans 5:20b**). The same is true for mercy and peace; God reveals his “mercy” (not getting what we deserve) by forgiving and freeing people from sin’s penalty. There are basically three kinds of peace mentioned in the Bible: “Peace with God (**Romans 5:1**); “Peace from God” (**Romans 1:7**); and the “Peace of God” (**Philippians 4:7**).
- The title “*God the Father*” points to the unique relationship Christians have with God. He is our father; we are His children. Jesus Christ referred to here as “*the Son of the Father*” points to the unique relationship between God and Jesus. While all believers can call God their Father, only Jesus is the unique Son of God who is one with God Himself.

- “***Truth and love***” form a bridge into the remainder of the letter. John speaks more directly about truth in verses 2 and 4 and about love in verse 5.

Read 2 John 4.

- John wrote that he experienced great joy in finding that “***some of your children***” (referring to the believers) were “***walking in truth.***” It seems as though John had received news of the church, including the sad information that it had suffered a division because of the work of the false teachers. But John rejoiced that “some” of the believers were walking with/abiding in Christ.
- Christianity had spread to many cities in the world. Sometimes there were several house churches in a city. True teachers and false teachers were increasing rapidly. Because there were many false teachings about Jesus Christ in the days of the early church, the apostles had to describe which teachings about Jesus were true and which were false. The true teachings were labeled as apostolic; the false teachings were labeled as heretical. Believers who adhered to the apostolic teachings, both in doctrine and in daily life, were walking in the truth/abiding in Christ.
- The commandment to live and walk in truth came from the Father through the Son to the disciples (**John 15:15**), who passed it on to the believers (**Matthew 28:19-20**). John had explained in another letter, “***And this is His commandment: that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He commanded us***” (1 John 3:23).

Read 2 John 5.

- “*I plead with you*” implies some degree of authority on the part of the person asking, as well as John’s deep concern for these believers. What John was asking was not something new as though he had received a new revelation (which the false teachers claimed), but rather a commandment that the believers had “*from the beginning.*” The Christians had been taught this commandment (to love one another) from the time they first heard the gospel preached (**John 13:34; 1 John 3:11**).
- The statement that Christians should love one another is a recurrent New Testament theme. Yet love for one’s neighbor is an old command, first appearing in the third book of Moses (**Leviticus 19:18**).

Read 2 John 6.

- Lest anyone wonder what John meant by the word “love,” he explained it here. Love does not focus on emotions or feelings; instead, true biblical love is the dying of self for the one who is loved (**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**). The one referred to here is God. Therefore, we show our love for Him by loving one another (verse 5). Love is expressed by dying to self, and dying to self fulfills the command to love. John made the same proclamation in his first letter (**1 John 3:11, 16-19**).
- Four times in verses 4–6 appears a form of the word “command.” Yet the commands are motivated and carried out through love. John wanted his readers to know that he spoke as an elder, as an apostle, and as a loving father to his children—with authority from God Himself.

Read 2 John 7.

- Here is the warning of this letter: Beware of the many deceivers (false teachers) who do not believe that Jesus Christ came to earth in a real body. John's first letter mentioned this heresy (**1 John 4:2–3**). Jesus had warned His disciples that false teachers would arise and lead many astray (**Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**). Jesus' words had come true, for many of these false teachers had "*gone out into the world*." Jesus is truly the Son of God who came to earth as a human. He is both fully human and fully God.
- These false teachers were against Christ; they were both deceivers and antichrists. John's first letter states, "*You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and already many such antichrists have appeared. These people left our churches because they never really belonged with us [...] If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist*" (**1 John 2:18-19; 4:3**). Many false teachers taught that the spirit is good and matter is evil; therefore, they reasoned that Jesus could not have been both God and man. In strong terms, John warned against this kind of teaching, and he warned Christians not to be deceived (vv. 8-9) and not to give encouragement or hospitality to the deceivers (vv. 10-11; **1 John 2:26**).

Read 2 John 8.

- This verse could read: "Watch yourselves, that you do not lose the reward that we [the apostles] worked for, but that you receive a full reward."
- John was warning believers to stay watchful and careful not to be deceived. Jesus warned His disciples that many would come with lies and would try to deceive the believers (**Matthew 24:4-5, 24**). John did not want these believers to follow the lies of the false

teachers and thus lose what the apostles (“*we*”) had worked to bring them—the gospel truth and a full reward. This “*full reward*” refers to the rewards that are given to those who walk in the Spirit, and by faith through grace, manifest the fruit of the Spirit and the life of Christ. What they had “*worked for*” refers to the labor of John, the other apostles, and coworkers—proclaiming the truth, defining the truth, and defending the truth against heresy, to build up the church. The believers, in turn, were admonished to exercise care in protecting that work from the destructive teachings of deceivers (v. 7).

Read 2 John 9.

- To “*not abide in the doctrine of Christ*” literally means to go beyond or too far. This may be a remark aimed at the false teachers who proudly claimed to be offering “advanced” teaching. Their so-called “advanced” or “deeper” teachings, however, had gone beyond the boundaries of true Christian belief. They had “wandered beyond” the teachings of Christ and, in the process had lost God himself.
- John had written previously, “*No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also*” (1 John 2:23). To have Christ is to have God, for they are one (John 1:18; 14:7).

Read 2 John 10-11.

- The New Testament has many verses regarding hospitality (Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:8-10). In John’s historical context, the command “*do not receive him into the house*” probably referred to a house meeting of the church, which would have been visited by

various teachers traveling from local church to local church. In the early days of the church, believers met in homes (**Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15**). These meetings could be spoiled by the presence of false teachers and false prophets (**2 Peter 2:1, 13; Jude 12**). The only way to deal with such people was not to welcome them into the fellowship. If these people do not bring this teaching; that is, the apostolic teaching concerning Christ, then the believers must not even give them a hearing.

- To welcome them, said John, is to participate in their evil deeds. Encouraging or helping false teachers, even if only to attempt to show “Christian kindness,” identified believers with, and basically implied approval of, the false teachers. The expression “participate in,” also translated “becomes a partner,” literally means “have fellowship with.” Believers cannot have fellowship both with God’s children and also with antichrists who are God’s enemies.
- John was not teaching that the church should not welcome unbelievers or even those who have been led astray by false teachers. He was teaching, however, that the door must be closed to those teachers who are dedicated to opposing the true teachings of God. Finally, John did not teach that Christians should shut out believers with different points of doctrine. The false teaching on which John was focusing was the refusal to accept Jesus as both God and man.

JOHN’S FINAL WORDS—12-13

The letter closes with a promise of further communication in person.

Read 2 John 12.

- The “you” to whom John had “*many things to write*” is plural in Greek, indicating a plural recipient; namely, the members of a particular local church. John’s desire to talk with the believers, rather than write more, accounts for the brevity of the letter. John’s love for the believers was not satisfied merely by paper and ink; he longed to visit them personally. As the apostle, elder, and father in the faith, he desired to come to them as a true teacher. As he and the believers fellowshiped together, their joy would be complete (made fully). John also made that statement in his other letters (**1 John 1:4; 3 John 13-14**). John’s joy was made full by his fellowship with other believers.

Read 2 John 13.

- Since the chosen sister is not named, John was probably referring to the sister church where he was staying while he wrote this letter. The children, then, referred to the church members. Believers in all churches all over the world have a common faith in Jesus Christ. Because of this, they share one another’s joys and sorrows. While the believers in these churches may not have known one another, they sent their greetings to these fellow Christians.

Introduction

- Loyal ... kind ... friendly ... reliable ...
- Cynical ... cheap ... irresponsible ... bitter ...

Descriptive and definitive words come to mind when specific names are spoken. A certain man is described as generous, another as stingy. One woman is pictured as outgoing, another as reserved. People are known for their actions; over time, they build reputations, and adjectives accumulate on their personal resumes.

For example, little is known about Gaius or Demetrius, except that both men were generous and faithful. Diotrephes barely makes a ripple in history, except that he is described as self-centered and mean-spirited.

Third John may be short, but it speaks much about the value of a good reputation.

3 JOHN

GOD'S CHILDREN LIVE BY THE TRUTH—1-12

The main body of this letter has two purposes. The first paragraph (vv. 5-8) commends Gaius for his hospitality to the itinerant missionaries who are traveling and preaching the gospel message. The missionaries have spoken well of Gaius's love for the church.

The second paragraph (vv. 9-12) warns against the insubordination of a certain man named Diotrephes. His love of power and authority has led him not only to defy the authority of the elder, but also to convince others to follow his defiance or be excommunicated. Gaius is warned not to be influenced by Diotrephes' example.

Read 3 John 1.

- The author of the second epistle identified himself in the same way. The elder, John, was one of Jesus' original twelve disciples. In addition to 1, 2 & 3 John, he wrote two other letters—the Gospel of John, and the book of Revelation. As in the previous letters, John did not focus on his apostolic authority but spoke of himself as an elder who watched over the believers with loving concern. Apparently, the readers recognized John as the author from this title alone.
- ***“To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.”*** Gaius was a common name in the Roman Empire. Men named Gaius appear in the pages of the New Testament (**Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14**), but it is unclear if any of them are the same “Gaius” to whom John wrote this letter. John considered Gaius a dear friend or ***“beloved”*** (vv. 2, 5, 11). The tenor of this letter indicates that Gaius

occupied a position of leadership and responsibility in a local church. Gaius may have owed his conversion to John (v. 4).

- “***Whom I love in truth***” could also be expressed as “whom I truly love.” The emphasis, however, was not on John’s sincerity but on their common relationship with Christ. John and Gaius were beloved brothers because they both believed the same truth about Jesus and experienced the same realities of the divine life (2 John 1, 4).

Read 3 John 2.

- John was deeply concerned for Gaius’s physical (“***in health***”) and spiritual well-being (“***your soul prospers***”), and his sincerity was revealed in his love for Gaius (“***beloved***”).

Read 3 John 3.

- These “***brothers***” (fellow believers) were either men sent by John to check on the situation in various churches under John’s ministry, or they were traveling teachers—the kind who promoted apostolic truth, as opposed to those who spread falsehoods (vv. 6-7). They reported back to John and told him about Gaius’s faithfulness and that he was living in the truth. It marked his character and life.

Read 3 John 4.

- John’s children referred to here were his spiritual children, the members of the Christian communities he served. John wrote of his “children” because he was the spiritual father of many. John’s joy came from hearing that the believers under his care were not

straying from the gospel message but were walking in the truth (**2 John 4**) To “walk in the truth” means living out the truth by applying it or expressing it in one’s behavior. Gaius was doing this, and John had no greater joy than hearing of this in the life of one of his spiritual children.

Read 3 John 5.

- These traveling teachers may have been sent from various churches to proclaim and teach the gospel. Because false teachers were infiltrating the churches, strong believers who taught the truth were very important. These traveling prophets, evangelists, and teachers were helped on their way by people like Gaius who housed and fed them. Gaius lovingly cared for these men who served the Lord, even when they were strangers to him. Finding good accommodations was very difficult for travelers who had no friends in the area. Inns were not very good places to stay. Such hospitality was vital to the spread of the gospel.

Read 3 John 6-7.

- “*If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God*” means that the traveling Christian workers whom Gaius had helped had mentioned his generous hospitality in an assembly of believers where John was present. Gaius’s selfless kindness was held up as an example for others. The future tense “*you will do well*” means John was encouraging Gaius to continue in this practice. John affirmed Gaius in his willingness to “*send [the teachers] forward in a manner worthy of God,*” meaning that he helped them by providing food and lodging, encouragement, and needed supplies as they continued their travels.

- These teachers were traveling with a purpose—to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some versions translated this “*for the sake of the Name*,” emphasizing the true identity of Jesus Christ, which was being challenged by various false teachers. These traveling teachers or missionaries were promoting the truth that Jesus is God’s Son come in the flesh. That they were accepting no support from non-believers means that they were completely dependent on other Christians for their support. A common sight in the ancient Roman Empire was the vagrants who traveled about begging for money from anyone and everyone. The Christian missionaries were not to appear that way. It is the church’s responsibility to care for Christian workers; this should never be left to nonbelievers. This parallels Jesus’ words to his disciples when he sent them out to spread the gospel (**Mark 6:8-10**). When the apostle Paul came to a town, he often stayed for a long time and worked at a trade to support himself (**1 Thessalonians 2:9**). At times he received gifts, and he acknowledged that traveling missionaries should be supported (**1 Corinthians 9:14**).

Read 3 John 8.

- Most modern versions read in this way: “*We ought to support such people*.” Believers are the ones who “ought” to receive and support these traveling preachers.
- When Christians help someone who is spreading the gospel, they are in a very real way co-workers with the truth. This is the other side of the principle in **2 John 10**. Not everyone should go to the mission field; those who work for Christ at home are vital to the ministries of those who go and who need financial support.

Read 3 John 9.

- The letter referred to here was probably neither 1 nor 2 John but another letter that no longer exists. Apparently, John had previously sent this letter to the church (of which Gaius was a member), encouraging them to welcome, receive, and help the traveling teachers whom John was sending their way and perhaps to give support to help them along their journey. But a man named Diotrephes had refused to acknowledge the apostle's authority (literally, he "***does not receive us***"). He ignored the letter. This necessitated John's writing this letter to Gaius so his words would be heard.
- Diotrephes, "***who loves to have the preeminence among them***" (literally, "loving to be first among them"), apparently refused to support these traveling preachers, thus snubbing John in the process. Diotrephes had an important position in the church but was blinded with pride and self-importance (**1 Timothy 3:6**).
- Diotrephes' lust for leadership was symptomatic of the same lust that would take over the church in the following centuries. One by one, churches formerly cared for by a group of elders, were taken over by one leader. This eventually led to a whole system of bishops, cardinals, and a pope.

Read 3 John 10.

- John would deal with Diotrephes personally if he were able to visit Gaius's church (v. 14). This verse explains some of what Diotrephes was doing. He apparently wanted to control the church. John refers to four errors of Diotrephes:

1. Diotrephes refused to acknowledge the authority of other spiritual leaders (v. 9).
2. Diotrephes was gossiping maliciously about those leaders.
3. Diotrephes refused to give hospitality to the brothers sent from John.
4. Diotrephes was attempting to “*put out of the church*” those who opposed his leadership, as well as those who received the brothers sent from John.

Read 3 John 11.

- John’s reaction to Diotrephes is surprising. Instead of expressing revenge, John promoted goodness (continue giving support and being hospitable). John encouraged Gaius to continue to follow what is good, for whoever does good is from God. John wrote at length in his first letter about how believers must show forth love. Those who do not love do not know God, for God is love (**1 John 4:8, 16**).

Read 3 John 12.

- John here mentioned a man named Demetrius in a way that made him a complete opposite to Diotrephes. Demetrius exemplified goodness, whereas Diotrephes exemplified evil. Nothing is known about Demetrius except that he may have carried this letter from John to Gaius. The book of Acts mentions an Ephesian silversmith named Demetrius who opposed Paul (**Acts 19:24**), but this is probably another man.
- Demetrius had a high regard for truth, which was a great testimony to his character. “*We also bear witness*” means that in addition to the testimony of everyone who knew Demetrius, and of the truth itself,

John and his coworkers also gave him their commendations. The believers, especially Gaius, could believe John's statements because John spoke the truth (**John 19:35; 21:24**).

JOHN'S FINAL WORDS—13-15

The letter closes with a promise of further personal communication followed by some greetings.

Read 3 John 13-14.

- John had much to tell his readers, but since John was anxious to deal with the situation in person, he limited his written words. He hoped to see them soon and talk face to face. John said much the same thing at the end of his other short letter (**2 John 12**).
- “*Peace to you*” forms a standard closing. Gaius would need the peace that Jesus gives in the days ahead (**John 20:19-26**), especially as he continued to refuse to acknowledge Diotrephes' leadership. The friends sending their greetings were other believers.



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