

Our Journey Through The Epistles of John

1st John / 2nd John / 3rd John

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Southside Baptist Church
Second Edition
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Unless otherwise noted all Scripture is taken from the New King James Version

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First John

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Lesson #1 - Introduction

Welcome to the First Epistle of John

Setting the Stage:

James and his brother John were working with their father Zebedee mending nets. As fishermen this was something they had to do every day. Fishing in those days didn't involve rods and reels. Instead, they would row their boat into the rough Sea of Galilee and spread their nets in a large arc to cover as much area as possible. Then after a time they would haul their heavy nets in by hand, hopefully laden with fish, and bring them into the boat. It was hard, back breaking work that either built your body into ropes of muscle or it broke you down. But hauling fish resulted in the heavy nets being drug along the bottom, which meant they were usually damaged. So after hours of toiling on the sea and stone-tired from their hard work, Zebedee and his sons were going through the daily ordeal of repairing their nets in preparation for their next fishing trip. As they sat in the Galilean sun mending their wares Zebedee may have thought about how fortunate he was to have two strong sons. The older he got the more difficult it became to row his boat and cast out and haul in the heavy nets. He was so glad to have his two strong boys because he needed them now more than ever.

But that would change today.

*As they sat mending their nets a young Rabbi approached. He was an unassuming young man, a carpenter by trade, but He knew so much about God's holy scriptures and spoke with such power. As He approached the boat with two other fishermen, Peter and Andrew, He said to James and John, **"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."** And just that quickly Zebedee's boys were gone. But the nets were not mended, and who would*

pull in the fish tonight? Zebedee pondered this as he watched James and John walk away to spend their lives casting nets of truth and hauling in catches of men. (Refer to Matthew 4:12-22).

James and John became part of twelve men Jesus would choose to accompany Him during His short earthly ministry. Socially and economically these were just ordinary men. Nothing special. Some were fishermen, one was a hated tax collector, another was a zealot who hated Romans in general and particularly their tax collectors, and one would become the greatest traitor in history. But whatever their background they had been selected by the Messiah for the most important task anyone could ever have. And yet, they had no pay or company benefits. They simply followed the Carpenter wherever He went and did whatever He said. Unfortunately we know very little about most of these men. In fact, we know almost nothing about the other James, the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Bartholomew and Simon the Cananaean. But a handful are mentioned several times in the Bible by name. As a result we know a few details about Peter, James, John, Philip, Judas and much later about Paul, but some of what we know about them isn't positive. They were human and Jesus didn't change that. So they often misunderstood what He wanted and sometimes said or did the wrong thing. But with the exception of Judas they were all faithful until death.

But one of them stood out from the rest in several ways. Zebedee's son, John, who went from hauling nets to following the King of kings. Even though each of the men Jesus selected did their part, John was unique in a number of ways:

He may have been the youngest of the Apostles. The Bible doesn't tell us that but early church history indicates John was younger than the rest.

*John is known as the one “...**whom Jesus loved...**” (John 13:23), and seemed to hold a special place in our Lord's heart.*

Maybe that's because Jesus already knew John would not abandon Him as the others would do, but would instead go to Golgotha to see Him crucified. As a result, Jesus asked John to care for His earthly mother Mary. (John 19:25-27).

*It was John to whom the Holy Spirit would inspire the most iconic truth of the Christian faith, “**16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**” (John 3:16).*

*It was also to John that our Lord gave His end-times Revelation and allowed him to see the things yet to come. Jesus gave John this assignment while he was incarcerated on the Island of Patmos. A Roman penal colony in the middle of the Aegean Sea. John was there because he preached, “...**the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ...**” (Revelation 1:9).*

*It was John, who when seeing Jesus in a vision of heaven described Him as a “...**Lamb as though it had been slain...**” (Revelation 5:6). This is unique because having watched the crucifixion John may have been the only Apostle who saw Jesus in all three conditions of life - living, dead and resurrected. In other words, John may have been the only Apostle who would recognize Jesus as the “...**slain...**” Lamb.*

John may have been the only Apostle who was not martyred but instead died of old age. As a result, he may have witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

And as the last of the twelve chosen men he was sought after and revered as the last living Apostle who had first-hand experience of walking with our Lord.

*And speaking of walking with our Lord, can you imagine what John heard from Jesus? Days spent listening to Him speak, time after time hearing His impactful sermons and divine guidance, and those quiet times alone as they sat around the fire and talked late into the evening. It's hard to fathom all John heard and could share, but the Lord would inspire him to write what would become five books in the Bible - The Gospel of John, three Epistles, 1st John, 2nd John and 3rd John, and the Book of Revelation. But those texts only give us a fraction of what John could have written. As John would say of himself, “**This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.**” (John 21:24-25). But John didn't write about all the “...**other things Jesus did...**”. He wrote the things our Lord commanded him to record. And that's what has been given to us.*

So let's take a journey together with a fisher of men, John, Zebedee's son, as he teaches us truths to help guide our life and build our testimony for Jesus.

Mike

Lesson #2

Author and Timing

For centuries early church scholars and historians have attributed these three letters, or “*Epistles*” to the Apostle John. Particularly Polycarp of Smyrna (Abt. 70 - 160 AD) who was actually a student of John’s. Polycarp is known as a Christian martyr, but also for his work “*The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians.*” He attested to the authorship by John of *The Gospel of John* during the Apostles’ residence in Ephesus. Another pointer to the Apostle John as the author of the Gospel is the fact John's name is never mentioned but he is instead identified several times as the one “**...whom Jesus loved...**” (John 13:23). This would reflect the author’s humility and is in marked contrast to John being mentioned by name over twenty times in the other three Synoptic Gospels. The same historical attribution also holds true for the *Epistles of John* because only someone of his stature, knowledge and reputation could write with such authority.

Dating the Epistles is difficult because they are not written to a specific church nor do they mention a specific historical event. Even so, scholars believe they were written around 90-95 AD, when John was near the end of his life and ministering to the church at Ephesus in Asia Minor - in modern day Turkey.

Since we are discussing John as the “author” it bears mentioning that scripture in the Bible was not actually written by the men we consider to be the authors. They were simply the scribes used by the Holy Spirit to record the text God intended for all who read it. Peter confirms this in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “**20. knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21. for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**”. This does not discredit the critical role prophets and authors played, because they were selected by God to record the words given to mankind. That’s important to remember, because God is the ultimate source of the inspiration, and we are all its intended recipients.

John the Apostle

Unlike the Apostle Paul, John was probably not a learned man. Nor was he a Pharisee or member of the Sanhedrin. John was recruited by Jesus as a young fisherman. In other words, he was a normal working class guy. But he would become an Apostle uniquely

inspired to tell us about the ministry of Jesus and about the future. His writings, from his Gospel, to his Epistles, to Revelation reveal a man entrusted to record some of the most iconic and important passages in the whole Bible. And it should encourage us that Jesus accomplished that with a simple fisherman.

The Bible doesn't tell us when or where John was born, but given his role in the New Testament, and the fact he lived and preached for so long, he was the subject of much early church history. Historians believe John was born around 6 AD, in Galilee, and possibly in the village of Bethesda. From Matthew 4:12-20 we know he was living near the Sea of Galilee, and possibly near Capernaum, when he was called by Jesus. In early church writings (non Biblical) John is sometimes referred to as John the Apostle, John the Evangelist, John of Patmos, John the Elder, and the Beloved Disciple. But in any case he had a long career as an Apostle for Jesus, he was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:9), he ministered for a time with Peter (Acts 3:1), and he was chosen by God to record the end-times and the second return of our Lord (Revelation 19:11).

John came from a hard working blue-collar family - a fisherman's son - and as such would have been accustomed to hard work and long hours. Mark 1:20 indicates their business was prosperous because it says they employed **"...hired servants..."**. But even so, the life of a fisherman required dedication and hard work. Traits that would help John as he followed Jesus through a very difficult ministry. This may have been what gave John the courage to risk his own life by coming to the cross to watch the crucifixion. As a fisherman John would often have to row into rough seas if he hoped to catch fish. Even when the sea did not cooperate John would still have to row his boat into the tempest and bear whatever came his way. Likewise, when following Jesus John would have to face dangers in order to be a fisher of men. Maybe that's why when the others fled and hid during the crucifixion, John went to the cross to be with our Lord until the end.

Jesus called John to service in a very unassuming way. He simply said, **"...Follow me..."** and John and his brother, **"...immediately left their nets and followed Him."** (Matthew 4:21-22). Oh that we would be so obedient and move immediately when Jesus calls us. But it's possible John may have met Jesus at an earlier time. In his Gospel account John describes a meeting between Jesus and John the Baptist. This is the time when the prophet would proclaim, **"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29-42). Years later the same sentiment would be expressed by the Apostle John which he recorded John 3:16 in his Gospel, and again years later when he saw Jesus in heaven and proclaimed Him to be like a, **"...Lamb as though it had been slain..."** (Revelation 5:6). But John records something else about the meeting between Jesus and John the Baptist,

“35. Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” 37. The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “What do you seek? They said to Him, “Rabbi” (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), “where are You staying?” 39. He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour). 40. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated, the Christ). 42. And he brought him to Jesus.” (John 1:35-42)

From this passage we know one of the “***...two disciples...***” was Andrew, Peter’s brother, but we don’t know who the other one was. Some scholars believe it may have been John, but even if it wasn’t John seems to have been a witness to the event, and as such, the encounter would have paved the way for him to be a follower of the Lord when He called.

We know very little about John’s father Zebadee, but by piecing scripture together we may know a little more about John’s Mother Salome:

- ***“20. Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.”*** (Matthew 20:20)
- ***“16. Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.”*** (Mark 16:1)
- ***“55. And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, 56. among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”*** (Matthew 27:56)
- ***“40. There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome,”*** (Mark 15:40)
- ***“25. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”*** (John 19:25)

The Bible doesn't specifically tell us Salome was John's mother, but a comparison of the verses above indicate she may have been one of the women who ministered to Jesus

during His ministry. Some scholars consider Mark 15:40 and John 19:25 indicate Salome was Mary's sister, which would make John Jesus' earthly cousin. Both passages describe the same group of women who were at the cross.

Here we see:

- The mother of Jesus (Mary) - (John 19:25)
- Mary Magdalene (Mark 15:40 and John 19:25)
- Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses – Also called Mary the wife of Clopas (Mark 15:40 and John 19:25)
- Salome (Mark 15:40) who may be “*...His mother's sister...*” in (John 19:25).

Now to be clear, the Bible doesn't specifically say Salome was Mary's sister but I point it out as a possibility when we put these verses together. If that were the case the family association may have been why John was referred to as the one “*...whom Jesus loved...*” (John 13:23). But again, that is not clear in scripture.

But even so, James and John were part of the inner-circle with Peter. The three Apostles are mentioned several times as participating in events not shared with the other Apostles.

For example:

- They went with Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration, “**2. Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.**” (Mark 9:2)
- They were with Jesus when He raised a young girl from the dead, “**51. When He came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl.**” (Luke 8:51)
- We see this again in Mark's account “**37. And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James.**” (Mark 5:37)
- And Jesus took them with Him into the garden to pray prior to His crucifixion, “**32. Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33. And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.**” (Mark 14:32-33)

The Bible doesn't tell us why Jesus frequently selected these three men to witness events the others did not. It's very possible Jesus used the others at times but did not mention it in the Bible, or it may have been Jesus, who already knew the future, was anticipating the prominent role these three Apostles would serve and used these events to train them. In any case, in addition to being the one “*...whom Jesus loved...*” John was also a member of this group. Jesus also had a nickname for James and John that seems to separate

them from the others. He called them "**Boanerges**", an Aramaic term which is translated "**Sons of Thunder**" (Mark 3:17). This may be an indication of their outspoken personalities. A trait we see in their request to Jesus, ***“.54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?”*** (Luke 9:54)

Lesson #3

The World of John

As we've discussed many times, it's important to understand the broad context of scripture to better understand its meaning. Who wrote it? Who did they write it to? What was the worldview at the time? Our Lord does nothing haphazardly or by luck. He has a plan, He knows the future, and therefore the timing of when and where He first presented His message can be important. Particularly when we consider the mindset of the world at that time and then apply the same truths to our own world.

So before getting into chapter 1 we'll spend a bit of time focusing on the world John lived in.

So why is it so important to study John's world before we study the scripture itself? Because this is where and when God chose for these events to happen, and who the Lord selected to record them. God could have given us His word without human scribes, and He didn't necessarily need to tell us who the scripture was originally written to. But if God did it that way it might be more difficult for us to apply scripture to our own lives. So the Lord gives us real life "context" by helping us understand when the Bible was written, who it was originally written to and what their mindset was. That way we can understand the culture, worldview and character of the author and the original readers. In doing so, we get a much deeper understanding of the context in which it was written, which in turn gives us a platform to better understand what the scripture actually means to us in our world. For example, in the case of John's Epistles they were written during the Roman Empire, which in many ways is like our own culture. Large and powerful, the Roman Empire was sinful, hedonistic, immoral and focused on the pleasures of life. Looking at America today I think we can relate to that and understand the culture John was living in and writing to. His primary audience were believers who were a minority, alienated and persecuted because of their faith in Christ while living in a sinful world.

And then we see the scribe himself, John, a man who walked with Jesus through all three years of His ministry. A man in the inner circle of our Savior, who unlike the others, was allowed to live into old age, and never gave up sharing the gospel. Through the words of John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we will get a first-hand eyewitness account of what it was like to walk on earth with the King of kings. And as we do, we will apply what we learn to our own lives so we can glean even more application from the text.

As a Jewish convert to Christianity in the pagan Roman Empire John would have been very familiar with persecution. He was an eyewitness to the crucifixion of Jesus, but

throughout his own life would have suffered for his faith. We see this in Revelation 1:9, ***“...I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”*** Near the end of his life John was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, a Roman penal colony and rock quarry. John was there ***“...for the testimony of Jesus Christ...”***. In other words, for preaching the gospel at a time and place when the gospel was not welcome. But John spoke with authority because he was the last known survivor of the twelve who actually walked with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. This, plus his inclusion in the inner-circle of Jesus gave John insights and understanding few others had. That's why as we walk through the scripture he wrote we will find profound truths and iconic doctrines of our faith that came to John directly from our Savior..

John and the Roman Empire

For a more detailed study of the Roman Empire and its relationship to Israel please refer back to our lessons on Romans and Philippians. They can be found on our church website under “Resources” and the “Bible Studies”.

"All roads lead to Rome" was a common expression focusing on the fact Rome was the source of art, architecture, government and great military power that stretched across the known western world. Extending from North Africa, to Northern Europe, west to England, and as far east as modern Russia, the Roman Empire conquered and absorbed dozens of kingdoms, thousands of villages, millions of people and made all the world to be like Rome. As the empire spread, so did its art, architecture and system of government. Rome brought each conquered territory under their control with their unrelenting vice-like power and then sought to make them like Rome. For nearly a thousand years the Roman Empire controlled most of the known world -- which of course included Israel. By the first century AD, when John lived, it is estimated that as many as seven million Jews lived in the Roman Empire. Not only in the Middle Eastern sector and Israel, but throughout the villages and cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia and what is now Europe.

Throughout history Israel has been the world's most hotly contested region and over the centuries many nations have sought to destroy her. Jerusalem alone has been besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, recaptured 44 times and destroyed twice. Though their enemies have been many, there were six specific ancient empires who sought to wipe out the Hebrew people.

But why?

- Geographically – Israel occupies a key strategic location on the north/south route between Asia Minor and Egypt. It also borders the Mediterranean Sea on the west which provides harbors and access to important trade routes. Even today Israel continues to be viewed by its enemies as a potential source of natural resources. Most recently, the rich Leviathan gas fields found off its coast have attracted the attention of other nations. Some commentators believe these resources could be the “**...hooks into your jaws...**” in Ezekiel 38:4 that will bring northern armies against Israel in the future Ezekiel War.
- Politically – Israel has been a hotbed of conflict since ancient times. As the world's only Jewish nation Israel has always had cultural and ideological differences with its neighbors who were historically pagan and today are predominantly Islamic.
- Biblically – Israel, more than any other nation on earth, plays a prominent role in God's plan for mankind. As His chosen nation and intended messenger to the world, Israel has come under relentless attacks from satan as he has focused on the destruction of God's plan, defeating God's Son and the disillusionment of God's chosen nation Israel. As a result, Israel has come under his intense focus for centuries because it was through them the Messiah would come to earth. But satan has failed over and over to physically destroy Israel so to this day he seeks to influence its people to turn away from God so they will not be the source of God's redemptive gospel message to the world. But a day will come when God's future plans for Israel will be fulfilled, and at that point, “**they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.**” (Zechariah. 12:10b)

Many ancient empires sought to control the known world of their day. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Medo-Persians and Assyrians swept through regions, destroyed cities, killed or enslaved people and brought harsh rule on all they conquered. But one of the ancient empires, Greece, was different. In 338 BC the 20 year old son of Phillip of Macedonia (who incidentally conquered Philippi and gave the city its name), Alexander the Great, conquered most of the Middle East, including Israel and Judea. But unlike prior conquering nations Alexander took a different tact for subjugation. Rather than killing their captives and destroying their cities Alexander sought to psychologically conquer the people by luring them to adopt the Greek way of life. By the time he died at 32 years old Alexander had set the stage for the Hellenistic Age which sought to “*Make all Things Greece*”. As a result, conquered nations often adopted the Greek model of government, studied Greek philosophy, worshiped mythological Greek gods, and in many cases changed their traditional language to Greek. That's why the first non-Hebrew translation

of the Bible, the "*Septuagint*", was written in the Greek language because most Jews spoke Greek by that point. That's also why the New Testament was written in Greek instead of Hebrew. Although Alexander's approach was to assimilate rather than destroy, it was ironically the bloodthirsty Syrian-Greek commander, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who attacked Jerusalem in 168 BC, desecrated its temple, abominated the altar and set the prophetic stage for the antichrist to do the same thing during the Tribulation. (Daniel 9:27 / 11:21 / 11:31 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Matthew 24:15).

But after a time the Roman Empire conquered the Greek-held area that included Israel during the period between the Old and New Testaments. In 63 BC General Gnaeus Pompeius "Pompey" Magnus (106 BC to 48 BC), son-in-law of Julius Caesar, conquered Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, adding Israel and Judea to the empire. But it appears Pompey ordered the temple to be purified, restored the position of high priest and allowed the people to bring offerings to God as was required by Jewish law. He also rebuilt several cities and restored others to self-government. This period of relative peace became known as the "*Pompeian Era*". Yet, at the same time, Israel was firmly under the control of Rome, subjugated to its laws and ruled by a series of regional Prefects, Procurators and Governors appointed by the Roman senate. Among the earliest of these was Herod the Great, the so-called "king" of Judea (Luke 1:5) who ruled from 37 BC to about 1 BC. Probably not a Jew, Herod is thought to have been an "Idumen". A people group descended from Esau through the Edomites, and therefore a traditional enemy of Israel whose people were descended from Jacob. A ruthless leader, Herod was hated by the Jewish people for his heavy-handed reign. It was Herod for example, who met with the Magi as they searched for the baby Jesus and later ordered the massacre of all Jewish boys in Bethlehem under two years old in an attempt to kill the child the Magi thought was a Jewish King and a potential threat to Herod's rule (Matthew 2:16). But Herod is also known for his massive building program including the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. At his death the Romans divided Israel amongst his three sons, Herod Archelaus, Herod Phillip and Harold Antipas. Archelaus was an ineffective leader and was quickly replaced by the Pontius Pilate as the governor of Judea. Herod Antipas is the ruler most spoken of in the gospels, and it was this Herod who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) and cross-examined Jesus prior to His crucifixion. (Luke 23:6)

By the time John was born, the long occupation of Israel by Rome firmly entrenched their culture into nearly every aspect of Jewish life. Although Rome allowed the Jews to worship as they pleased, Roman administration, laws, taxes and culture were all part of being an occupied territory. This so infuriated Israel's civil and religious leaders that their hatred of Roman rule eventually distracted them to the point they totally missed the prophesied Messiah when He came to earth. They were desperately looking for a powerful

warrior king who would rid their land of the foreign invaders and establish His promised kingdom on earth. They were not looking for a lowly Carpenter who carried a message of love and forgiveness. As a result, the Jewish people misunderstood who Jesus was, viewed Him as a fraud, and demanded the Romans crucify Him. This would become the prevailing attitude amongst Jews as John left his nets to follow Jesus.

This is the world John lived in his entire life. Israel was subjugated to Rome before John was born and the empire would not fall until long after John died. As a result, John lived as a subject of an occupied people. A people accustomed to hatred and persecution in the grip of a totalitarian government.

This situation would come to a head on April 9th, 70 AD, when the Roman General Titus - son of future emperor Vespasian - laid siege to Jerusalem and surrounded the city. They cut off all supplies and literally starved them out. The city fell in September and afterwards was almost completely destroyed. Its citizens were slaughtered by the tens of thousands and the temple was demolished. Millions more were captured and sold as slaves. Some were destined to the arenas in Rome where they were publicly murdered for entertainment. Why? “...**because you did not know the time of your visitation...**” (Luke 19:44). The Messiah had come, just as the prophets foretold, but the Jewish leadership was so preoccupied with rejecting the Romans they instead rejected God. Even as the Lord Jesus stood in their midst, healed their sick, raised their dead and fulfilled scripture right before their eyes, they refused to accept Him as their King and instead had Him crucified.

And John, the son of Zebedee, would have witnessed all of this.

Lesson #4

John's Other Writings

Before we begin our study of John's Epistles let's briefly explore his other writings; the *Gospel of John* and the *Book of Revelation*. As we will see, both are a unique gift from God scribed by the Apostle John.

The Gospel of John

Often when a new believer asks where they should start reading the Bible, the answer will be "*Start with John*". But why John? Why not Genesis, or Psalms or any of the other books? Frankly, any of them would be a good starting point, and they are all God's words, but John is unique in that it gives us a close and personal view of our Savior. But also because the Lord used John to record some of the Bible's most important truths about salvation.

The *Gospel of John* is one of four Gospels in the Bible. As the first four books of the New Testament the Gospels work together to record events associated with the life and ministry of Jesus on earth. In fact, it is only through a study of the same event in multiple Gospels we're able to fully understand the narrative and its message. The word "*Gospel*" comes from the Greek word "*Euangelion*" and means "*Good news*". The Gospels tell the good news of the Messiah's coming and the redemption possible through faith in His life, death and resurrection. The Gospels are not biographical in that they do not present the entire life of Jesus. With few exceptions we know very little about the first 30 years of our Lord's life, so the gospels focus on His 3 year ministry and specifically the last week leading up to the crucifixion. The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke focus much attention on the Lord's ministry in Galilee, while John's focus is more on His ministry in Judea and Samaria.

So what is different about the *Gospel of John*? John's gospel records none of the parables found in the other three. He also doesn't discuss the birth of Jesus or His early life. John starts much further back and links Jesus to the initial creation, "**1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. He was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.**" (John 1:1-3), He then introduces us to Jesus as the light of the world (John 1:4-5), and in verse 14 reveals the humanity of our Lord and helps us understand the fact Jesus in all God and all man, "**14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**" (John 1:14), This monumental beginning of John's

gospel leaves little doubt to his intended purpose, **“31. but 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.”** (John 20:31). John’s focus (actually the Holy Spirit’s focus through John) was on salvation through faith in the Messiah who had come as Jesus. Not only were his words instructional to Jews and encouraging to Gentiles, but it would lead the lost to God’s saving grace. We see this no more clearly than in the iconic verse of our faith presented to us through John, **“16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”** (John 3:16-17).

Although the focus of our study is on the *Epistles of John*, let’s take just a moment to see how John uniquely describes Jesus throughout the text of his gospel. In this we find more than narratives of events and parables. We see an in-depth view of our Savior’s heart. By reviewing a few of these passages we’ll have a much greater insight into the nature of Jesus and the themes found in John’s later Epistles.

- Jesus is the Creator – **“1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. He was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”** (John 1:1-3)
- Jesus is God, the Word who became man - **“14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:14)
- Jesus is the Lamb of God – **“29 The next day John [The Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29)
- Jesus is the promised Messiah - **“45. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** (John 1:45)
- Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man - **“51. And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”** (John 1:51)

- Jesus is the fulfilment of the temple. The place of atoning sacrifice – **“19. Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** (John 2:19)
- Jesus is how we are born again - **“3. Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** (John 3:3)
- Jesus was the fulfillment of the serpent on the pole in the wilderness – **“14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15. that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:14-15)
- Jesus is the sole source of salvation - **“16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** (John 3:16)
- Jesus is the Groom for His church who is His bride - **“29. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.”** (John 3:29) // **“3. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”** (John 14:3)
- Jesus is the Living Water – **“13. Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14. but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** (John 4:13-14)
- Jesus is the Judge of man - **“24. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. 25. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27. and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.”** (John 5:24.27)

- Jesus is the fulfillment of manna from heaven - **“32. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ 34. Then they said to Him, ‘Lord, give us this bread always.’** (John 6:32-34)
- Jesus makes us free - **“31. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’** (John 8:31-32)
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd – **“11. ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.’** (John 10:11)
- Jesus is the King of Israel - **“12. The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: ‘Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ The King of Israel!’ 14 Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: 15 ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey’s colt.’** (John 12:12-15 - taken from Zechariah 9:9 and Isaiah 40:9)
- Jesus is the Servant - **“14. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.”** (John 13:14-16)
- Jesus indwells in believers - **“23. Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me. 25. ‘These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.’** (John 14:23-26)
- Jesus is the Peacemaker – **“27. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”** (John 14:27)

- Jesus is the Overcomer - **“33. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33)
- Jesus is the Great I AM - **“58. Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”** (John 8:58)
 - I AM the Bread of Life
 - **“35. And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”** (John 6:35)
 - I AM the Light of the World
 - **“12. Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”** (John 8:12)
 - I AM the Door - (John 10:9)
 - **“9. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”** (John 10:9)
 - I AM the Good Shepherd
 - **“11. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”** (John 10:11)
 - I AM the Resurrection and the Life
 - **“25. Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (John 11:25)**
 - I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life
 - **“6. Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** (John 14:6)
 - I AM the True Vine
 - **“5. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)**

This is just a sampling of the rich truths about Jesus given to us through John. Although all four Gospels provide an important narrative of Christ’s ministry on earth, the Gospel of John is unique in the way it defines and expresses the heart of God and the character of the Son. Through the eyewitness account of John the Holy Spirit gives us a deep understanding of salvation. So much so, the word “believe” occurs over one hundred times in John’s Gospel. This brings clarity of salvation through faith in the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

This is part of John's twofold purpose:

- To help us understand that Jesus is the Messiah. The man who is God.
- And to give us a clear message of salvation by faith in the work of Jesus as the Lamb of God.

So with that summary of the *Gospel of John* let's quickly review the other three *Gospels* for context:

- **The *Gospel of Matthew***

- The first of the four Gospels was recorded by the Apostle Matthew, or sometimes called Levi, the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). Prior to his salvation and being called by Jesus, Matthew was a hated tax collector (Luke 5:27), and as such was an unlikely choice to participate in the Lord's ministry. But in reality, we are all tax collectors to some degree, and Matthew's sin was no greater than ours. In fact, the conversion of Matthew from Jew to Christian and from a successful employee of the Roman Empire to an unemployed follower of Jesus is encouraging to all of us because it shows us the courage to step away from the trappings of the world to a life of faith. Despite his background Matthew became a trusted Apostle of the Lord and recorded what he saw during the Lord's earthly ministry. Matthew may have been written as early as 50 AD and was directed primarily to a Jewish audience. Like most of the New Testament it was written in Greek which was the most common language at the time in the Mediterranean region.
- Matthew's focus is to help his Jewish readers recognize the Carpenter Jesus as the Messiah. To do so he often quotes Old Testament scripture to provide a link between Jesus and earlier Messianic prophecies. It portrays Jesus as the long awaited Messiah and King of Israel. Particularly the connection between Jesus the Messiah and the "*Kingdom of Heaven*". A term he uses over 30 times. He also does this through the genealogy in chapter 1 which is designed to show the lineage of Jesus through king David, which would help his Jewish readers understand the Lord's role as King of Israel and the King of kings. Matthew also records five major sermons of Jesus, beginning with the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew chapters 5-7) and ending with the *Olivet Discourse* (Matthew 24), which also gives us insights into the end-times that will be further defined by John in the *Book of Revelation*. Finally, at the end of his Gospel Matthew gives us the Lord's "*Great Commission*", directing all of us to share the gospel message of Jesus to all the world.

- **The Gospel of Mark**

- Mark was not one of the twelve Apostles but he was a faithful believer selected by the Lord to record the second of the four Gospels. Also known as John Mark (Acts 12:12), Mark was a companion of Peter and later a co-worker with the Apostle Paul. Peter referred to Mark as “...**Mark my son...**” (1 Peter 5:13) and he references Mark's mother and her home in Acts 12:12. So obviously, they were close. Mark was not an eyewitness to the account of Christ's life but many believe he was recording events narrated to him by Peter. Mark was also a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) who accompanied Paul and Mark on Paul's first missionary journey. But something happened along the way and Mark deserted the team (Acts 13:13). This infuriated Paul to the point he would not let Mark participate in his second missionary journey (Acts 15:38). But over time Paul forgave Mark and he references Mark on three known occasions, at Colossi (Colossians 4:10), to Philemon (Philemon 24) and to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:11). Despite his earlier setbacks, at some point along the journey the Lord used Mark to record the gospel of His ministry. This should encourage all of us who have fallen away and returned to serve our King.
- Mark was probably written between 50-70 AD. His initial audience appears to be Gentile believers in Rome. He sometimes translates Aramaic terms or uses early Latin terms. Both would be helpful for Roman Gentiles who did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic (Mark 3:17 / 5:9). He also explains Jewish customs to help his readers understand the context (Mark 7:3). This would not have been necessary for a Jewish audience.
- Mark doesn't cover the birth or childhood of Jesus as Matthew and Luke do. Instead, he starts chapter 1 with the prophecy of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. This marks the very beginning of Christ's earthly ministry. From there Mark's theme is Christ as the Suffering Servant, “**45. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**” (Mark 10:45). This helps us understand the humanity and humility of Jesus which we must firmly grasp in order to understand the profound reality of the cross. Mark also focuses attention on fourteen miracles of Jesus which helps us make the connection between the Son of God and the Son of man. The end of Mark's gospel gives a detailed account of the trial of Jesus, His death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. Like Matthew he ends the text with the commission from our

Lord to “...**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature...**” (Mark 16:15b).

- **The Gospel of Luke**

- Like Mark, Luke was not one of the original twelve Apostles. In fact, it is believed Luke was a Gentile and not a Jew, which is indicated by Paul in Colossians 4:14. If this was the case, then Luke would be the only Gentile who recorded scripture, and not only that, when combining the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Book of Acts* - both written by Luke - he actually wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else; even Paul.
- We know very little about Luke other than the fact he was a physician (Colossians 4:14). He traveled with Paul during portions of his ministry and may have been with him at the time of his execution (2 Timothy 4:11). Although Luke did not write his gospel from firsthand experience he was diligent as he recorded what had been done during the Lord’s ministry, “**1. Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2. just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3. it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4. that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.**” (Luke 1:1-4). Here he writes to Theophilus, a friend, to record the ministry of Jesus. We know very little about Theophilus other than the fact Luke calls him “...**most excellent...**” (Luke 1:3) which may indicate a person of high status or position. Although Luke was not an eyewitness he cited other “...**eyewitnesses and ministers...**”, as sources, which may have included some of the Apostles. In any case, Luke, like the others, was inspired by the Holy Spirit so there is no reason to doubt any of what he says. This is why he can confirm he is writing this, “...**having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first...**”, in an “...**orderly account...**” and with “...**certainty...**”. Luke may have had copies of Matthew and Mark’s accounts to refer to because he uses some of the same terminology and chronology of events. But again...this makes sense because all of the Gospels were inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- Luke probably recorded his gospel around 60 AD, and taken together with Acts chronicles the ministry of Jesus from His birth through the completion

of Paul's ministry in Rome. Combined they present a unique chronology of the rise and expansion of the Christian faith. His gospel is particularly well known for the birth narrative found in Luke chapter 1 and touches on Jesus as a young boy in the temple (Luke 2:41-52). The leadup to the birth narrative and the birth itself shines light on the faith of Mary, Elizabeth and Anna. This theme carries throughout his gospel with a repeated focus on women, children, Gentiles, sinners and others who were downcast in the legalistic and male-centered Jewish environment of the time. What better person to choose to record these events than a physician. Someone dedicated to serving everyone, no matter who they were or what they had done. Luke devoted a significant portion of his Gospel to our Lord's journey to the cross. This leads to chapters 19-23 which narrate the "*Passion Week*" and the crucifixion. Luke ends his narrative with the important story of the "*Road to Emmaus*", giving us a wonderful connection between the New Testament life of Jesus and the Old Testament Messianic prophecies. He ends chapter 24 with the Ascension to heaven, which he picks up again in chapter 1 of Acts.

As we wrap up this summary of the Gospels, there's an important point we need to remember. Although the four Gospels were recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the actual author was the Holy Spirit. Each of them is written just as the Lord wanted, and when added together and cross-referenced they bring a clear picture of the earthly life and ministry of our Lord. More importantly, they portray the gospel message of redemption through the atoning work of God on the cross.

The Book of Revelation

In one sense the *Book of Revelation* is unique because it provides a detailed chronology of future events surrounding the rise of the antichrist through the return of Jesus, the Millennial Kingdom, final judgment and eternity. But in reality, what we see in Revelation is also scattered throughout the Bible through prophecy. From Genesis 3:15 where God alerts Satan of the destruction to come, through Daniel, Joel, Zachariah and others who give us prophecies of end-times events.

Revelation was probably written around 90-95 AD when John was near the end of his life. He was a prisoner on the Island of Patmos. A Roman penal colony in the Aegean Sea. He was there for preaching the gospel of Jesus, "**9. I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.**" (Revelation 1:9).

To me one of the most interesting connections between John and the Book of Revelation is the fact John may have been the only Apostle to see Jesus die on the cross. This is significant because that means John may have been the only one who saw Jesus in all three conditions of His earthly life – living, dead and resurrected. So why is that important? Because when John sees Jesus in Heaven during his vision of the end-times he sees him as “...**a Lamb as though it had been slain...**” (Revelation 5:6). Given his eyewitness to the cross John may have been the only Apostle who would have recognized Jesus this way. I find that to be fascinating. Particularly when it was through John we see Jesus most clearly described as the Lamb (John 1:29) who bore our sins on the cross (John 3:16).

Lesson #5

Introduction to the Book of First John

Background – The Epistles of John

First John / Second John / Third John

An “*Epistle*” is simply a letter or series of letters. In this case they are three letters written by the Apostle John to the early church, and by extension to the church throughout time. Although John is not mentioned by name as the author, early church history attributes the letters to him. But more telling is the fact that only someone with John’s unique, eyewitness and personal experience in the ministry of Jesus could write with such clarity and authority. This will become obvious as soon as we get into the actual text.

John’s Epistles were not written to a specific church or person, but provide all mankind with insights and instructions from the Lord. As we review John’s letters we will tie them back to other passages in the gospels and those written by Paul, that together give us clear direction on how to live our lives as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

John himself was unique amongst the Apostles, which may be why our Lord chose him as the scribe to write such touching letters.

As we’ve already discussed, some of the unique characteristics of John include:

John was the Apostle known as the one “**...whom Jesus loved...**” (John 13:23).

He was the only Apostle who did not abandon Jesus but went to Golgotha to be with our Lord while He was crucified. As a result, Jesus asked John to care for His earthly mother Mary. (John 19:25-27).

John would be inspired by the Holy Spirit to record the most iconic truth of the Christian faith, “**16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**” (John 3:16).

John was one of three Apostles (with Peter and James) who saw Jesus in His glorified state on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13).

Jesus gave John His end-times Revelation and allowed him to see the things yet to come. He did this while in a Roman prison on the Island of Patmos. He was

there because he faithfully preached, “...**the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ...**” (Revelation 1:9).

It was John, who when he saw Jesus in heaven described Him as a “...**Lamb as though it had been slain...**” (Revelation 5:6). This is unique because having watched the crucifixion John may have been the only Apostle who saw Jesus in all three conditions of life - living, dead and resurrected. In other words, John may have been the only Apostle who would recognize Jesus as the “...**slain...**” Lamb.

John described the Second Coming of Jesus like no one else (Revelation 19:11)

And it was John who said, “**This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.**” (John 21:24-25). There was so much more he could have written, but what he’s given us in what the Lord asked him to share.

These characteristics and events, and many more like them, create a resume of someone uniquely qualified to record the truths of Jesus. This enables John to share observations, instructions and guidance that could only come from someone who walked with Jesus every day and listened to His every word.

So in writing these lessons I approached them a little differently. Rather than focusing on a deep theological meaning I opted to focus on application. As we will see, through John’s pen our Lord gives us guidance and direction for living our Christian life. So I focused these lessons on how to apply what is being said to our daily lives. In doing it this way I pray it is encouraging and helpful in your own walk with our Lord.

And with that, let’s go to Chapter 1

Lesson #6

First John chapter 1 verses 1-4

The first four verses of First John are so rich in context we could literally spend a month just dissecting this short but amazing passage and tracking its theme throughout the Bible. Here we are given the unique view from someone who walked with Jesus and knew Him in a very personal way.

Now, let's explore John's beautiful introduction:

John doesn't mention Jesus by name but it's clear from verse 1 exactly who he is talking about. The term **"...from the beginning..."** reminds us John can speak with authority as an eyewitness from the very start of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:21). But, **"...from the beginning..."** also takes us back to the first few verses in the *Gospel of John* which also declared, **"...1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. He was with God in the beginning..."** (John 1:1-2). When combined with Genesis 1:1-2, these verses clarify the divinity of Jesus as God and as a member of the Trinity. But not only that, Jesus is **"...the Word..."** because He brings to us God's written word, the testimony of Jesus who brings the truth of who He is to a lost world, and it is through Jesus **"...the Word..."** through whom God presents Himself to His believing children (Colossians 1:15). But in his Gospel John also provides us a view of Jesus as both the Son of God and the Son of Man, **"...14. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth..."** (John 1:14). Jesus, who is fully God, came to earth as a man when He **"...became flesh..."** in order to take the sin of man on Himself and offer redemption to mankind. To accomplish this, verse 14 clarifies the dual role of Jesus as the *Son of Man* who, **"...became flesh and made his dwelling among us..."** and as the *Son of God* who has, **"...the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth..."** (John 1:14) John will stress this again in chapter 2 when he tells us, **"22. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?"** (1 John 2:22). This clarifies the reality of Jesus as the divine Son of God who physically came to earth as the human Son of Man. This was important for John to point out early in his letter because the humanity of Jesus was a reality disputed by false teachers in John's day. So John wanted his readers to fully grasp who Jesus is so they could understand His unique role in salvation, **"...6. Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me..."** (John 14:6). This verse connects Jesus to the description of **"...grace and truth..."** by declaring Him, **"...the Word..."**, to be the **"...truth..."** who provides **"...the way..."** to eternal **"...life..."**.

John uses a number of phrases to help us understand his unique first-hand knowledge of Jesus:

- “...**which we have heard...**”
- “...**which we have seen with our eyes...**”
- “...**which we have looked at...**”
- “...**and our hands have touched...**”

These are phrases that could only be used by an eyewitness with a close personal relationship with Jesus. Someone who walked with Him, participated in His ministry and heard His words spoken daily. John’s descriptions of “...**heard, seen, looked and touched...**” are physical actions. Not just “*I imagined*” or “*I saw a vision*”. Instead, these phrases bring credibility to what John is about to tell us because he clarifies the fact he is the one who physically experienced these events with Jesus. Interestingly, these terms that reflect a close association with the Lord are similar to phrases John used when he recorded the *Book of Revelation*. There again, John indicates what he experienced was more than just a vision:

- “...**I heard...**” (Revelation 1:10)
- “...**I saw...**” (Revelation 1:12)
- “...**I looked...**” (Revelation 4:1a)
- “...**I will show you...**” (Revelation 4:1b)
- “...**I watched...**” (Revelation 6:1)

Phrases like these are repeated over and over in Revelation indicating John had more than a vision or dream. They reflect a unique and physical view of future events so he could share them with us as an eyewitness account. Likewise, the same type of phrases used at the beginning of First John helps us understand more clearly what we are about to hear, and the fact we’re hearing it from one who observed it first-hand.

Then John goes a step further to clarify who he is talking about. In verse 1 he says, “...**this we proclaim concerning the Word of life...**”. Here he points us back again to “...**The Word...**” in John 1:14, speaking of Jesus who brings us “...**eternal life...**” (John 3:16 / John 14:6). To further clarify our Lord’s role John describes Jesus as the “...**life appears...**” who “...**has appeared to us...**”, giving further testimony to his eyewitness account of the Messiah as a physical person. This is the One who, “**4. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.**” (John 1:4) who John clarifies is someone “...**our hands have touched...**” reminding us it was John who was “...**25. Leaning back against Jesus...**” as they observed the Passover meal prior to the Lord’s crucifixion (John 13:25 / 21:20). But why was it so important for John to “...**proclaim to you what we have seen and heard...**” as an eyewitness? Because the Lord – through the pen of

John – is going to provide us with instructions for living our lives in accordance with His will. So John stresses his unique ability to provide a first-hand account giving credibility to what he is about to tell us. In other words, these are not simply John's thoughts and ideas, but they are divine instructions given to us by someone who heard them directly from the Lord. Given this, we can clearly see why John stated that his letter was intended, **"...to make our joy complete."**

In addition to providing credibility to his testimony there's another reason John stressed the fact Jesus was a physical being who could be seen, looked at and touched. He wanted to make sure his readers understood Jesus is the promised Messiah, the One who physically **"...appeared to us..."**, as a man, but who is also clearly God, **"2. the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us."** (1 John 1:2). Here the Greek word *"ephanerōthē"* is used for the phrase **"...was manifested..."** or **"was made manifest..."**. A term that simply means, **"to reveal, to make known, to show openly"**. Again, John is using this phrase to underscore the fact Jesus physically came as a man, in the **"...flesh..."** (John 1:14) to reveal Himself to us so we could believe in His life, death and resurrection as the single source of atonement. This was an important point because John lived at a time when false doctrines were rapidly growing and confusing believers. By stressing both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus John was probably combating an emerging belief system known as *Gnosticism*.

The Gnostics were a mysterious sect who combined aspects of Greek philosophy, mysticism and Christianity. They taught salvation comes through special enlightenment or divine knowledge available only to a select few. Of course, this discounts the role of Jesus as the source of our salvation through faith which makes it a false doctrine. Paul confronted a similar group in his letter to the churches at Colossae and Laodicea (see Colossians 2:1-10). He reasoned with them to understand that all the knowledge they needed for salvation came from scripture, **" 2. ...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3. in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.** (Colossians 2:2-4 / see also Proverbs 3:5 and Jeremiah 17:9). Paul admonished them to remember it is through the Lord we receive **"...all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge..."** and not through religion, mysticism or philosophy. Paul's reference to **"...persuasive words..."** reminds us of the warning he gave Timothy that still applies today, **"3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4. and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."** (2

Timothy 4:3-4) Here Paul also reiterates what their focus must be, **“2. Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”** (2 Timothy 4:2). But what a sad commentary that Paul and John, who were both chosen by Jesus to spread the gospel, had to **“...Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering...”** those who chose to share a false doctrine.

The Gnostics claimed to be “Christians” but like many false teachers today they departed from what the Bible actually says and developed their own interpretation to support their warped and heretical ideas. For example, they believed salvation was the result of divine and secret knowledge given only to a chosen few. This is counter to Biblical teaching of salvation through faith alone in the atoning work of Christ. They also questioned the humanity of Jesus. Some did not believe He was truly human (and God) and others believed Jesus’ divinity only existed between His baptism and crucifixion. They also believed matter was evil and our spirit is good, with the idea our sin is not connected to our spirit. This led them to believe sin was permissible and God’s law was irrelevant. Supporting their heretical beliefs Gnostics wrote their own alternate “Gospels”, such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Phillip*.

So given all of this it was important for John to share his eyewitness testimony of Jesus as both fully man and fully God. To stress his point even further John writes, **“3. “...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”** (1 John 1:3). Here John uses the Greek word “*Koinonia*” for **“...fellowship...”**. This is the same term Paul used in his letter to Philippi to stress the importance of their adherence to the true gospel, **“5. “...for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now...”**. (Philippians 1:5). Using the term **“...fellowship...”** stresses the importance of believers gathering together in unity, but it also reminds us we will be together for eternity.

Given the fact both Paul and John used this term it’s important for us to understand what they meant. So let’s go back to our Philippians study and quickly review the meaning behind the word **“...fellowship...”**.

(Note: The Bible study referenced here *Our Journey Through the Book of Philippians* is available on our church website under “Resources” and “Bible Studies”)

Except from *Our Journey Through The Book of Philippians*, Lesson #5

*“In verse 5 Paul highlights **“...your fellowship in the gospel...”**, further clarifying their sound doctrine and the fact they had not fallen prey to the false teaching so*

prevalent in Paul's day. This was an important distinction because early Christians were coming out of either traditional Judaism or Gentile pagan beliefs and were easily led astray by emerging aberrant belief systems. We see this in Paul's letter to the church at Galatia where he warns them about false teachers, **"6. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7. which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."** (Galatians 1:6-9). In this case, the early Galatian believers were turning away from the true gospel to a false teaching popularized by a group called the Judaizers who taught Christianity must be combined with legalistic Jewish laws and customs. In other words, the Judaizers' teaching drew people away from simple faith in the work of Jesus, and back to a law, ceremony and works based faith of self-righteous religion. So Paul warned them to accurse anyone, even an angel, who taught any other gospel than redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ.

But are people any different or any less susceptible to the false narratives of the enemy in our own time? Absolutely not. In fact, the advent of social media and liberal mainstream media today allows the transition of false teaching more effectively, and more dangerously, than ever before in history. Add to that the prevailing self-centered attitude of most people in our society, plus their tendency to believe whatever they see on social media, and the combination spells disaster.. Given that, we can see why heretical doctrine such as the Prosperity Gospel movement is so popular. These teachings - while they may sound "good" and encouraging - are actually false and unBiblical because they focus attention on who you are and what you do rather than focusing on who Jesus is and what Jesus did on the cross. This is a false "gospel" and a message of forbidden fruit for those with **"...itching ears..."** (2 Timothy 4:3). For that reason, Paul clarifies the true basis of the gospel is only **"...in Christ..."** which results in their **"...fellowship in the gospel..."**. Something many churches today would struggle to understand.

Here Paul uses an interesting word to describe their faith in the gospel; **"...fellowship..."**. In the original Greek, the word "Koinonia" is defined by terms like "a Partnership", "Contributory help", "Participation", "Sharing" and "A fellowship in the spirit...". All of these describe the unique relationship believers have with one another when we are **"...in Christ..."**. It doesn't matter who we are, where we're from, or how far apart we might live, there is a beautiful connection that exists between true followers of Jesus. It's much more than just an acquaintance or even

a close friendship. The association of believers is unique because **“...where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them...”** (Matthew 18:20). As believers, Jesus is always with us individually through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11), but when multiple indwelt believers are gathered together **“...in My name...”** to worship, praise, teach and learn, Jesus works amongst us, in us, and through us to collectively strengthen us and draw us closer to Him. Certainly, if we were stranded alone on a deserted island we could still worship and communicate with the Lord, but something unique occurs when believers congregate in the Lord’s name because we become one body with a singular focus on Jesus. Our togetherness and **“...fellowship...”** brings unity as we seek God’s will through our collective lives. As the Psalmist says, **“...1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”** (Psalm 133:1). And as the Lord directed through Peter, **“..all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous...”** (1 Peter 3:8). It is when we’re together, focused on Jesus, seeking unity and striving to be **“...of one mind...”** we become the “Body of Christ” – the collective gathering of believers as one entity, **“...5. so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”** (Romans 12:5). But we need to keep in mind, the term **“...one body...”** doesn’t mean a church, a denomination or even a group of religious people. It means the gathering together of true born-again followers of Jesus Christ. No matter who they are or where they are. That’s because even though we as individuals are indwelt by the Lord, something extraordinary happens when we come together **“...in My name...”**. Paul describes this unique relationship in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

- **“12. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14. For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 16. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 17. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18. But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20. But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem**

to be weaker are necessary. 23. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24. but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25. that there should be no schism [conflict] in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

It is when we gather together as a body in “...fellowship...” we are the strongest. It is then we can feed off each other's joy, celebrate each other's victories, fight each other's battles and support one another through the triumphs and difficulties of life. As the “Body of Christ” we are a force to be reckoned with. A source of love, strength and devotion that cannot be overcome. That's why the Lord tells us, “...24. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25. not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching...”. (Hebrews 10:24-25). The “...assembling of ourselves together...” is critically important because it is the “...assembling...” that results in the “...fellowship...” Paul is talking about. Just imagine how encouraging this would have been to the persecuted believers in Philippi. Believers living in an age of severe moral decline, where followers of Christ were the minority in a hedonistic and sinful world. — Much like the society we live in today. Therefore, his reference to their “...fellowship...” would be encouraging and strengthening for them. Just as it is for us.

Both John and Paul felt it was important to stress the importance of “...fellowship...” amongst believers. Not only because gathering together is a way to strengthen Brothers and Sisters in Christ, but when we gather together in “...fellowship...” we draw off each other's strength which helps all of us resist the lure of the world. Being in Christian “...fellowship...” means we're no longer connected to the world around us. We live in the world, but we are no longer of the world (John 17:14 / Romans 12:2). Instead, we are part of the *Body of Christ* who work together to glorify Him, and thereby encourage one another. But also, Christian “...fellowship...”, through faithful gathering and a diligent study of God's word, can help us understand the dangers of false doctrines and learn how to avoid them. Paul stresses the risk of not doing this in Ephesians 4 where he discussed equipping [educating] the saints,

“12. “...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13. till we all come to the unity of the faith and

of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14. that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” (Ephesians 4:12-14)

John and Paul (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) were both trying to educate their readers of the dangers from “***...every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men...***” so they are not “***...tossed to and fro...***”.

But that risk still exists today, and possibly more than it did during the time of Paul and John. That’s because so many well-meaning believers, and those seeking the Lord, are drawn away from truth by the feel-good messages of the Prosperity Gospel movement or the self-focused efforts of people who try to earn salvation through works or religious activities. That’s why it’s so important for us to be equipped with the truth of God’s word. Not only to shield us from the influence of false teaching, but also so we can help others find the truth of Jesus.

Lesson #7

First John chapter 1 verses 5-10

Quick Recap:

In the first four verses of First John we see an amazing eyewitness account from someone who walked with Jesus every day. Phrases like “...**which we have heard...**”, “...**which we have seen with our eyes...**”, “...**which we have looked at...**”, “...**and our hands have touched...**”, all add credibility to John’s message as one who was writing from first-hand knowledge. This was an important set of credentials because John, like us, lived in an age when false teachers and heretical doctrine were rampant. So John clarifies it was Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, who “...**appeared to us...**”, as a man, and “...**was manifested...**” in the “...**flesh...**” (John 1:14). This was important because the emerging belief system of the Gnostics saw Jesus as a man indwelt by God, and believed their salvation was the result of secret knowledge given to only a chosen few. John’s credibility as one who walked with Jesus would bring a reality to his testimony.

Now, let’s dig into verses 5-10.

John continues to stress his eyewitness account, further reminding us this is more than simply repeating what he has heard from someone else. Instead, he clarifies, “**5. This is the message we have heard from him...**”. This helps us understand what we are about to hear came directly from Jesus. It’s not something John heard second-hand and is now sharing with us. It is “...**the message...**” given directly to John by Jesus and is being passed to us with the credibility of an eyewitness with unquestionable credentials. Here John declares Jesus to be God, which He is as part of the Trinity, and describes Him as “...**light...**”. This is a reminder that Jesus is “...**the light of the world...**” (John 8:12) who is sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21) because “...**in Him there is no darkness at all.**” This reminds us of John 1:4-5, “**4. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.**”

Then John begins to talk about our testimony, our “...**walk...**”, which is simply the way we live our life in front of the lost world. As we’ve discussed many times, apart from our salvation nothing is more important to us than our personal testimony. Why? Because it is our “...**walk...**” more than our words that will show the reality of Jesus to the world. It is our actions and reactions as we “...**walk...**” through our day that bears witness of the power of God in our lives. If you’ll recall from our study of Philipppians, our testimony, our “...**walk...**” is one of the most common themes in the Bible. But why is that? Very simply,

our testimony is the way the lost world most clearly sees Jesus. We can talk about Jesus, and we can share the gospel – which we should – but never forget, our most powerful testimony about Jesus is to show His love and power through our lives. Our life is the platform by which we become a “*...living sacrifice...*” (Romans 12:1-2) as “*...ambassadors for Christ...*” (2 Corinthians 5:20) by showing the world the reality of a life lived for Jesus. Paul speaks to this in Philippians 1:20, “**20. according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.**” Here Paul uses the term “*...magnified...*” to explain how he wants his life to present Jesus to the world. Think of it like a magnifying glass. It doesn't change an object but it makes an item appear more clearly and easier to see in detail. So too our life is like a magnifying glass, enabling the lost world to see Jesus in a way they might not see Him with their normal vision. But our life can help bring Jesus into focus so the lost world can more clearly see who He is. Paul further stresses the importance of our “*...walk...*” when he says, “**27. Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...**” (Philippians 1:27a), using the term “*...conduct...*” to represent our testimony. Peter also speaks to our “*...walk...*” when he tells us, “**8. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9. not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.**” (1 Peter 3: 8-9) Here Peter, like Paul, talks about our testimony by also stressing the need for unity by having “*...compassion for one another...*” and being “*...of one mind...*”. There should be no surprise in the continuity between the writings of Peter, Paul and John because all of these passages were actually written by the Holy Spirit and scribed by three different men. That's why all of these passages have one thing in common. They stress the critical importance of our life lived before the world as we represent Jesus and His message of redemption.

John reminds us of this when he says, “**6. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.**” (1 John 1:6). This is speaking of those who claim to be Christians and yet continue to live in habitual sin. Their lives do not magnify Jesus and therefore are a mockery of our Lord. Our “*...walk...*” is not meant to earn salvation, no matter how good it is, but it should reflect the fruit of our salvation (Galatians 5:22-23). As Jesus tells us, “**14. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 5:14-16). We are a “*...light...*” because Jesus is the “*...light...*” (John 8:12) who dwells within us (Ephesians 3:17-19). That's why nothing is more damaging to the credibility of the gospel than for a “Christian” to live a life

of sin in front of the world. When we do, the enemy will surely use our life to confuse non-believers and draw them away from the truth of Jesus. And yet, if we “**...walk in the light...**”, (1 John 1:7) then our life will represent Jesus to the world, and we will “**...glorify your Father in heaven...**” (Matthew 5:16).

So how important is our “**...walk...**”, to sharing the gospel? Let’s see what the Lord says through Paul,

“13. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” 14. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15. And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:13-15)

Notice how the Lord describes our task of taking the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15). We are “**...the feet of those who preach the gospel...**”. This is our “**...feet...**” that takes the gospel wherever we go, and it is our “**...walk...**” that is represented by our “**...feet...**”. That’s why it’s so important to ensure our “**...walk...**” through life represents Jesus and brings credibility to His message. This includes how we “**...walk...**”, where we “**...walk...**” and who we “**...walk...**” with. It is our actions, our words, our thoughts and even the tone of our voice that can show the world the power of Jesus in our lives.

So let's think about it this way. John goes to extremes to help us understand his credibility as an eyewitness. He leaves no doubt about what he says because he declares it with the credentials of one who walked with Jesus every day and heard Him speak these truths. And yet, even though we today have never physically walked with the Lord, we “**...walk...**” with Him every day through faith in our hearts.

But what does the world really see in our “**...walk...**”? Let’s ask ourselves:

- Does our life bring credibility to the gospel message, or does our life cause those around us to doubt?
- Does our life magnify the Lord, or present a blurry image?
- Does our life, particularly during difficult times, show the power of Jesus in our lives, or does our life show the weakness of our faith?

To dig a little deeper into this let’s look back to a passage we’ve discussed many times. The iconic passage of faith under trials in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, which tells us how to walk in obedience even when the road ahead is so difficult.

“8. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Here Paul asked God to remove a trial from his life, but God said no. Instead, God offered to walk through the trial with Paul. So what does Paul do? He said he would “**...boast in my infirmities...**”, or said another way, Paul would use his trials to fortify his testimony. Why? Because he knew God’s “**...strength is made perfect in weakness...**”, because “**... the power of Christ may rest upon me...**”. And when that happens something amazing occurs because, “**...when I am weak, then I am strong.**” Here Paul is talking about his testimony, his “**...walk...**”, and confirms when our path is rough and hard to follow, our Lord walks it with us and will give us the strength we need to magnify Him. That’s basically the same thing John is saying about our “**...walk...**” and our “**...fellowship with Him...**” as we show the world the power of Jesus in our life – no matter how difficult our life may be.

So let’s consider a real-life example of how our testimony makes us an influencer for Jesus. You’ll often meet Christians who participate in social drinking, which in our society is a “vice” because it is governed by laws. But when you ask them about drinking they’ll often tell you the Bible doesn’t say you shouldn’t drink, it just says don’t get drunk (Ephesians 5:18). But that’s a lame response and a lousy excuse. Why? Because the word stresses over and over the importance of our testimony as we “**...walk...**” as an example of Jesus before a lost world. The word tells us not to walk in the flesh (Romans 8:1-4), not to walk as the world walks (Romans 12:2 / Ephesians 2:1), and to make ourselves “**...a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God...**” (Romans 12:1a). That means our “**...walk...**” is not only what we do to magnify the Lord, but also what we don’t do that can blur His image. In fact, it is often the things we don’t do that speak the loudest to a watching world. This is important to remember because our life may be the only reflection of Jesus some people will ever see. And, how we live and “**...walk...**” in front of them may be the only gospel they will ever hear. So will drinking send you to hell? No. But...could drinking, which is a social vice, confuse a lost person watching your life and cause them to stumble? Absolutely. And, could drinking damage your testimony enough to discredit the name of Jesus? Yes it can - and it will. That’s why John reminds us, “**...6. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.**” (1 John 1:6). Bottom line...if we claim to “**...have fellowship with Him...**” then let’s take that role very seriously, hold ourselves accountable, and consider

how our actions - our "...walk..." - could either draw someone to Jesus or convince them we have nothing they need.

To confront this issue even further John continues to talk about sin in verses 8-10, "**8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.**". Here we're reminded of Paul's declaration in Romans 3:23, "**23. for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...**". We all sin, even believers, and when we do we "...fall short..." of God's standard which is measured by Jesus on the cross. That's why our religion and good works can never earn salvation. Because nothing we can do would ever compare to what Jesus has already done. So...we all "...fall short..." because we all sin, but if somehow we feel we don't sin John reminds us, "**...we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...**". But why would the truth not be in us? Because the "...Word...", Jesus, (John 1:1) who is the "...truth...", (John 14:6) says we "...all have sinned...", and if we doubt what He tells us, "**...we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us**" (1 John 1:10). It might seem harsh to some people to characterize their sin as deceiving themselves and not knowing the truth, but let's look at it another way. In Ephesians 2:1-3, the Lord tells us, "**1. And you He made alive, [saved] who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2. in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3. among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.**" So who is "...the prince of the power of the air..." this verse is talking about? That's satan. In effect, when we sin that's who we follow. Or at least, who we are influenced by. That may sound crazy to a believer, but the word tells us, "**...for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone...**" (James 1:13b). In other words, if our sin doesn't come from God, who does it come from? James tells us in verse 14, "**14. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.**" (James 1:14-15). The same satan who tempts us to sin then stands before God to report on our failures (Revelation 12:10).

Now, let's be honest, we all sin from time to time. Even a lustful or hateful thought is sin, but the difference is a true believer, who may still occasionally sin, does not live in sin or commit habitual sin, but instead tries to avoid sin. Therefore, if your life has habitual sin you need to bow before the Lord to get that right. How do we do that? By confessing our sins to God. Salvation comes through repentance of our sin and asking for forgiveness through our faith in Jesus. After that we are guaranteed an eternity in heaven (Ephesians

1:13-14), but we still have the human ability to sin. The difference is, our sins after salvation, are already forgiven, but our sins temporarily separates our communion with God and that relationship must be restored. That's why we must **"...confess our sins..."** to restore our relationship with the Lord. It doesn't mean we lose our salvation. It means we recognize our failures and take them before the Lord to restore our close relationship with Him. By confessing our sins, we are admitting what God already knows, but we are going before Him in repentance in order to restore our **"...fellowship with Him..."** and **"...walk..."** in His **"...light..."**. This was counter to the Gnostics who tried to rationalize their sin, but that is something we can never do. Confessing our sin puts us in the right relationship with the Lord and draws us closer to Him. As we'll see in chapter 2 when that happens Jesus stands in our defence and shields us from the wrath we deserve (Hebrews 4:12-16). Why? Because, **"8. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."** (Romans 8:1 - underline added)

I pray this lesson has helped all of us remember the importance of our testimony and how our actions may be the reason someone turns towards Jesus or walks away.

Lesson #8

First John chapter 2 verses 1-6

Quick Recap:

In chapter 1 John established his credibility as an eyewitness to the earthly ministry of Jesus. To do this he confirms the things, “**...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.**” (1 John 1:1b). It was important for John to establish these credentials to help us understand these are not words he heard second-hand, but are the words he heard directly from our Lord. Words that are now shared with us.

Like us, John lived during a time when false doctrines were emerging and Christianity was under attack. So his eyewitness testimony was critical to combat belief systems such as *Gnosticism* which sought to draw people away from the truth of the gospel. But that’s no different than the *Prosperity Gospel* movement today that draws people away from true salvation through faith in Christ by focusing them on their own efforts. That means that we, like John, have the responsibility today to share the true gospel with the world. The fact that salvation only comes one way. Through faith in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. But also like John, to do that effectively we must be seen as credible, as a believer who “*Practice what we preach*” through our life. So just like John our life needs to establish our own credibility so that our testimony reflects one who lives obediently for the Lord. John talks about this when he discusses our “**...walk...**” and whether we walk in the “**...darkness...**” of the world or in the “**...light...**” of our Savior Jesus (1 John 1:6-7). This is critical to understand because it is our testimony - our “**...walk...**” - that gives us credibility before the lost world and will either draw people to Jesus or convince them we have nothing they need.

Now let’s continue with chapter 2.

Verses 1-5

John begins with “**...My little children...**”, This expresses the love he has for his readers as their spiritual leader, but may also indicate his advanced age. He continues to stress the importance of our “**...walk...**” by imploring us not to sin. That doesn’t mean we won’t sin, but we must avoid intentional and habitual sin. John has already told us as believers we will still sin, and if somehow we think we don’t sin John confirms, “**...we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...**”. (1 John 1:8). John isn’t talking about our

occasional stumbling and failures, but is focused on habitual sin (Romans 6:12-14). The things we repeatedly do against God's will that discredits our "...walk...". But, he also reminds us that as a born-again follower of Jesus we have "...**an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**", who testifies on our behalf (1 John 2:1b). When we sin God views us through the veil of Christ's blood because we are forgiven of all sin by our faith in His work on the cross (Hebrews 10:20). But even though we are forgiven God does not remove our ability to sin. Instead, He lets us know what sin is and He expects us to avoid it. But He knows we will fail and when we do Jesus is our "...**Advocate...**".

So let's think about what it means for Jesus to advocate for us.

When we sin Jesus is our "...**Advocate...**" because He speaks on our behalf. But how sad it is that our Savior has to repeatedly advocate for us because we repeatedly sin. When we sin it's not as simple as doing something counter to God's direction. When we sin we sin against God and we sin against our precious Savior who took our sin to the cross. That means our sin should deeply burden us, keep us alert and guide us to do everything in our power to fight the urge to rebel against our Lord. The mindset we should have is that of Psalm 139:23-24, "**23. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24. And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.**". Through this prayer we are asking the Lord to help us recognize the temptation and sin in our lives so we can actively work to avoid it. Our salvation is not a license to sin just because our future sins are already forgiven. That's why the Lord tells us through Paul in Romans 6:1-2, "**1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?** Instead of a licence to sin, our salvation should constantly remind us of our Savior on the cross and the sacrifice He made because of our sin. The beatings, scourging and being nailed to a cross were all endured for us because we sin, and because God wanted to give us a way to be forgiven. Frankly, Jesus could have decreed that each of us would be crucified ourselves and then forgiven. Instead, He was not only crucified in our place, but He forgave us for the sins that put Him there in the first place. So the thought of our Savior's suffering should keep us alert and watchful to avoid sin and the people, places and things that lure us to sin. That means just because Jesus is our "...**Advocate...**" we should never take our "...walk..." for granted just because we're already forgiven. Our forgiveness came at an awful cost, and as a result, our testimony becomes critical to the message of the gospel. As Paul instructed Titus, "**11. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12. teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13. looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14. who gave Himself for us, that He**

might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." (Titus 2:11-14). But living for Jesus isn't always easy. We need courage and endurance to fight the enemy's temptation. But when we do we will be prepared to **"...stand against the wiles of the devil.** (Ephesians 6:11a), and the enemy will flee from us (James 4:7). John also reminds us that the sacrifice of Jesus was not for a select few as touted by the Gnostics and Reformers but He offers grace to **"...the whole world..."**. This reminds us of the iconic verses of salvation recorded by John in his Gospel, **"...16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."** (John 3:16-17). Salvation is offered to everyone. Not just the "elect" or those who believe they have special knowledge. It is for everyone who will trust and believe in Jesus (John 11:25 & 20:31).

Beginning in verse 3 John continues to explore the topic of sin, but makes it very personal. He reminds us that the source of our salvation is Jesus. Not just a head knowledge of Jesus, but a heartfelt redemption of someone trusting and knowing Him as our Lord and Savior, **"...by this we know that we know Him..."**. So what does **"...by this..."** and **"...know Him..."** really mean relative to our salvation? To explain, John points back to verse 2 where he told us, **"...He Himself [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins..."**. In the original Greek the word used here translated as **"...propitiation..."**, "hilasmos" means **"an offering to appease or atone wrath"**. In other words, the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sufficient to pay the sin debt for mankind. John uses this word twice; here and in verse 4:10. In both cases he's talking about the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. As Peter tells us in I Peter 1:19, our salvation comes one way, **"...19. but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot..."**. This is important for us to understand because in John's day the Gnostics thought they were made righteous through special knowledge imparted to a select few. Similarly, the Jews believed they were made righteous through adherence to the Law and their association with Abraham. In both cases they based their righteousness on something they did instead of having faith in what Jesus did on the cross. But today is no different. Millions of people believe they can be made righteous through practicing religion, by their own good works, by their prosperity, or because they think they are elected. But the Bible is crystal clear, salvation comes only one way, through Jesus because, **"12. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12). This is the only way **"...by this..."**, through faith, we can truly **"...know Him..."**. Not because we went to church or lived a good life, but because we have faith in the life, death and resurrection of the One who is the payer of our debt, **"...the propitiation for our sins..."**.

But let's dig a little deeper into the thought, **"...we know Him..."** by looking at Matthew 7:21-23. One of the most profound passages in the Bible. There Jesus shares a tragic view of those at the future Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11) who based their salvation on something other than faith in Him,

- **21. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23. And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)**

Please pay close attention to what Jesus is telling us:

- These people call Jesus **"...Lord, Lord..."**. They even say it twice for emphasis. Indicating they think they know Him well.
- But note what they base their salvation on, their own efforts, **"...we..."**,
 - **"...have we not prophesied in Your name..."**
 - **"...cast out demons..."**
 - **"...done many wonders..."**
- And they did these things, **"...in Your name..."**. Aligning what they did with Jesus.
- But they gave all of the credit to their own efforts, **"...we..."**, rather than praising what Jesus did for them on the cross.
- So the Lord says, **"...I never knew you..."**, and casts them away.
- And if Jesus **"...never knew..."** them, that means they truly never knew Him.
- In other words, they were not saved even though they thought they were.

But why? Why would Jesus say He never knew people who did these wonderful things **"...in Your name..."** and thought they were saved? Very simply, because they based their salvation on their own efforts and not on what Jesus did on the cross. These same people could have said, **"...Lord, Lord, have we not gone to church and praised Your name, were on a committee and used Your name, and gave offerings in Your name..."**, Yes, but it's the same thing. They are focused on what they did to earn salvation, not what Jesus did to pay their debt for them. That's why none of these good works earn credit for heaven. Because they do not reflect true salvation through Christ alone (John 14:6 // Acts 4:12). The Bible is very clear about this, and when these well-meaning people stand at judgment they will be, **"...judged, each one according to his works..."** (Revelation 20:13b) and Jesus will say, **'...I never knew you; depart from Me..'** (Matthew 7:23b). Please pay very close attention to this. These well-meaning people, who thought they were "doing" the right things, will be judged by the good things they did, but not by their

faith in what Jesus did. That's why they never knew Him, because they mentally knew who Jesus was, and thought they were earning His favor, but they never knew Him as their Savior. That's why movements like Gnosticism, Prosperity Gospels, Manifesting and other belief systems and practices do not bring salvation. They focus on what man does, and not what Jesus did. That's why God clarifies, **"12. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12). The phrase **"...in any other..."** means nothing other than Jesus, and **"...no other name..."** includes our name because nothing we could ever do in a hundred lifetimes would outweigh what Jesus has already done. Because a hundred lifetimes of good works and religion would never be enough to pay the debt for our sin that Jesus paid on the cross. And yet millions of people today believe they are made righteous because they practice religious activities or because they feel their good efforts will be sufficient to earn them a place in heaven. But that's why Isaiah tells us, **"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags..."** (Isaiah 64:6a). Wow! That seems a little unfair. Why would God view our righteous good works to be filthy rags? Very simply. Because people with good intentions try to earn salvation through their own works without ever realizing God measures our efforts by His standard. And His standard is Christ on the cross. So when we try to earn salvation by things we do we will fail every time, because we can never achieve the standard God requires. But in today's culture the enemy has convinced people they can get to heaven by doing good or through practicing religion. That's probably the mindset of most people we witness to because our society is laser focused on *"self help"*, *"do it my way"* and *"an army of one"* mentality, and when that happens they become oblivious to the singular role of Jesus as the source of our salvation and just assume they will *"go to a better place"*. That's why John says, **"...4. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."** John isn't talking about earning salvation through adherence to the Ten Commandments, he's talking about the broader message of God's entire word - His commandments and statutes - that tells us redemption and salvation comes only one way. Through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the *"Crimson Thread"* message throughout the whole Bible. The fact sin is forgiven by faith in the sacrificed Lamb of God. As Jesus Himself makes clear, **"6. Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6). To **"...keep His commandments..."** is to understand God's plan of redemption which is achieved only one way. It is through faith in Jesus, **"...we know that we are in Him..."**. If we believe salvation comes any other way we are, **"...a liar, and the truth is not in him."**

Verse 6

Now John reemphasizes the importance of a believer's "...walk..." and implores us to **"...walk just as He [Jesus] walked..."**. But as a human, who still has the ability to sin, how do we walk like Jesus? Let's look back to chapter 1 where John confirmed he had, **"...seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life."** (1 John 1:1b). These are physical actions, not words. These are actions associated with John's "...walk..." and represent his testimony of Christ. John understood it is our "...walk..." more than our talk that will draw people to the Lord.

So how do we do what John says in verse 6 and **"...walk just as He walked..."**? To answer that let's look at what the Apostle Paul says about our "...walk..." - our testimony - in his letters. First, we need to remember, salvation is more than just believing who Christ is. In fact, satan and his demons know who Jesus is. They even know He's the Son of God and was crucified, but that head knowledge alone will not save them because they have no faith in Him as their Redeemer and King (Mark 5:6-8). Salvation comes from trusting in what Christ did on our behalf on the cross and through faith asking Him to redeem us and forgive our sin. When we do that our life changes. Just as Jesus put on our sin, we **"...put on..."** Jesus like a garment that covers us and presents us to the Father in a different way (Romans 13:14). That's why Paul tells us to **"...put on..."** Jesus so we can, **"...put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..."** (Colossians 3:9b-10). This helps us understand the close relationship we should have with our Lord. It also emphasizes our lost condition, as **"...the old man with his deeds..."** - who was focused on his own works (**"...deeds..."**), versus our new self, **"...renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..."**, who should now be focused on living for Jesus. The process of salvation effectively crucified our sinful nature, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we're made new and righteous in God's eyes and can begin to obediently **"...walk just as He walked..."**.

But it takes courage and determination to, **"...walk just as He walked..."**, because we walk in a dark world and will be constantly attacked by the enemy. But, as a result of our salvation we should feel prompted to **"...walk in newness of life..."** as we strive to, **"...be in the likeness of His resurrection..."**. (Romans 6:4-5) This is the mindset we need to be in and is the attitude both John and Paul are talking about when they mention our **"...walk..."**. Therefore, having been spiritually raised with Christ we should be walking in an attitude that's pleasing to our heavenly Father whose grace enabled us to be raised to eternal life. Jesus explains the reality of this transformation by contrasting the attitude of our old nature with the new, **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for**

yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21) Paul explained the same principle to the church at Colossae, ***"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."*** (Colossians 3:1-4) Our salvation comes through repentance and by an acceptance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, when we are saved we are, ***"...hidden with Christ in God..."***, and are raised ***"...with Christ..."*** as righteous and justified children of God. Because of this we should be focused on ***"...things above..."***; heavenly things, not earthly things, as we ***"...walk..."*** through our day. As Paul explains in Colossians 3, ***"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."*** (Colossians 3:5-10) Peter also spoke of this transition, ***"...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*** (1 Peter 1:14-16) As believers, dead to flesh and raised in Christ we become God's children, ***"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God..."*** (John 1:12). And as we mature in our faith our ***"...walk..."*** will reflect Jesus to the world.

How? Because at the moment of our salvation we were made new in Jesus. That's why our ***"...old man..."***, the sinful lost soul we used to be, was forever changed through our faith. As a result we are no longer, ***"...slaves of sin..."*** because, ***"...our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."*** (2 Corinthians 4:16). This transformation of our ***"...walk..."*** is what God said through Ezekiel, ***"...I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh."*** (Ezekiel 11:19) Paul explains this even further to the Ephesians when he tells them, ***"...put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."*** (Ephesians 4:22-24)

How encouraging is that! We are transformed by our salvation to live with Jesus for eternity. But our eternal life, the new man, is not through any effort of our own but through

Jesus. Because, "***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***" (1 John 1:9) Paul stressed the same point to Timothy, "***This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.***" (2 Timothy 2:11). This is a truth we should think about every day as we "...live..." and "...walk..." through life "...with Him...". As believers in Christ we no longer just live, but we live for the Lord and our life should reflect Him to the lost world. And as His living testimony we have an amazing opportunity to show the world that Jesus lives in us as they watch how we live for Him.

So, bottom line, it is our life, on exhibit before the world, that John is talking about. A life reflective of obedience, prayer and being in God's word as we seek the Lord's direction every day. That's what is meant by "*Walking in the Spirit*".

Paul also describes the character of believers as being, "***...in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.***" (Romans 8:1b). Here Paul contrasts two "walks". A word that in Greek, "*peripatousin*" means "*To conduct life.*". In other words, how we "...walk..." is how we live and how we conduct our life as a believer. It is what the lost world sees in us. It is our testimony. Paul describes our walk through life as either according "***...to the flesh...***" or according "***...to the Spirit....***". He's not talking about "walks" as an effort or "work" to earn or gain salvation, but to represent the life and character of either the flesh-led "***...old man...***" or the Spirit-led "***...new man...***". As Paul reminds us in Galatians 5:16, "***...walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh...***".

That's something we must all strive to do every day.

Lesson #9

First John chapter 2 verses 7-11

Quick Recap:

In verses 1-6 John speaks to his readers as **"2. My little children..."**, indicating his role as their spiritual teacher. As one who physically walked with the Lord he now shares what he learned with great credibility. He talks about sin and the fact we have an, **"...Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous..."**, who speaks on our behalf. But just because our sins are forgiven doesn't mean we have licence to sin more (Romans 6:1-2). To the contrary. Our sin should remind us of the suffering and torment our precious Savior went through so we can be forgiven. This should make us alert to the people, places and situations the enemy uses to tempt us to sin, and should prompt us to avoid them at all costs. John then talks about how we truly **"...know Him..."**, which is not a head knowledge of Jesus, but is a close personal relationship based on our faith in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. John ends this segment of his letter with the reminder to **"...walk just as He walked..."** which speaks to the importance of our living testimony on exhibit before the lost world.

Now, let's continue with verses 7-11.

Verse 7

But what John is telling us should not come as a surprise. From the first verse to the last, God's word clearly defines His expectations for obedience and faith, and the characteristics that should be seen in His children. This is nothing new. In fact, in the garden God gave Adam and Eve only one commandment to follow, **"17. ...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."** (Genesis 2:17). Very simply, *follow my command and live. Disobey my command and die.* But as God already knew, Adam and Eve would fail and separate themselves from Him through a new element - sin. But God had a plan for that too and redeemed them through the promise of forgiveness illustrated by the death of an innocent animal. This became an illustration of God's love, His mercy and the coming Messiah who would offer Himself as a sacrifice on the altar of the cross. But why did God do this? Why didn't He simply destroy Adam and Eve and start over? Because, **"19. We love Him because He first loved us."** (1 John 4:19). For **"...God is love..."** (1 John 4:8b) and He loves us so much He is willing to forgive our sin if we come humbly before Him and ask for redemption through faith in the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. John reminds us this is not a **"...new commandment..."**, but an **"...old**

commandment...” they should already know. But what commandment is that? John tells us in 2 John 1:5-6, **“5. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”** The **“...new commandment...”**, is the same as the **“...old commandment...”**. To **“...love one another...”**. Just as Jesus tells us, **“35. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:35). That’s the **“...new commandment...”** John is talking about, that has been made fresh and anew through the sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. The **“...old commandment...”** of love now illustrated by Jesus on the cross as **“...new...”** because His death brings new life as we are born again, and are given the promise of an eternal life with Him (John 3:3). It is love that brought Jesus to earth, and love that put Him on the cross. As Jesus tells us in John 15:12-13, **“12. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”**

When the wicked Pharisees asked Jesus which commandments were the most important, He summarized them into two - **“37. Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38. This is the first and great commandment. 39. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”** (Matthew 22:37-40). Very simply, Jesus rolled all of the commandments - the Ten plus all others in scripture - into two: Love the Lord and love everyone else. He clarifies this by saying, **40. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”** As we know, the phrase, **“...the Law and the Prophets...”** speaks to the first books of the Old Testament, the **“Law”** penned by Moses, to the last book of the **“Prophets”** in Malachi. We see this same statement in several other passages:

- As Jesus Himself told the men on the Road to Emmaus:
 - **“25. Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” 27. And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”** (Luke 24:25-27 - Underline Added)
 - Here Jesus cites **“...Moses...”**, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, through **“...the Prophets...”**, which takes us through Malachi.
 - In other words, Jesus is talking about the entire Old Testament, **“...all the Scriptures...”** and tells us they all point to Him.

- Jesus clarifies that fact in John 5:46 when He said, “**...46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.**”
 - This is the same thing Phillip recognized:
 - **45. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** (John 1:45 - Underline Added)
 - Here Phillip also cites “**...Moses...**” and “**...the prophets...**”, referring to what we know as Old Testament scripture.
 - And from the Old Testament scripture Phillip was able to recognize the homeless Carpenter is God.
 - This is also the same fact the apostle Paul recognized years later,
 - **“23. So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.”** (Acts 28:23)

In each case “**...Moses and all the Prophets...**” is the same thing Jesus is talking about when he refers to, “**40. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.**” (Matthew 22:37-40). In other words, all of God’s commandments and expectations through His entire word point to His love. The love that created us in His image, the love that forgave the fall of man, the love that sent the lamb to the temple altar, the love that sent Jesus to the cross, the love that allows the Lord to forgive us rather than simply destroying us, and the love that gives us a glorious eternity with Him. Basically Jesus was telling us that everything we see in His word is based on love. This is not a “**...new commandment...**” but is the same “**...old commandment...**” pervasive throughout His entire word. But it is now more vibrant and fresh than ever before through the work of Jesus on the cross. As John will remind us later, “**8. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.**” (1 John 4:8-9).

But why is this so important? Very simply.

Earlier we were told to “**...walk just as He walked...**” (1 John 2:6b). That’s speaking to our testimony and how we live our life before the lost world. So if we are to “**...walk...**” like Jesus we must have a very important characteristic in our life — love.

- If “**...God is love...**” then how do we walk like Him without love?
- How can we be His ambassador without love?

- How can we magnify His name without love?
- How can we present Him to the world without love?
- How can we “**...love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**”, without love? (Matthew 22:37b)

We can't. That's why the “**...new commandment...**” and the “**...old commandment...**” are the same. We must love. We are to love so our testimony represents Jesus with the credibility of one who “**...walks...**” with our Lord through life. So in verses 8 to 10 John talks about love from the perspective of walking through life with Jesus who is our “**...true light...**”. In doing so we become a light in this darkening world. Not because of our own efforts, but because as followers of Jesus His light shines through us. That's why I often pray “*Lord, may I be so transparent that the world sees you and not me.*” Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 5:14-16 when He said, “**14. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** Note what He says here, “**...Let your light [Jesus in us] shine before men [the world]...**” Why? To “**...glorify your Father in heaven...**”. Our life, our “**...walk...**”, our testimony is to present the love of Jesus to the world and in doing so, to glorify the Lord.

Let's look at two other passages to better understand the light of Jesus that should be shining through us every day:

- “**1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. He was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.**” (John 1:1-5)
- “**3. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 5. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.**” (Revelation 22:3-5)

Both of these passages speak to Jesus as a “**...light...**” but they also speak of Him overcoming the “**...darkness...**” of sin. Just look around at the world today. What percentage of what you hear and see represents “**...light...**” and what percentage is “**...darkness...**”? It seems that in so many cases “**...darkness...**” prevails. We see it in the actions and attitudes of society around the world. We see it in the rise of antisemitism. We see it in our schools. We see it in our government. We see it in the aberrant church.

We see it in nearly every aspect of society. That's because, **5. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.**" (John 1:1-4). The dark world does not recognize Jesus because they do not love as He loves. John points this out in verses 9 through 11 where he contrasts love with its opposite emotion - hate - **"...9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now..."** (1 John 2:9).. Just as love is characteristic of God, hate is characteristic of Satan. Hate is at the core of all sin. Why? Because when we sin we take action against what God expects us to do, and in doing so we are rebellious to the One who loved us enough to forgive our sin by taking it to the cross. That's why sin is so egregious to God. It is a mockery of His desire to love us and an affront to what He did for us. Just look around you at society today and characterize the emotions and attitudes of those fighting against the Biblical principles established by God. At the core of their progressive movement is hate. They may not think they hate, but let's be honest. How can you vote to abort unborn children unless you hate the very essence of life? How can you push for gender-shifting ideology unless you hate the gender God assigned to you? How can you call for antisemitism unless you hate the people God called as His own? In each case, God has set standards for man to follow, and if we do, they reflect the love He has for His creation. But...to rebelliously move away from God's expectations comes from a hatred of what God has asked us to do. The world may not see it that way, but if they understood the love our Lord expects us to show each other, they would see more clearly the hate they harbour in themselves. John will touch on this again in chapter 3 when he says, **"...15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him..."**. In other words, the sin of hate and the sin of murder are the same thing. The only difference is the physical act that is taken.

But why does the world hate? Because they don't see the **"...light..."** of Jesus. Why? Because they are looking through lenses fogged by **"...darkness..."**. That's the message of verses 9 through 11. The world **"...walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."** And when they walk in darkness, they walk in hate and not love. We're reminded of that in 1 John 1:5, **"5. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."** And neither should there be any **"...darkness..."** or hate in us. So what happens when we don't **"...walk just as He walked..."** because our testimony is not **"...worthy of the gospel..."** (1 John 2:6b / Philippians 1:27). Then Our **"...light..."** doesn't shine and our Lord isn't glorified. And that's a sad state to be in because God loved us so much He gave us His **"...Light..."** on the cross. We need to love Him so much we shine His **"...light..."** to the world.

Lesson #10

First John chapter 2 verses 12-14

Quick Recap:

In verses 7 through 11 John talked about a “**...new commandment...**” but makes it clear, it is the same as the “**...old commandment...**”. John isn’t necessarily talking about a specific rule like the “*Ten Commandments*”, but is speaking more broadly to a common theme found throughout the Bible - love. Jesus clarifies the importance of this in Matthew 22:37-40, “**37. Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38. This is the first and great commandment. 39. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”** Here Jesus was responding to a question from the wicked Pharisees to tell them which commandment was the most important. Jesus answered by rolling them up into two broad commands: Love God and then love everyone else. He did this by citing scripture using the phrase “**...all the Law and the Prophets...**”, which is what we now call the Old Testament. Starting at “**...the Law...**” which is the first five books of the Bible recorded by Moses, through Malachi, the last Old Testament prophetic book (see also Luke 24: 25-27, John 1:45 and Acts 28:23). By using this phrase Jesus is simply saying that all scripture - His written word - points to a single characteristic of God, that “**...God is love...**” (1 John 4:8b). To further define God's love John talks about the “**...light...**” of Jesus we are to shine in a world characterized by “**...darkness...**”. But again, it all comes down to one thing - our “**...walk...**” - which is our testimony of how we live our lives before a lost world who desperately needs Jesus.

Now, let’s continue with chapter 2, verses 12-14

Here John clarifies who he is writing to - everyone - “**...children...**”, “**...fathers...**” and “**...young men...**”. Of course this would have also included women, but “**...fathers...**” and “**...young men...**” are the spiritual leaders of the home which carries with it great responsibility. John uses the phrase, “**...little children...**” but probably not to indicate their physical age but their spiritual maturity. The phrase also reminds us we are children of God and not of the devil (John 8:39-44 // Galatians 3:26). A fact John will declare again in chapter 3, “**1. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.**” (1 John 3:1). The inclusion of “**...children...**”, “**...fathers...**” and “**...young men...**” could also indicate the stages of “*sanctification*” as we grow in our faith and draw closer to the Lord. In that sense, the “**...children...**” would

be newer believers and the “**...fathers...**” the most spiritually mature. This may also be indicated by the fact John uses the phrase “**...have known...**” or “**...have known Him...**” three times. Taking us back to verse 3 where he reminds us, “**3. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.**”.

But no matter the audience, these are encouraging words to us from the Lord:

- “**...your sins are forgiven...**” (verse 12)
- “**...you have known Him...**” (verse 13)
- “**...you have overcome the wicked one...**” (verse 13)
- “**...you have known the Father...**” (verse 13)
- “**...you have known Him who is from the beginning...**” (verse 14)
- “**...you are strong...**” (verse 14)
- “**...the word of God abides in you...**” (verse 14)

Think how encouraging it would have been for John’s readers in the first century to hear this. People trying to serve the Lord while under great persecution in the Roman Empire. But also think about how encouraging it is for us today when we look at the fallen society around us and try to shine our “**...light...**” before a darkening world.

So through this list:

- New believers will be encouraged by the fact their, “**...sins are forgiven...**”, pointing to their faith in Christ.
- The “**...young men...**”.will be encouraged by the fact they, “**...have overcome the wicked one...**” and “**...are strong...**” in their faith because “**...the word of God abides in you...**”.
- Then the “**...fathers...**” will be encouraged because they “**...have known Him...**”, and have matured in their faith.
- In each case these accolades reflect a life well lived for Jesus. A life whose “**...walk...**” shines the “**...light...**” of our Lord before a dark world. These are characteristic of those who are faithful and whose life is, “**...worthy of the gospel...**” (Philippians 1:27)

So why does John repeat the phrase, “**...you have known Him...**” three times? Because to truly know the Lord is a measure of our faith. Those who rely on head knowledge of Jesus, or those who are believers but weak in their trust often begin to doubt when the road gets tough. That’s not because they’re bad people or even disobedient Christians, but they have not matured to the point they trust the Lord to go with them no matter what their situation may be. On the other hand, a mature believer who places their full trust in the Lord may still suffer, but they will do so by looking to Jesus for the strength they need. This requires maturity of faith. We saw this in our study of Philippians and realized Paul

wrote such an encouraging letter while chained in a Roman prison. Likewise, as we've discussed many times, Paul's iconic proclamation of strength found in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 that helps us understand how truly knowing Jesus gives us the endurance we need to glorify Him,

"8. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Here the Lord assures Paul His grace is sufficient to provide the strength Paul needs to endure his trials. So Paul declares he will ***"...boast in my infirmities..."*** which simply means he's going to use his challenges to fortify his testimony, But why? Because he wants to use his difficulties to show the world, ***"...the power of Christ may rest upon me..."*** so that, ***"...when I am weak, then I am strong."*** Paul wasn't able to do this because he had special powers but because he knew the Lord would go with him, no matter how difficult it might be. This was the maturity of his faith and reflects what it means to say. ***"...you have known Him..."***.

But are these characteristics reflected in our lives?

In other words, are we ***"...strong..."*** in our faith and able to ***"...overcome the wicked one..."*** because ***"...the word of God abides in you..."***? I think this last point may be the most important for us to explore. Why? Because, at the end of this encouraging list of faithful characteristics John qualifies them with the stipulation, ***"...the word of God abides in you..."***. It's as if the list is predicated on God's word. Which I think it is. But let's be honest, does God's word abide in you? Are you in God's word every day? Do you use it for guidance and direction in life? Do you seek God's face in His word and listen to what He says for you to do? If not, then His word does not ***"...abide..."***, or *live* in you. The English word ***"...abide..."*** comes from the Greek word *"Menei"*, which in this context literally means, ***"...Something has established itself permanently within my soul, and always exerts its power in me..."***. Let's think about that. When John says, ***"...the word of God abides in you..."***, he is actually saying ***"God's word is permanently within your soul, and always exerts its power in you..."***. But let's be honestly and assess whether or not that describes the Bible's place and priority in our life. This is critically important for us to understand because the Bible tells us, ***"12. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and***

spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12).

So let's think this through:

- How can God's word be "***...living...***"?
 - It lives through our life if it "***...abides...***" in us..
- How can God's word be "***...powerful...***"?
 - When it is seen by the world through our "***...walk...***".
- How can God's word become, "***...a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.***"?
 - When we use it to lead and guide us through our day.
- And when all that's true what is the outcome?
 - The Bible is established permanently within our soul, and always exerts its power in us.
 - So we will be "***...strong...***" and able to "***...overcome the wicked one...***".

Frankly, I'm not sure how a believer gets through the day unless, "***...the word of God abides in you...***", because our days are often tougher than we can manage on our own. But God's word cannot abide in us unless we are actually in His word. God's word does not live in us from what we hear in the pulpit or classroom, or what we read in devotionals or Christian books. God's word only "***...abides...***" in us when we abide in it. Why do you think missionaries often spend their lives translating God's word into a tribal language? Because at the core of our faith, our ability to grow closer to the Lord, and our efforts to share His message with others is dependent on being in God's word. Frankly, we could be saved through faith even if we couldn't read, but the process of growing closer to the Lord and stronger in our faith comes from being in God's word. That's because when we are in His word, reading what He said and being alert to His movement in our heart, it "***...always exerts its power in you...***". That's so important to understand because, if we are not in God's word, we will not be "***...strong...***" or able to "***...overcome the wicked one...***".

Please pray about that.

Lesson #11

First John chapter 2 verses 15-17

Quick Recap:

In verses 12 through 14 John encourages his readers by telling them:

- **“...your sins are forgiven...”** (verse 12)
- **“...you have known Him...”** (verse 13)
- **“...you have overcome the wicked one...”** (verse 13)
- **“...you have known the Father...”** (verse 13)
- **“...you have known Him who is from the beginning...”** (verse 14)
- **“...you are strong...”** (verse 14)
- **“...the word of God abides in you...”** (verse 14)

But pay close attention to the qualifier at the end of this list, **“...the word of God abides in you...”** (verse 14). The strength and encouragement found in the first six statements is predicated on the last. Unless we are in God's word so that it lives and **“...abides...”** in our hearts then we will fight through life in our own strength. But, if we're in God's word and allow it to strengthen us and guide us then we will be able to glorify and magnify His name no matter how difficult life may be. Why? Because **“...the word of God is living and powerful...”** (Hebrews 4:12a).

Bottom line, a believer who is not in God's word will never be able to live the life our Lord has prepared for us.

With that thought let's now continue with chapter 2.

John continues to focus on our testimony by talking about how we should interact with the world around us. Earlier he told us what we should love, now he tells us what we shouldn't love - **“...the world or the things in the world.”** In fact, he defines this truth in a very direct way that can hit close to home, **“...If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him...”**. Wow. That seems a little harsh because there's a lot in this world we love. Like our family, our Christian fellowship and God's word. But John isn't talking about things like that. In one sense he's talking about loving **“...the world...”** from the perspective of loving the people, places and things that tempt us to sin. By contrasting the words **“...world...”** and **“...Father...”** he stresses the point that our love for the Lord must be the first priority in our lives. As Jesus told us, **“37. Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”** (Matthew 22:37 / Deuteronomy 6:5). This is the love our life should show to a lost

world - the love we have for our Lord. So think about this from the iconic lesson of sin. In the Garden of Eden Eve was presented with two influences, the fruit, which is the, “...**world...**” and the commands given to her by God from the “...**Father...**”. The test was which would she put first? In other words, which would she love most? Jesus gives us another example when He was tempted in Matthew chapter 4. In each case He was presented with temptation but He rebuked them with scripture and by expressing His love for the Father above all things (see *below*),

So to help us better understand, “...**the world or the things in the world.**”, let’s take a deep dive into the action of rebellion we call “*sin*” and how it contrasts with being spiritually “...**strong...**” and able to “...**overcome the wicked one...**” because “...**the word of God abides in you...**”. Why is that important? Because “...**the wicked one...**” is the source of our temptation and we need to be “...**strong...**” enough to resist him.

So let's explore what sin is and how to fight it...

I think we could all make a list of the things that tempt us, but to help us better understand John clarifies temptation as, “...**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..**”. These are the same things satan used to tempt Adam and Eve in the garden. “**6. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [lust of the flesh], that it was pleasant to the eyes [lust of the eyes], and a tree desirable to make one wise [the pride of life], she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 7. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.**” (Genesis 3:6-7). They are also the same temptations Jesus used to illustrate the power of scripture when He was tempted by satan in Matthew chapter 4,

“1. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The lust of the flesh – **2. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” 4. But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’**

The lust of the eyes – **“8. Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” 10, Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’ ”11, Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.”**

The pride of life - ***“5. Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6. and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ 7. Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”***

Here we see the same three temptations but in the case of Jesus we see no corresponding sinful actions like we did with Eve. That’s because sin requires three steps:

- First, there is the temptation.
- Second, there is a desire to act on the temptation.
- And third, the desire becomes a physical or mental action which constitutes the sin.

It takes all three - temptation, desire, and action - to commit sin. But here, in Jesus, we see no desire or sinful action. Instead, Jesus confronts each temptation with a passage of scripture to show His true desire - to do the will of the Father - and in doing so He shows the power of His word. In His case there was no sinful desire, there is no sinful action, and therefore there is no sin. But how was it possible for Jesus to be tempted and not sin? Particularly since He was living as a human. The key is the lack of desire. We need to remember, Jesus is not like Adam. Jesus is fully God and was not created nor was He born “of” man. Therefore, even as a human, He did not receive the inherited nature of fallen man, which is the desire to rebel against God. Jesus, who is God Himself, came to earth through a surrogate human mother but was divinely conceived through the power of God, ***“35 And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”*** (Luke 1:35). It was through God’s miraculous power that Jesus was born as a human baby, but not from the same process by which humans are conceived. Therefore, Jesus has no inherited, imputed or in-born desire to rebel against God - which would also be rebelling against Himself because He is God. All other humans have an inherited desire to rebel through the sin of Adam, ***“18. Therefore, as through one man’s [Adam] offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,...”*** (Romans 5:18). But not Jesus. He was not created like Adam and He was not “of” Adam (or Joseph) but was conceived by God and therefore did not have the internal desire to go against God’s commands. No doubt, Jesus was all man, with human attributes, but Jesus was also all God and could not rebel against His own divine nature.

Let’s think about it this way - Adam and Eve were presented with temptation. Just like we are. The same temptation Jesus was presented with, ***“...the lust of the flesh, the lust***

of the eyes, and the pride of life.” And yet Adam and Eve sinned, and we sin, but Jesus did not. That’s because Adam and Eve - although initially created without sin - were neither divine nor holy. They were fully human, with no divine attributes, and therefore when they were presented with temptation they had the freewill desire to act. That’s why Adam and Eve saw the temptation (the fruit) as, “**...good for food...**”, “**...pleasant to the eyes...**” and “**...desirable to make one wise...**”. In other words, “**...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.**” This is the desire they felt when presented with the temptation, and it was this desire that resulted in an action, “**...she took of its fruit and ate...**” “**...and he ate...**” (portions of Genesis 3:6-7). It was this desire to satisfy their own personal needs that allowed them to take an action that turned the temptation into sin. But Jesus, who is still God even in His earthly human state, cannot rebel against Himself or His divine nature, because Jesus has no internal mechanism that allows for His desire to act on temptation. So He did not sin.

Let’s dig even deeper for our own application. Prior to our salvation we are literally followers of satan, even though we might not admit that or even understand it. Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us, “**1. And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2. in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3. among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.**” This passage clarifies we “**...who were dead in trespasses and sins...**” when we were lost, “**...once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air...**” and we “**...conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh...**”. That simply means, in our pre-redeemed state the source of our internal desire is satan - “**...the prince of the power of the air...**” and when tempted we took corresponding actions and, “**...conducted ourselves...**”, in ways that are offensive and sinful to God. That explains why politicians and others pushing legislation and ideology that is clearly against God’s commands think they are doing what is good. Why? Because it is their nature to sin and satan makes the sin appear. “**...pleasant to the eyes...**” (Genesis 3:6a).

But...after we’re saved we are “**...made alive...**”, essentially “**born again**” (John 3:3) through the power of the shed blood, and we are made new. This is the process of salvation where the Lord replaces our old nature with a new nature when we are indwelt by God through the Holy Spirit. Paul explains this so simply in Galatians 2:20 - “**20. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**” This is the process - the gospel - by which our sins are placed on Jesus and were in effect crucified with Him. We see this throughout the Bible:

- Romans 6:6 - ***“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.***
- Ephesians 4:22 - ***“That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,...”***
- Colossians 3:9 - ***“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds”***

These verses describe the miraculous transformation that occurs when we accept Christ and His work on the cross and the forgiveness of sin is applied to us. In other words, we are still human but something miraculous has happened. As a result of our salvation we are now ***“...in Christ...”*** (Romans 6:11) because ***“...Christ lives in me...”*** (Galatians 2:20) and He is the new source of our internal desire to please the Lord, not the enemy. Peter explains this transformation in 2 Peter 1: 2-4, ***“2. Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 3. as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4. by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*** Through our salvation we are given ***“...the divine nature...”*** of Jesus through the indwelling Holy Spirit, which gives us a new source of influence and an internal desire to please the Lord and not ourselves. As Paul describes in Romans 6:1-4, ***“1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2. Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3. Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4. Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”*** God’s grace doesn’t give us license to sin. God’s grace, and the corresponding indwelling of the Holy Spirit, gives us a new nature, a new source of influence and a new type of desire. We no longer desire to sin as a normal outcome of our sinful nature. Instead, inherited desire has been replaced with a divine desire to please God by combating sin in our lives just like Jesus did. By consciously living in accordance with His direction and leading through His word. That’s what is meant by ***“Walking in the Spirit”*** and living in the ***“...newness of life...”***. That’s our testimony. The way we ***“...walk...”*** through life.

That doesn’t mean we don’t still sin. We do. But in order to sin we have to add a step in the process, and momentarily step away, so to speak, from the influence of the Holy Spirit. Remember, sin requires temptation, desire and action. For a lost person this is how their mind works. They see, they want, they do. But as a believer in order to take a sinful action we have to act on our desire which is counter to our new nature in Christ. But when we

do that, we should be immediately convicted of our sin and seek forgiveness. That's something a lost person does not do. Or said another way, when a believer is tempted we have to make a conscious decision as to whether or not we take a sinful action. If we don't take action, then there's no sin. But if we do take an action, then sin has been committed. The difference is as a believer, the decision to take an action is counter to God's commands and results in the spiritual warfare we fight every day. A battle that can only be defeated one way. By walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh, and by making sure, **"...the word of God abides in you..."** (1 John 2:14). That's what Paul means when he says, **"16. I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."** (Galatians 5:16-17).

So...being tempted to sin is not the same thing as sinning. All of us have been tempted at times, walked in the Spirit and turned away from the temptation without taking any action to sin. But when Adam was tempted he acted on his desire and ate the fruit. Therefore He sinned. Jesus was tempted but He took no action to follow through with satan's request because He had no internal desire to do so. Therefore, no sin was committed. That's why we try to *Walk in the Spirit*. Always conscious of what is going on in us and around us as the enemy tempts us to take an action of sin. But we can fight him just like Jesus did in Matthew chapter 4. By being in God's word every day so **"...the word of God abides in you..."**. That's so important because His word is the sword we are given to carry into battle, **"...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..."**. (Ephesians 6:17b).

A battle we cannot win on our own.

Lesson #12

First John chapter 2 verses 18-29

Quick Recap:

In verse 15 John tells us, “...***Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him...***”. That may sound harsh, but it's actually true. To love the world is to love those people, places and things that lure us to sin. It also means we prioritize our love for the world above our love for the Lord. In the same way that satan used the tree in the garden to tempt Eve, temptation presents us with “...***the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...***” (1 John 2:16b). Those are the things that draw us to move from temptation, to desire, to sin. That's what John is trying to explain about loving the world. It's also the lesson Jesus tries to teach us in Matthew chapter 4 when He shows us how to fight satan with scripture, the “...***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...***” (Ephesians 6:17b). Without the sword of His word we are helpless in battle because we will fight in our own strength.

Now in the closing verses of chapter 2 John writes about an event we can begin to see emerging in our own society. The rise of total rebellion against God. Events that will eventually lead to the rise of a man called the “*antichrist*”.

Near the end of John's life Jesus entrusted him with recording future events, the destruction of the world and the recreation of God's eternal kingdom. This became what we know as the *Book of Revelation*. A book that not only tells us about the future, but interestingly it tells us things about Jesus we may not already know. In fact, if you have never read the Book of Revelation then there are probably things about our Lord that may surprise you. Why? Because even though the Book of Revelation is an amazing view into the future, it also gives us a unique view of our Savior. In some cases a view found nowhere else in the Bible. For example, in Revelation Jesus is described by over sixty different names and titles, and each one could result in an amazing study on its own. Here we see Jesus as the Warrior King at the Second Coming (Revelation 19:11), we see Him as the Holy Judge at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11) and we see Him as the Lamb who is the Light of God's eternal kingdom (Revelation 21:23). These descriptions and many more like them give us a view of Jesus we may not otherwise understand.

But there's much more...

In Matthew chapter 24 we find what is called *The Olivet Discourse*. On the Mount of Olives Jesus gave His Apostles a broad overview of future events. Years later He would inspire John to write the Book of Revelation which gives us even more details about what will happen at the end of time. Taken together, Revelation, plus hundreds of end-times prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments, gives us a fairly clear indication of what is to come. Granted, it's very complicated, and there's some of it we don't fully understand, but for those of us who are students of Revelation it reveals a timeline of events that help us better understand what we see happening in the world today.

The apostle John is unique in the sense he was the only apostle to receive both the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation. That makes him uniquely qualified to give us verses 18 through 29 which is a brief view of what is to come. In both the Olivet Discourse and Revelation John was physically there and experienced what he saw first hand. That gives him the credibility to say, “**...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled...**” (1 John 1:1b). Many times in Revelation John uses phrases like, “**...I saw...**” (Revelation 1:12), “**...I heard...**” (Revelation 5:11) or “**...I looked, and behold...**” (Revelation 4:1), giving clear indication that what he experienced was more than simply a vision or a dream. As Jesus said to John in Revelation 1:19a, “**...Write the things which you have seen...**”, not the things you imagine. Given all this, scripture indicates John was given a miraculous view of the future.

So, in verse 18 John has the credibility to discuss, “**...the last hour...**”. Here he describes the future using the Greek word “*eschatē*” which is translated into English as “**...last...**”, but it is also the root word used for the term “*eschatology*” which is the Biblical study of the end-times. The term “**...last hour...**” indicates John is discussing end-times events. In essence, the same events recorded in the Book of Revelation and related Old and New Testament scripture. So given that, why would John, who lived two thousand years ago, feel it was the “**...last hour...**”? Well, from God's perspective it is. As Peter tells us, “**8. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9. The Lord is not slack [slow] concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**” (2 Peter 3:8-9). God doesn't measure time like we do. To God, who is eternal, time is meaningless. At least from the way we look at time. But what is important to God is providing sufficient time for more people to come to Jesus so that “**...all should come to repentance.**”. But as we know, not all will come, but even so, God in His merciful grace will provide time until the last offer of grace is made to His rebellious creation (Revelation 18:4). So when will all of this happen? The Bible doesn't say. So we trust it will occur when God intends and we'll remain patient until the time comes. That said, it appears from scripture nothing significant remains on God's timetable between now and the Rapture of the bride. The

resurrection of Jesus was the last major prophetic event that will occur prior to the future Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). That's because the Lord's death and resurrection offered redemption to all mankind and by doing so Jesus fulfilled the promise made in Genesis 3:15. The next major event will be the Rapture of believers and after that will come the *Tribulation* period and the emergence of the antichrist (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Until then Jesus tells us to be alert, pay attention, and be mindful of what is happening around us, **"...37. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"** (Mark 13:37).

So who is the antichrist?

For a detailed study of the antichrist I invite you to look at our lessons from "Our Journey Through the Book of Revelation" found on our church website under "Resources" and "Bible Studies". There is a lot more information provided there than we will cover here.

So to give us a quick overview for context let's briefly discuss who the antichrist is and why he will come.

Chapter 12 of Revelation discusses satan's continuous pursuit of Israel. There the imagery of a "woman" is used to represent God's chosen people. The nation who would give birth to a male child - the Messiah. The God/Man who would come to the earth and bless mankind through the nation of Israel and her people (Genesis 12:3 / Isaiah 49:6). But Israel's role in God's plan set them apart and made them a target for satan's wrath. From the fall in the garden, until the time of his post-millennial destruction, satan has and will try every tactic to destroy the work of Christ, His chosen nation and His followers. But a day will come when satan will be hurled from heaven to earth one last time (Revelation 12:9). It is then, in the short period of time satan has left he will exhaust all efforts to destroy Israel and try to take his place in the role of god. But that will not happen. In the end satan will be defeated by the Warrior King Jesus who returns at the Second Coming to claim His rightful throne (Revelation 19:11 / 20:10).

Until then satan continues his relentless pursuit to destroy everything related to God, and specifically anything related to Israel. He has done this across time using Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, plus dozens of other empires and through men like Nero, Stalin and Hitler. He continues his pursuit today by influencing our society, its morals, politics, laws and attitudes. The signs are numerous that we are clearly in the **"...last hour..."**, and we have been duly warned. But sadly, more is to come. During the later part of the Tribulation satan will move boldly and openly through a human puppet. A man so vile and evil only one name can describe his character and his mission. That name will embody everything that is against Christ as he seeks to convince mankind he is the messiah they seek.

This man will be the "*antichrist*" – also known as the "*beast*."

There are various opinions amongst Bible scholars about who the antichrist will be, when he will come on the scene and what he will do. The Bible gives many clues but doesn't provide enough detail to clearly understand all we'd like to know. So for the purpose of our study we're not going to fill-in-the-blanks with conjecture. Instead, we'll focus on what the Bible says about who the antichrist is and how he fits into the overall end-times chronology.

But before we do that, let me clarify one common point of contention. I believe the Book of Revelation, and end-times prophecy in general, is literal and will happen just as the Bible says. Some scholars view prophecy as symbolic or metaphorical and don't believe it will occur as written. I don't see it that way. In fact, I find no scripture that would lead me to believe the Lord would dedicate over a third of His word for prophecy, but doesn't mean what He says. I take the Bible literally and approach it for what it "says", not what we think it "means". In other words, since God wrote it I trust that's how it will happen just as he says. So to be clear, for our brief study of the antichrist I believe he will function just as the Bible says he will. Not as a symbol or a metaphor, but as a real figure who will seek to control the world.

The antichrist:

- We see the antichrist in Revelation chapter 6 represented by the rider on a white horse offering false peace to Israel. He appears with a bow, but no arrows, indicating he will be seen as a diplomat seeking world-wide peace. This will be the fulfillment of a vision given to Daniel by Gabriel, "**...Then he** [the antichrist] **shall confirm a covenant** [treaty] **with many** [Israel] **for one week** [seven years]..." (Daniel 9:27). Here, the "**...covenant...**" will be a treaty, the "**...one week...**" will be a seven-year period of time we now know as the *Tribulation*, and the "**...many...**" are the people of Israel. In other words, after the Rapture and near the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation the antichrist will come on the scene as a powerful leader, establish a peace treaty with Israel, and influence them to view him as their messiah. But that peace will be short-lived and after three and a half years the antichrist will turn on Israel and try to destroy her, "**But in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.**"..." (Daniel 9:27). After three and a half years of "peace" the antichrist will enter the new temple in Jerusalem, declare himself to be god and command that all Israel and all the world worship him. This will be an act of intolerable sin against God

by the most intolerable sinner of all. An act of sin Jesus talked about in the *Olivet Discourse*, **"...15. "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place..."** (Matthew 24:15a / 2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Daniel 9:27).

- We also see the antichrist in Revelation 11:7 when, **"...the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit..."** kills the "Two Witnesses" who will be sent by God to share the gospel with Israel. But this action will backfire when the subsequent resurrection of the Two Witnesses is seen by the world. That event will so astound the people of Israel they will begin to understand the true identity of Jesus. It is then, **"...the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven..."** (Revelation 11:13b).
- He is the **"...beast rising up out of the sea..."** (Revelation 13:1).
- The **"...man of sin..."** and **"...the son of perdition..."**, (2 Thessalonians 2:3).
- The one **"...who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God..."** (2 Thessalonians 2:4).
- The **"...another horn, a little one..."** (Daniel 7:8).
- The one who, **"...shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High..."** (Daniel 7:25).
- The one **"...Having fierce features, Who understands sinister schemes...."** (Daniel 8:23).
- He will, **"...exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done..."**. (Daniel 11:36).
- The one who, **"6. "...opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven."** (Revelation 13:6)
- And the one to whom, **"7. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation."** (Revelation 13:7)

But no matter what his title or description, he will be a vile and vulgar satan-empowered and controlled human who will lead Tribulation man against God and His people. He will be called to prominence by satan at a time when the sinful world will be in the chaos of God's judgment and looking for a leader. A leader whom satan will place in authority as the beast. A human monster who comes from the nations of the world to build his empire. At his side will be another evil being called the *"false prophet"*, or *"the beast from the earth"*. He will establish a worldwide religion based on worship of the antichrist and satan (Revelation 13:11).

During the Tribulation satan will try one last time to overcome God through the influence of the antichrist. In doing so he will attempt to take the place of God the Father, the antichrist will attempt to take the place of God the Son, and the false prophet will attempt

to take the place of God the Holy Spirit. This trinity of evil will turn the world away from God until the point **“...All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”** (Revelation 13:8). But their insurrection will fail as Jesus unleashes twenty-one horrific judgment actions that will destroy the world and all who follow the antichrist. Through these actions Jesus will be victorious and satan destroyed, **“...The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”** (Revelation 20:10).

So given the fact all of this will occur in the future end-of-time, what does John mean when he says, **“...even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour...”** (1 John 2:18b)? So let's think about that. In 1 John 4:1-3 John clarifies for us, **“1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3. and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”** The final antichrist will be a satan-led human who seeks to control the entire world by globalizing a world-wide government, economy, military and religion. But until this single figure emerges, many other people throughout history have fit the description of, **“...every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh...”**. These are people who embody beliefs counter to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, or in some other way discount His work for redemption. That disbelief gives them a **“...spirit of the antichrist...”**. In John and Paul's day that would have included the Gnostics, Judiaziers, self-righteous Jews, idol worshipping Gentiles, and anyone else who denied faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But John also tells us, **“...He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.”** (1 John 2:22b). This would include not only those who deny Jesus is the Savior, but also those who deny the Father as God. All of them would be considered an **“anti”** Christ.

So where do we see that same attitude today? In many places. The Prosperity Gospel movement, works-based gospels, satan worship, agnosticism, atheism, pagan belief systems, false teaching or any other movement or belief that is either against Christ or teaches a faith apart from salvation in Christ alone. Why? Because in one way or another they deny **“...that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh...”**. And when they deny Him or the work He did for redemption, it makes them opposed to or **“anti”** Christ. Unfortunately many of these people don't understand this and think they are doing the right thing. They may even dutifully sit in church and practice religion, but they base their eternity on their

own prosperity, or good works or religious activities. In doing so, they discount salvation through the work of Jesus on the cross and therefore they do not, **“...confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh...”**. In other words, they seek faith in something other than Jesus and the gospel. And when they do that they are in effect denying the work Jesus did when He came to earth **“...in the flesh...”** (John 1:1-14 / 3:16). That may sound nit-picking, but it's not, because salvation only comes one way. Through the work of Jesus, who is God, who came **“...in the flesh...”** as a man, to bring redemption to all mankind (Acts 4:12). But this disbelief doesn't include just people on the outside of the church looking in, but can also include people in the church who believe counter to the true gospel. That's what John means when he says, **“...19. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”** (1 John 2:19). He's talking about people in the church who believe something counter to the gospel of Christ. This is such a serious issue that Paul tells the church at Galatia, **“...6. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7. which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert^[a] the gospel of Christ. 8. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”** (Galatians 1:6-9). These are stern words, but they are important to understand because of the damage done to the church by false gospels and false teachers. Jesus warned us about this in Matthew 7:15, **“...15. “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”**. Paul takes it a step further in Acts 20:29-30 and tells us who those **“...wolves...”** are, **“...29. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”**. Please note Paul's comment, **“...from among yourselves men will rise up...”**. That's talking about people inside the church. People who appear to be Christians and yet they believe something other than the gospel of Jesus. That's one of the reasons at Southside we focus so much attention on teaching and reinforcing solid Biblical doctrine. Because someone who infiltrates the body and influences others with false doctrine can create chaos and confusion that can take years to overcome. John stresses this point in verses 20 and 21, **“...20. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. 21. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.”**. Our desire, through solid Biblical teaching, Biblically based teachers and by equipping the body with the word will ensure we **“...know the truth...”** and are able to fight against the enemy's tempting fruit.

But sadly, most people probably don't realize that believing anything counter to salvation through Christ alone gives them **"..the spirit of the antichrist.."**. But how can that be? How can well meaning people fall so easily for the fruit satan offers. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:3-4, **"3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4. and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."** We need to remember, through temptation satan made Eve think the fruit was **"...good for food..."** [lust of the flesh], **"...pleasant to the eyes..."** [lust of the eyes], and **"...desirable to make one wise..."** [the pride of life] (portions of Genesis 3:6). Those same temptations cause people to believe false doctrines without ever seeking the truth themselves. But how? Because, **"13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14. And no wonder! For satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."** (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). These are the **"...wolves..."** Jesus and Paul warn us about. People who believe and spread false doctrine and thereby have in them, **"..the spirit of the antichrist.."**, even if they don't realize it. . Jesus touches on this fact in Mark's recounting of the Olivet Discourse, **"...5. And Jesus, answering them, began to say: 'Take heed that no one deceives you. 6. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many."** (Mark 13:5-6). Later in the same passage He clarifies, **"...21. 'Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. 22. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 But. take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand."** (Mark 13:21-23). Pay attention to the Lord's last comment, **"...take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand."** This is a warning to be alert to what is happening around us and deep in the Lord's word to understand what it means. Why? Because the same satan who so cleverly fooled Eve into thinking the fruit was good does exactly the same thing today through false teaching and progressive ideologies. But society is falling at a fever pitch to the point we see more than satan simply fooling the unwise. We are starting to see an emergence of hate and discord that defies logic. That's because our enemy has infiltrated politics, education, medicine, business and nearly every aspect of life in ways we had not even considered just a few years ago. Is it any wonder we see what's happening in Europe, on college campuses and in the halls of government. Particularly the sudden and violent increase in antisemitism (anti-Israel) in a world who after the holocaust collectively said, **"Never again!"** This includes politicians and supporters of progressive ideologies who seek legislation counter to the commands and will of God. And when they do they are opposed to or **"anti"** Christ, and have **"...the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world..."**.

But in one sense that's ok because the Lord has already told us it's going to happen. What we see happening today in Israel and in the worldwide moral decline of mankind is the glideslope man must be on to reach the point, **"...All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the antichrist]..."** (Revelation 13:8a). So let's think about that. The Lord has already told us everyone on earth will worship the antichrist during the Tribulation. That means the whole world has to be in the right frame of mind so when the antichrist comes on the scene they will quickly accept him as their leader. At first, he will allow the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem so Israel will believe he is the messiah. Likewise, the rest of the world will see him as the world-wide leader of government, economy, military and religion. That's why, **"...3. And all the world marveled and followed the beast [antichrist]. 4 So they worshiped the dragon [satan] who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"** (Revelation 13:3-4). So what we see happening today in Israel, Europe and even in America should not come as a surprise. As alert students of God's word will see this simply as the world regressing to the point they need to be in so they will quickly accept the antichrist. But...we can find strength and encouragement because God's word also tells us how it will end:

"11. Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He [Jesus] who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses [believers]. 15. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:

**KING OF KINGS AND
LORD OF LORDS.**

17. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, 18. that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." 19. And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and

against His army. 20. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.” (Revelation 19:11-21).

This is our Lord - our Mighty King - the King of kings - who at the appointed time will return to destroy the antichrist, the false prophet, satan, and all who follow them. I pray you find peace in that truth and understand the urgency of sharing the gospel everywhere we go. Until then, do not fear what we see, but understand the victory our Lord will bring.

I love the way John ends this chapter by expressing strength and lack of fear, “**...28. And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.**”. Earlier John tells us the importance of God’s word abiding in us (1 John 2:14). You’ll recall the word abide in Greek means, “*...Something has established itself permanently within my soul, and always exerts its power in me...*”. We talked about that from the perspective of God's word abiding in us, but let’s also think about it from the perspective of Jesus, who is the Word (John 1:10-14), who abides in us through the Holy Spirit. This makes us “**...in Christ...**”. A phrase Paul uses dozens of times to explain the unique relationship we have with our Lord (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). This is what gives us the confidence to have a testimony we are not ashamed of, so we can magnify the Lord until He comes to take us home.

Lesson #13

First John chapter 3 verses 1-3

Quick Recap:

John started chapter 2 with “**...My little children...**”. This could express both his advanced age and the fact he was the last remaining Apostle who walked with Jesus. But to me it also tends to set us at ease and prepare our minds for what is to come. John is encouraging us and his opening statement reminds us we are “**...called children of God!**” (1 John 3:1). John then talks about how we truly “**...know...**” Jesus. Not from head-knowledge, but from faith as we “**...abide...**” with Him as we walk through life. Then he shares a “**...new commandment...**” which is actually the “**...old commandment...**”, which is love. Without love we cannot do as God asks. John contrasts love and hate with light and darkness and reminds us those who hate, “**...does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**” From this we realize it is the love we have for others (as hard as that might sometimes be) that helps us shine the light of Jesus in a dark world.

Now with that, let's move to chapter 3.

In chapter 3 John returns to a familiar topic - love. A topic expressed throughout the whole Bible but maybe no more clearly than through the iconic verse of salvation, “**16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**” (John 3:16). This verse expresses the profound love our Lord has for us. A love expressed so beautifully by our Lord Jesus when He said, “**...12. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**” (John 15:12-13). So why is that type of love so important? Because, “**...8. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” (Romans 5:8). In a nutshell the love of God is the core of the gospel. A love so powerful God Himself came to earth as a man, to live like a man, and die like a man, in order to take our sin on Himself and raise us victorious with Him. As Paul explains in Galatians 2:20, “**20. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**” That could not happen without the miraculous love God has for us. A love we do not deserve and cannot earn.

Here in verse 1 John highlights a profound outcome of God's love for us, “**...that we should be called children of God!...**”. So let's think about that. As believers in Christ

we are not only made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), but we become **"...children of God..."** when we're saved. That means we're part of our Lord's eternal family and the inner-circle of redeemed humans who will spend our eternity with Him. Revelation 21:3-4 gives us a sense of what that type of love means, **"3. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."** This will be the time in the future when we as believers will be with our Lord for eternity, and loved by Him as part of His family.

To wrap our head around the importance of this family connection let's see how Paul explains it, **"14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."** (Romans 8:14-15). One of the most amazing aspects of our salvation is the fact we have **"...received the Spirit of adoption..."** as **"...children of God..."**. It is through our adoption the Lord will train us, teach us and strengthen us to bring the fullness of God into our lives. It is this **"...Spirit of adoption..."** that gives us the nature of an obedient child as we seek to bear the image of our loving Lord.

So let's dig a little deeper into the Biblical use of the word **"...adoption..."** so we can understand why **"...we should be called children of God!..."**. We'll start by looking at Hebrews to see a view of God's love and our adoption through Jesus.

"For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience [sin nature] from dead works [sin] to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator [between us and the Father] of the new covenant, [of grace] by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." (Hebrews 9:13-14).

Here the author of Hebrews speaks about the **"...inheritance..."** we receive as a gift passed down from the Father. But not just any gift, it is a gift of **"...eternal inheritance..."**. An **"...inheritance..."** we receive that is permanent. But adoption in the ancient world was not the same process we think of today. Modern adoption is generally focused on children. Often to rescue them from a bad situation and place them in a loving home. But adoption in the Roman world was often very different and included adopting adults to be heirs of a family inheritance. So in Romans 8:15 Paul used the term **"...adoption..."**,

"*huiothesia*" in Greek, which his first-century readers would understand to mean a person being brought into a family and given an "...**inheritance**...". In effect, making them a child and a legal heir. Paul explains this further in Romans 8:16-17, "**16. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17. and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.**" (Romans 8:16-17). This is an amazing passage of scripture that speaks not only of our salvation, but the fact our justification to God makes us "...**children of God**...", but also "...**joint heirs**..." with Jesus. And as full heirs we are able to call God, "...**Abba Father**...". The word "...**Abba**..." is defined as, "A term of tender endearment by a beloved child – affectionate, a dependent relationship, like the titles "daddy" or "papa." It is an Aramaic term that illustrates the unique relationship we have with our Almighty Creator. A term of great love reflecting the close relationship between a child and Father. It's a word so special Jesus used it in the garden when He prayed to the Father just prior to His crucifixion, "**And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.**" (Mark 14:36). Paul also used the same term to encourage the believers in Galatia, "**And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father! Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**" (Galatians 4:6).

But how does spiritual adoption work and why is it permanent? Very simply, "**Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. [sin] But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [as a Jew] to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**" (Galatians 4:3-5). The story of spiritual adoption is the story of the gospel, because through our faith in Christ we become children of God and full, permanent, heirs to His kingdom. But what's also important for us to understand is the fact our "...**adoption**..." and "...**inheritance**..." are permanent. Why? Because God's love for us is not a temporary relationship, but is permanent because we belong to the Lord and have an "...**eternal inheritance**...". We see this no more clearly than in Ephesians 1:13-14, "**13. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14. who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.**"

In this passage we see a series of terms explaining the gospel and indicating the permanency of our salvation:

- "...**In Him you also trusted**...",
 - Salvation requires trust in Jesus.
- "...**after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation;**..."

- We trust in Jesus through the truth of the gospel.
- **“...having believed,...”**
 - And we believe the gospel through faith.
- **“...you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...”**
 - By doing so through faith we are “...sealed...” by God with His “...promise...”.
- **“...guarantee of our inheritance...”**
 - The “...promise...” which is a “...guarantee...” of our “...inheritance...” is permanent.
- **“...until the redemption of the purchased possession...”**
 - Because we are redeemed as a “...purchased possession...”, paid for by the blood of Jesus.

How could anyone read this passage and think they could lose their salvation? In other words, how could a God who loves us so much He sent His Son to die for our mistakes take that way because we made more mistakes? This passage clearly explains that our salvation is a “...promise...”, that is “...sealed...” by God and given a “...guarantee of our inheritance...”. This is a salvation we cannot lose and will never be removed. As Peter confirms, our salvation is an, “...inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...” (1 Peter 1:4) It does not “...fade...” [go away] but is “...reserved...” for us because, “...having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:7). Again, Peter, just as Paul did, stresses the fact we are “...heirs...” in God’s eternal family with a promise of “...eternal life...”. It’s important to understand this truth in order to fully understand what John is saying in verse 1, “**1. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!...**”.

So, given that fact...our salvation, through God's grace, makes us His children and His heirs with an assurance of eternal life that cannot be taken away or lost. Paul clarifies our relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit by explaining, “...**16. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit...**” as He indwells within us, and in doing so confirms “...**that we are children of God, 17. and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...**” (Romans 8:16-17a). This is an incredibly profound statement. As believers in Jesus and His work on the cross we will inherit an eternity in God's kingdom where, “...**He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people...**” and, “...**he who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be His God and he shall be My son...**” (Revelation 21:3&7). Through our faith we “...inherit...” God's blessings as His child. Thus making us, “...**joint heirs with Christ...**”. That may be amazingly difficult to grasp, but it is so true. Yet, in our earthly body we may still suffer through the weight of temptation, or the stress of persecution, or maybe just the trials and tribulations of our

mortal life. But as we do the indwelling Holy Spirit walks every step with us. As we've discussed before, God could have simply saved us and then made sure we were never sick again, or He could have made us wealthy, or took away all of the challenges of life. But if He did then everyone would want to be saved so they can be healthy and rich and care free. They would not focus on Jesus, but on themselves. But that's not the way it is. The Lord allows His children to go through the same difficulties in life everyone else does. Why? Because sharing Jesus with a testimony of health, wealth and happiness has limited credibility, but when the world sees you facing life's challenges with faith, love and perseverance it makes Jesus real to a lost world. That's why, **"...if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."** (Romans 8:17b).

But after expressing God's love for us, John says, **"...Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."** This reminds us of John 1:4-5 & 10-14)

- **"4. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."** (underline added)
- **"10. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13. who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."** (underline added)

Here we are confronted with the fact we are different and no longer seem to fit in. That's because as born-again believers we are no longer of this world (John 17:16) and we should not be conforming to the world. Instead, we are left here after our salvation to act as the representatives of Jesus on the earth. Ambassadors who are commissioned to share His gospel message with the rest of His creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:20 and Matthew 28:19-20). This is what Paul meant when he said, **"1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** [Romans 12:1-2). Our nonconformity to the world is what represents Jesus to the lost who need Him. It is our testimony, our actions that allow **"...your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."** (Philippians 1:2a).

John closes this segment with an amazingly encouraging passage, **“2. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”** (1 John 3:2-3). We honestly don't know what we'll be like in our glorified state. But it really doesn't matter because **“...we shall be like Him...”**. That doesn't mean we'll be divine like God, but we will be glorified and perfected to live for eternity in a new body, free of defects and sin.

We get a glimpse of what that will be like in two key passages:

“50. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52. in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54 / see also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18))

“4. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” 5. Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” (Revelation 21:4-5).

God's amazing love for us through our **“...inheritance...”** as the **“...children of God...”** brings glory even in our death. We will be made new, incorruptible, immortal and free from pain and sin. Why? Because we are the Bride of Christ who were washed in the blood of the Lamb, **“8. And to her [the Bride] it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”** (Revelation 19:8).

Please rest today in the peace and joy of our eternal salvation.

Lesson #14

First John chapter 3 verses 4-9

Quick Recap:

John starts the first section of Chapter 3 with a very encouraging statement, “**Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!**” (1 John 3:1a). It’s sometimes difficult for us to understand how God could forgive us for sinning against Him, but then to imagine He would call us His children. Wow! That is a relationship only God could establish because His love for us is so strong. To explore this type of love we talked about Paul’s proclamation that we are “**...adopted...**” into God’s family “**...as joint heirs with Christ...**”, and as a result we are given an eternal “**...inheritance...**” (Romans 8:14-17). And not only that, we are given assurance that our salvation will never be taken away, because we are “**...sealed...**” by “**...the Holy Spirit of promise...**” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Now, with that encouraging context let’s move forward to verses 4 through 9 and talk about a less encouraging topic — sin.

To start our discussion let’s clarify an important point right up front so we’re not confused by John’s statements related to sin.

We all sin. John has already clarified this in chapter 1, “**...8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**”. Even as believers we are still capable of sinning. That’s because until we achieve our glorified state after the Rapture, we still have the ability to act on temptation (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). But John’s point is simple. As a believer we should avoid intentional and habitual sin in our lives. In other words, our daily walk should not reflect a life of sin but a life of righteousness. Otherwise, our life will reflect “**...lawlessness...**” because our sin is a rebellion against God’s will. Sadly, we’re all going to fail at times. Even a single unclean thought can be sin. But as a follower of Christ we should be actively seeking to live in such a way our life is not reflective of sin, “**5. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**” (Romans 8:5).. Also, as believers, sin should cause us to continually repent and restore our relationship with the Lord, “**9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**” (1 John 1:9). We don’t repent because sin removes our salvation, but unrepentant sin clouds our spiritual life and must be addressed between us and our Lord. This perspective is reflective of the prayer in Psalm 139:23-24, “**23. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and**

know my anxieties; 24. And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.”

So let's look at this passage about sin in an historical context.

John was probably dealing with the heretical influence of a religious group called the “Gnostics”. They practiced a belief system supported by followers like Plato who combined Christianity with philosophy and mysticism. They believed salvation was available to a chosen few who were given “special” knowledge called “gnosis”. Some of their followers taught that sin was not an affront to God but was simply the result of ignorance, and concluded that sin was unimportant. This is of course contrary to God's word and it could have influenced believers to ignore sin in their own lives. Paul addressed a notion similar to this in Romans 6:1-2 when he said, **“1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2. Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?** What Paul is saying is just because we're saved and our sins are forgiven doesn't give us licence to sin even more. Instead, it should continuously prompt our heart to abide in the Lord and seek, **“...to walk just as He walked...”** (1 John 2:6b).

So John clarifies, **“4. Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.”** This should have made it very clear that sin is sin, and no matter how insignificant it may seem, it is rebellion against God. That was important to understand for any of his first-century readers who might have been lured by Gnosticism into thinking the sinful things they did were allowed. But it's equally important for us to understand today because our society has gone to extremes as it seeks to make sin look “normal”. We see this every day as members of our government try to legislate actions as legal and good that are clearly against the commandments of God. As a result, to a lost and unbelieving society it becomes more and more difficult to determine what is right and what is wrong. The result is things that are clearly wrong in God's eyes become “right” in the eyes of a fallen society. The Lord warned us of this, **“20. Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”** (Isaiah 5:20). But also think about the number of Christians today who are not in God's word. How do they really know how to discern what is God's will and what is sin? How do they know whether or not a particular social issue or political platform is sinful? Particularly if society tries to make it sound okay. The truth is, they may not know, which is why we often see Christians falling into sin by conforming to the desires of the world, or we see Christians supporting liberal agendas that are clearly unBiblical. Or even worse, we see people who think they are Christians but they have been convinced they can base their salvation on something other than faith in Jesus. So to clarify all of this, John says, **“...Whoever abides in Him does not sin”**. That doesn't mean we are incapable of sin just because we're saved. It means as

followers of Jesus, who are abiding and living for the Lord, we should be keenly aware of the temptations around us and constantly striving to avoid the people, places and things that draw us into sin. It also means we should not practice sin as a part of our life, but instead, be alert to God's commands, clearly stated throughout His word, that help us understand what God expects of us. That's what Paul means when he says we should, **"...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** (Romans 12:2b). This act of transformation is the constant attention to God's direction for our lives as we seek, **"...to walk just as He walked..."** (1 John 2:6b) and live our lives in God's will.

So let's think about that. How do we know God's direction for our lives and the expectations He has for us if we are not in His word? We can't. We might think we can learn enough from sermons and Sunday School to get by, but the fact of the matter is, if we are not in God's word ourselves, then we are not benefiting from the things He intends for us to learn. And to make matters worse, recent research shows a large percentage of Christians spend more time on social media than they do in God's media. And when that happens, we open ourselves up to the influence of the enemy. You can doubt that if you want, but you're just kidding yourself. If you are on social media more than you're in God's word then you are opening the door of deception and distraction, and may not even realize it.

So John reminds us, **"... let no one deceive you..."**, because the devil, who is the father of lies, (John 8:44) will make the fruit of sin look so good. Here the Greek root word for **"...deceive..."**, *"Planato"*, means *"To lead astray"*. And that's exactly what satan does. He doesn't force you to commit sin. Instead, he slowly and imperceptibly leads you away from the Lord to achieve your own desires. Do you ever wonder how a politician or anyone else for that matter, who claims to be a "Christian" can support legislation or positions that are clearly sinful in God's eyes? It's because the enemy has masked the rotten stench of sin with the sweet smell of fruit and led them away from the truth. Remember, satan didn't drag Eve to the tree and threaten her. He simply made her question what God said, **"3. Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"** (Genesis 3:1). And when she questioned, she sinned. And so it is today. Liberal leaders, legislators, educators, social media influencers, and others do the same thing. They prey on the feelings of those who don't understand what God expects and they bite the fruit because it sounds or looks so good. So John clarifies our condition in verses 7 and 8, **"He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning..."**. Here he contrasts two lives: **"...He who practices righteousness..."** and **"...He who sins..."**. This represents two divergent testimonies. One following Jesus, **"...as He is righteous..."** and one following satan which makes them, **"...of the devil..."**.

This contrast should remind us of Eve's original sin **"...from the beginning..."** and draw us away from temptation. But **"...from the beginning..."** should also remind us of the fact Satan is the origin of sin. Initially created as a glorious angel he rebelled against God and became the source of all evil (Ezekiel 28:12-17 / Isaiah 14:12-14). But Christ came to earth to defeat Satan, **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."** (1 John 3:8). Not only did the work of Jesus on the cross forgive our sin, but it destroyed the power of Satan over those with faith in who Jesus is and what Jesus did. Paul ties these thoughts together in Galatians 2:20, **"20. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."**

But sinful influences don't come just from a liberal society, but sadly, can also come from within the "church". As we've discussed, Paul warns us, **"29. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."** (Acts 20:29-30). Here Paul isn't warning the brethren about influence from the outside, but from the inside. He states **"...from among yourselves..."** will emerge false teachers and false doctrine who will influence and **"...draw away the disciples after themselves."** That situation is rampant today through liberal churches, unBiblical denominational positions, Prosperity Gospels, false doctrines, heretical preachers and social media influencers who teach and follow beliefs contrary to God's word. Often these differences seem small and hard to identify, but they are deceptively dangerous because they are used by the enemy to focus us on something other than faith in Christ alone. Think about it this way. Eve didn't have to eat the whole tree in order to sin. She merely had to take one bite of one fruit to turn herself away from the Lord. And so it is with the "church" today. Many focus on ritual tradition, or their own prosperity, their righteous works, or their desire to be "relevant" with the world. But that's all it takes to shift our focus away from Jesus. That's why Paul said, **"22. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks [Gentiles] seek after wisdom; 23. but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24. but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."** (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). His point here is very simple. The world (Jews plus Gentiles) are looking for something tangible to hang onto, but **"...we preach Christ crucified..."** which requires faith in Jesus. Not faith in the system or ourselves. When we add our own efforts or religious activities we are simply implying Jesus is not enough and the cross is insufficient. And when we do that, we're biting the fruit.

I stress this point continuously in my teaching because this attitude reflects the world we live in today. Churches who are grounded in solid Biblical doctrine are rare and becoming even more so. They are increasingly replaced by churches who in an effort to appear

relevant, embrace the world and lose their focus on Jesus. But when we seek to be relevant we fail to be righteous. And yet, this is nothing new, so we should know better, because the Lord gives us a vivid example of this in Revelation 2:1-4, “1. **To the angel [pastor] of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2. “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3. and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”** This is talking about the church at Ephesus. Founded by Paul and led by men like Timothy, Apollos and John. They were a hardworking and faithful church known for their labors, their patience and their avoidance of sin (Acts 18-20). Yet, they “**...left your first love.**” Their love for Jesus. They became so focused on their own works that their own efforts eventually took priority over their focus on the work of the Lord. What a sad commentary for a once faithful church. But what is the outcome of all this? The Lord tells us through the example of the church Laodica in Revelation chapter 3, “**15. “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”** (Revelation 3:15-17). Like the church at Ephesus, they were a church of “**...works...**”, or religious effort, but they were also a church focused on themselves and their own prosperity. They bragged of being “**...wealthy, and have need of nothing...**” yet their love for the Lord was stale. As a result, they were neither refreshing as cold water, nor soothing as warm water. Instead, they were “**...lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot...**”. So how does Jesus reward their efforts and wealth? He said He will “**...vomit you out of My mouth...**”. That’s a tragic consequence for a congregation who considers themselves part of the church and yet finds out they are not.

But don’t we see the same thing happening today? Churches and denominations focus on being relevant with society and focus more on themselves than they are on the Lord. More on fun than faith. More on what they can get out of it, instead of what Jesus put into it. Over time this begins to be their priority until the point they are no longer focused on Jesus. Or another way of looking at it, they no longer have “**...conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...**” (Philippians 1:27a) because the enemy slowly led them astray. That’s why John says, “**...let no one deceive you...**”, because he knows they will try. That’s something we must always be alert to.

So why was it so important for John (inspired by the Holy Spirit) to talk so much about sin? Because he’s simply repeating the same warning God gives to all mankind. But do

we really listen? In the garden God was very clear with Adam and Eve, **“16. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17. but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”** (Genesis 2:16-17). How could God be more clear than that? The message was crystal clear. There was no gray area - *stay away from the tree*. In fact, He had already told them about the tree and warned them of the consequences of disobedience so there would be no confusion on their part. But doesn't He do the same thing with us? **“18. ‘So you shall observe My statutes and keep My judgments, and perform them; and you will dwell in the land in safety.’** (Leviticus 25:18). Here the terms **“...statutes...”** and **“...judgments...”** are talking about God's word - the Bible. The commandments He gives us to follow. But just like He did with Adam and Eve, God explains the consequence of sin, **“15. “But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 16. “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. 17. “Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 18. “Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. 19. “Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.”** (Deuteronomy 28:15-19). Although this passage was originally written to Israel, the same core principle applies to us – disobedience brings consequences.

But God is equally clear in the New Testament:

“23. for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)

“12. Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

“23. For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23.)

Could God be any more clear than that? Sin brings death. But do we listen? Not really. God told Adam and Eve if they sin they will die, and yet they did it anyway. But he tells us the same thing and we don't listen either. So we sin and destroy our marriage. Sin and destroy our health, Sin and destroy our family. Sin and destroy our testimony. The list could go on and on. So John is very clear, **“...sin is lawlessness...”** (1 John 3:4), because sin is rebellion against our Creator and against the One who took our sin to the cross. But also because sin destroys our testimony and if we live in **“...lawlessness...”** we no longer have the ability to **“27. “...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...”** (Philippians 1:27a).

That's why this discussion is so important.

Lesson #15

First John chapter 3 verses 10-24

Quick Recap:

In verses 4 through 9 John talked about a troubling topic – sin. It's troubling from several perspectives, including:

- Sin is rebellion against God
- Sin is the reason Jesus went to the cross for us
- And sin is the thing that can easily destroy our testimony

Sadly, we're all going to fail from time to time, but a true follower of Christ will consciously avoid intentional and habitual sin in our lives. We do this most effectively by being in God's word and being obedient to His commands, but also by avoiding the people, places and things the enemy can use to lure us in. That's a lesson from the story of Eve. She should have stayed far from the tree.

Now in verses 10 through 24 John will tell us how to recognize sin and fight it – by reflecting an important characteristic in our lives. Something our enemy hates:

Love.

John begins in verse 10 by contrasting “**...the children of God...**” and “**...the children of the devil...**”. There are no other options. We are either part of God's family through our faith in Christ (Romans 8:14-17) or part of satan's family through the rejection of God's grace. To explain this fact John uses the word “**...manifest...**”, which in Greek, “*Phaneros*”, means “*evident, apparent or obvious*”. In other words, something that is visible. Like our testimony seen before the lost world. A testimony that should reflect whether or not we have faith in Christ or in satan. So John highlights two key indicators of our faith. The fruit we bear as a believer through our testimony; represented by “**...righteousness...**” and “**...love...**”. In fact, this is so important that John says we cannot be “**...of God...**” (in Christ) unless we exhibit these traits. That's harsh, but it's true. A true believer who falls into habitual sin won't lose their salvation, but they are no longer obedient to God, no longer a testimony for Jesus, no longer the ambassador He asks us to be (2 Corinthians 5:20), and frankly, our life will be miserable. Why? Because we are not pleasing our Father and the world cannot see Christ through our lives. That's why repentance and seeking to *walk in the Spirit* each day are so important. They are the actions that keep us focused on the Lord and obedient to His will.

The term “**...from the beginning...**” in verse 11 takes us back to Lesson #5 and the beginning of John’s Epistle in Chapter 1 verse 1, “**...That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.**”... Here John reminded us he could speak with authority as an eyewitness from the very start of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:21). But, “**...from the beginning...**” also takes us back to the first few verses in the Gospel of John which also declared, “**...1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. He was with God in the beginning...**” (John 1:1-2). Jesus is “**...the Word...**” because He brings to us God’s written word. The testimony of Jesus who brings the truth of who He is to a lost world, and it is through Jesus “**...the Word...**” through whom God presents Himself to His believing children (Colossians 1:15). But “**...from the beginning...**” can also remind us of the timeless requirement to live a life of obedience and a love to honor our Lord. And yet when mankind failed to be obedient, God, through His endless love forgave Adam and Eve and sacrificed an innocent animal for their redemption. He also reminds us of this through the story of Adam and Eve’s sons, Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-15) when God accepted Abel’s offering because it was made in obedience and love, and Cain’s offering was rejected because it reflected the influence of satan and the hatred he had for his brother. Throughout the Bible we see example after example like this to help us understand the depth of God’s amazing love, but no more so than when “**...God so loved the world...**” He sent Jesus to die in our place. (John 3:16a). That’s a love we cannot even fathom.

And yet, even though we strive to love those around us, we are often not loved back. So John warns us, “**13. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.**” This is a sobering thought but it shouldn't be a surprise. In fact, Jesus had already given us a similar warning in John 15:18-19, “**...18. “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.**” In other words, if you’re part of the world they will love you, but if you’re part of Christ they will hate you. That makes sense to me. People are going to gravitate towards others who think like them, so, if we’re living for Jesus it will be evident in our lives and we’ll be seen as different from the world. That’s why Jesus tells us we are no longer of this world. (John 17:16). That’s a beautiful reminder that we no longer belong to the world, but we belong to the Lord.

I don’t want to get off on a tangent here, but to get our head around this let's think about some of the reasons Christians are “hated” today. To start with, most people probably don’t hate us just because we love Jesus. In reality, they really don’t care what we believe as long as our beliefs don't hinder their agenda. But they hate us when we exhibit Jesus in our lives and differ with their ideology.

For example:

- They hate us when we want a voice in our children's education (Proverbs 1:7).
- They hate us when we consider a boy a boy and a girl a girl (Genesis 1:27).
- They hate us when we support Jews as a people and Israel as a nation (Deuteronomy 7:6).
- They hate us when we want all children to live. Even those who are not yet born. (Psalm 127:3).

Is that fair? No. Not at all. But we've been warned; when we follow Jesus instead of the world we will be hated. But honestly it's ok because Jesus warned us we will suffer tribulation in this world, but He also reassures us, "**3. *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.***" (John 16:33). So given that, let's try to look at the tension between us and the world in a different way by viewing it as an opportunity to love. Even though being hated may not be "fair" and is frustrating at times, Jesus instructs us how to deal with those who hate us, "**27. *But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28. bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.***" (Luke 6:27-31). Please pay attention to what He says. Does the Lord tell us to criticize those who hate us? Talk trash about them? Spread gossip about them? Argue with them? Question their character? No. – The Lord tells us to love them, bless them, pray for them and give to them. Even if they ***hate you, curse you, spitefully use you, strike you or takes away your goods.*** That's what we must do in order to reflect Jesus to a lost world who needs Him, and that's why our testimony is so important. Granted, it can be very difficult to love those who hate us, but it's something we must do to show the world we are different. More importantly, our love for them may eventually help them understand we have something they need, because we have Jesus.

So why is this type of love so important? Because our life, shown through actions of love, will often draw people to Jesus and the message of the gospel. That way they can understand that through our faith in the Lord we not only have eternal life, but we also have a new life here on earth. John reminds us of this in verse 14, "**14. *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.***" In reality, it's not our love that separates us from the world. In fact, there are lost people in the world who show incredible love to others. What truly separates us is the fact we're *in-Christ* through our faith in His work on the cross and our love shows them Jesus is real. In that sense,

we have ***“...passed from death to life...”*** because we have passed from an eternity of spiritual death to an eternity of spiritual life. As John reminds us in his Gospel, when Jesus said, ***“24. ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.’*** (John 5:24). This passing ***“...from death to life...”*** is talking about our salvation when we take off the old man and put on the new, and are born-again into an eternal life with our Lord (Ephesians 4:24 / Colossians 3:9-10). This is why the world hates us. They are the ***“...old man...”*** of the world, and we are the ***“...new man...”*** in Christ. That’s why our testimony in the face of their hatred will show them the new life they can have too, and they will see that most clearly through how we live. So to close out this thought on love versus hate John reminds us how evil hate really is. So evil, that our thoughts of hate are akin to murder because what we do in our minds is one step removed from what we do with our actions (Matthew 5:21-23). That’s why John says, ***“15. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”*** That’s why walking in the Spirit is not only our physical actions, but our thoughts as well.

John then gives us the greatest example of love. When our Lord went to the cross and ***“...laid down His life for us...”*** He didn’t sacrifice Himself for His benefit. He sacrificed Himself for our benefit. For our sin and for our hate, in order to make us the ***“...new man...”*** in Him. John then reminds us again of our testimony when he tells us to ***“...lay down our lives for the brethren...”***. In one sense that could mean dying to save someone else, but by using the example of sharing our ***“...goods...”*** in that passage it can also reflect giving of ourselves and what we have in order to help others. The act of serving others and helping others is an act of love that should be seen in followers of Christ. So John implores us, ***“...let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth...”***. Our deeds are our actions, which when shown in love can give us a platform to share the ***“...truth...”*** of the gospel. That’s why James reminds us, ***“...22. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*** (James 1:27). Love expressed only in words has limited utility, but add to it the actions that show love and the world will clearly see Jesus in us. James further clarifies this by saying, ***“14. What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15. If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16. and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17. Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”*** (James 2:14-18). So let’s clarify something here. James is not talking about ***“...works...”*** for salvation, but is talking about the actions that result from our salvation. These are the deeds John is talking about. The actions that back-up our words and show love to the world.

John closes out this section with an often misunderstood verse, “**22. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**” There is a dangerous fad “theology” emerging today called “*manifesting*”. People who follow that belief system think of Jesus like a holy vending machine, ready to provide whatever they want. How self-centered and unBiblical is that? Jesus answers our prayers based on His will, not ours. Jesus loves us and guides us and will forgive our sins, but He’s not going to buy us a new house or a bigger car just because we ask Him to. Instead, we need to “**...keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight...**” because we love Him and want to live our lives in a way that’s honoring to Him. But we don’t expect anything in return. Why? Because He’s already died for our sins and has promised us an eternity with Him in heaven. It would be a mockery of our Lord to expect Him to “manifest” material things in our lives as a proof of His love. Manifesting is an offshoot of the Prosperity Gospel movement, and both are tragic and unBiblical. They are the enticing fruit of the tree.

As followers of Christ we have one overarching focus in our lives, “**23. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.**”. We are to love. Seen first through our love for Jesus, and then our love for others. But in both cases, we are to love. That’s why Jesus paraphrases all of the commandments into love (Matthew 22:36-40). Love the Lord and love others. That is our priority and is a testimony that will clearly show Jesus to a lost and dying world. Because, “**...by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.**”

How beautiful is that?

Lesson #16

First John chapter 4 verses 1-6

Quick Recap:

In the closing section of Chapter 3 John talked about a characteristic every believer must have - love. Not the superficial love experienced by the world, but a love born from our faith in Jesus Christ. A love representing the life He gave for us when He went to the cross for our sins. So love must be the primary element of our testimony, because without love we have no testimony at all. Very simply, **"...God is love..."** (1 John 4:8b) so that's what this dark world needs to see in us. That's what Paul reminds us of in 1 Corinthians 13:13, **"13. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."**

Now in Chapter 4 John continues to discuss the nature of love. A topic so important to God that the first characteristic of the **"...fruit of the Spirit..."** is love (Galatians 5:22-23). But why is that? Because, **"8. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."** (1 John 4:8) The essence of God is love and the sacrifice of Jesus is the ultimate application of love. So if we're going to represent our Lord to the world, then we need to represent His character of love. But the love exhibited by a believer is not the same "love" exhibited by the world. That's because our love is so fundamentally different. It comes from a unique source that emanates from our faith in the work of Christ on the cross. This unique type of love is expressed so beautifully in Romans 5:8, **"8. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** God loved us and Jesus died for us even though we were in active rebellion against Them. In other words, God loved us when we were in our most depraved state and undeserving of His grace. But God offers His grace and unconditional love if we will simply have faith, **"...that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God..."**. This short statement in verse 2 is a brief summary of the gospel message: Jesus, who as a person of the Trinity is God, came to earth as a man, so He could live a sinless life, give Himself as a sacrifice for our sin, be resurrected after death and return to His throne in heaven. And He did all of that because, **"16. God so loved the world..."** (John 3:16a). That's why our love is different and that's why we must show the world a Godly type of love through our life.

That sounds easy enough; right? Our salvation and love comes from simple faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But sadly it's not that simple. If it were, everyone would believe and be saved. So what is it that confuses the gospel message and makes faith in Jesus so difficult for some people to accept? It's our enemy, satan. The father of lies (John 8:44), who acts as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) to influence mankind

so they will believe anything other than faith in Jesus. These are the spirits and “...**false prophets...**” John is talking about. The agents and influencers of our enemy who have infiltrated religion, education, politics, social media, journalism and nearly every other element of society in order to spread a message other than salvation through faith in Jesus. That’s what Paul meant when he warned the church at Ephesus about the truth of our enemy’s evil deception, “**12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.**” (Ephesians 6:12). This is describing the demonic spiritual forces at work in the world who present a false message to lure people away from the truth of our Lord. It’s the same thing Paul was talking about in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 when he said, “**3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4. and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.**”.

These “...**fables...**” are the false teachings John is talking about in verse 1. The demonic influences that manifest themselves in many ways:

- We see it when people have a complete lack of faith like Atheism,
- Or, through completely divergent belief systems like Buddhism or Hinduism, who discount the existence of Christ,
- Or, it might be false teaching like Jehovah Witnesses who believe Jesus is Michael the Archangel,
- Or Islam, who believe Jesus is a prophet,
- Or, “Christian” denominations who focus on their own religious merits or ceremonies for salvation instead of faith in Christ alone,
- Or, various versions of the modern Prosperity Gospel movement who view Jesus through the lens of their own success and wealth.

All of these have one thing in common. They discount Jesus as the only source of redemption and salvation by either ignoring Him completely or by adding works or religion in an attempt to earn salvation themselves. But how can something so simple as the plan of salvation get so distorted? The same way satan tempted Eve to eat the fruit. By leading her away from the truth of God's word. That's why Paul warns us, “**13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14. And no wonder! For satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.**” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). In most cases satan simply discredits or minimizes the work of Jesus to influence people to believe in something different than God's redemptive plan. That's why John now warns us to “...**test the spirits...**”. In other words, diligently seek

to understand whether or not what you read or hear is influenced by the Holy Spirit, or influenced by a demonic spirit seeking to draw you away from the truth of Jesus.

So how do we “**...test the spirits...**”? John tells us:

- **“2. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,**
- Or, **“3. and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.”** (Underline added)

It's that simple. We either choose to confess or do not confess that Jesus is Lord. That is the truth of the gospel that's only found in one place; God's word, given to us by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). Opposing this are the false gospels that teach something other than salvation through Jesus. Paul clarifies this in 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, **“22. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23. but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24. but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”** In essence, Paul takes the phrase **“...confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God...”** and summarizes it as **“...we preach Christ crucified...”**. And yet, as simple as that is, the enemy influences people to believe in “religion”, spirituality, science, or even their own wisdom. Anything to cause them to misunderstand or ignore the truth of salvation through Jesus (John 14:6).

But testing false teaching can be much more difficult than it seems. Particularly in the social media age with a seemingly endless parade of false teachers who sound so good, and millions of gullible people eager to believe whatever sounds good to them. But there is only one way to test the validity of a belief system or theology, and that is through God's word. There is no other way to understand whether or not what you read or hear is the true gospel other than by the standard of scripture. But that doesn't mean twisting scripture as some do to fit their own opinion or ideology, but testing a thought against the standard of God's word as it is written. That's why we spend so much time at Southside focused on Biblical doctrine. We take everything back to God's word to confirm it follows the doctrines and theological standards established by God. That includes what we read, what we watch and what we say. And that's why we'll often discredit specific authors or pastors or movements because they do not conform exactly to God's word.

But why is that so important? Well let's think about it. The fruit of Eve was still fruit. It obviously looked good and probably tasted good, but a single bite was all it took to rebel against God. That's because her action, no matter how insignificant it might seem, was counter to His commands. That's why we're so careful about how we handle God's word when we teach or preach, and why we question everything other than God's word. There can be no compromise. Why? Because we **“...do not believe every spirit...”** so we

“...test the spirits...” by holding them to the standard of God's word exactly how it is written. And when we do, bad authors and teachers don't get three strikes. It only takes one deviation for us to kick them to the curb. But sadly, most people are not serious about understanding God's word so they are easily taken in by the **“...many false prophets have gone out into the world...”**. In fact, my heart grieves for well-meaning people sitting in apostate churches who believe what they are being told by pastors and teachers who are in reality, **“...false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ...”** (2 Corinthians 11:13b).

But testing the spirits is not limited to checking behind authors, pastors and poor doctrine. Testing the spirits can include an assessment of someone's faith to ensure they truly understand the gospel. Some people believe they are saved because of their religion, or their good works, or even their superficial belief in Jesus. But they've never really understood the meaning of the cross, and they have never truly repented of their sin and given their life to Christ. Sadly, these people have been fooled by the enemy to think they are ok. But they are not. How do we know that? Because Jesus describes their eternal state when they stand before Him and cry out, **“22....‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ To which Jesus will reply, “23. And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’** (Matthew 7:22-23). These aren't atheists or pagan worshippers. They are people convinced they're going to heaven based on something other than true faith in Christ. They will believe they were saved because of their religion or works, but they will be lost for eternity because they did not, **“...confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,..”**. They think they are walking with the Lord, but in reality they are walking with satan, **“...1. And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2. in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3. among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”** (Ephesians 2:1-3). But how did they end up in this condition? Because they believed what someone told them but did not **“...test the spirits...”** themselves through the canon of scripture.

And that breaks my heart.

So John characterizes false teachers and their apostate message as a **“...spirit of the antichrist...”**. So given the fact he used the term **“...antichrist...”** let's take a quick sidebar to understand who he is talking about.

Note: For a more detailed study of the antichrist please refer to “Our Journey Through the Book of Revelation” on our church website under “Resources” and “Bible Studies”. There you will find four lessons (#31-34) “What is an antichrist?” “Why is there an antichrist?” “Who is the antichrist?” and “What will the antichrist do?”

For the purpose of our current study let’s briefly discuss what an antichrist is and why John warns us, ***“3...And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”*** (1 John 4:3b).

The antichrist will be a real person. The final incarnation of sin in a single being. He will be the future culmination of satan’s ancient battle against God described throughout the Bible, that eventually manifests itself in a single human who will attempt to bring the total depravity of sin upon the earth. There are a wide range of opinions amongst Bible scholars about who the antichrist will be, when he will come on the scene and what he will do. Although the Bible gives us many clues it doesn’t provide enough detail to clearly understand all we’d like to know. As a result, there is a lot of speculation. From Biblically sound possibilities to far-fetched ideas with no Biblical basis whatsoever. So for the purpose of our study we’re not going to fill-in-the-blanks with conjecture. Instead, we’ll discuss exactly what the Bible says about who the antichrist is and how he fits into the overall end-times chronology.

But first, let’s briefly review two common views held by a number of scholars today. These illustrate how different - and yet connected - these opinions can be.

The mahdi:

Some believe the antichrist will be a future Muslim leader known as the mahdi or the 12th Imam. Proponents of this position believe he will create a powerful Islamic Caliphate or empire, with which to rule the world. According to the Islamic Sunnah - a text that when combined with the Hadith and Quran provide the major source of Muslim traditional guidance - he will appear in the end-times on a white horse to make war on anyone who opposes his rule. Muslims believe he will be accompanied by a second person of power; a spiritual leader named Isa, whose Arabic name can be translated as “Jesus”, who is referenced in the Quran and highly revered by the Muslim world. Islamic literature teaches the mahdi and Isa will make a treaty with Israel for seven years, but at the mid-point of the treaty they will turn on Israel and seek to destroy them and all non-Muslims.

In some ways the story of the mahdi is very similar to the chronology found in Revelation, but the characters are fundamentally different. For example, you will sometimes read or hear people comment about “Jesus” in the Quran, with the implication that he may be the

same Jesus we worship (the Hebrew Messiah and the Son of God). This is incorrect. Muslims believe Isa stands at the right hand of Allah, who is not the Christian God of the Bible. They also believe he is not the Son of God, he is not divine, he did not die on the cross and he was not resurrected. Instead, they believe he is a human prophet who assists the mahdi in establishing his empire in order to rule the world by convincing people that faith in the Jesus of the Bible is wrong. The intended outcome is to establish a religion focused on the worship of the mahdi, who will, at the mid-point of the seven years, declare himself to be God. ---- So please be very careful what you read about "Jesus" in Islamic eschatology. He is the same in translated name only and is not connected to the Lord Jesus Christ in any way. This is another example of how the enemy seeks to confuse people.

The Emerging Roman:

Another view is the antichrist will be a popular political, business or military leader who rises to power within a revived European version of the Roman Empire. This view contends the antichrist will form an alliance of nations from the ten or so ancient people-groups who originally inhabited the European countries controlled by the Romans. Keep in mind, at its height, the Roman Empire occupied most of the known world from North Africa in the south, to Scandinavia in the north, to England in the west and to Persia (Iran) in the east. A large portion of their empire is what we know today as Europe. An area that continues to separate itself more and more from God. This is particularly relevant given their history of anti-Semitism and the recent influx of Islam. Supporting this "Roman" attribution, many believe -- and it certainly seems plausible -- that the current European Union of combined pre-Roman Empire territories, the World Bank, Globalization, the Eurodollar, the influx of Islam into Europe, the falling-away of Christianity, and the sharp rise of anti-Semitism could all point to a political and spiritual environment that lends itself to the rise of a single, powerful leader. Coupled with the re-establishment of Israel in 1948, the recognition by the United States of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and the acceleration of multiple Islamic powers against Israel, it certainly seems the world at large, and possibly Europe in particular, is becoming a stage for the fulfillment of end-times Bible prophecy. But the fact is we don't know where the antichrist will emerge. We just know that he will.

So who and what is an antichrist?

The Bible teaches the antichrist - also known in Revelation as "*the beast*" - will seek to rule the world by forming a one-world government, establishing a single economy, and

creating a false religion focused on worshipping him as the supreme power. Guided by satan, he will be part of an unholy trinity where satan attempts to supplant God the Father, the antichrist tries to replace God the Son and the “false-prophet” the Holy Spirit. They will make a treaty with Israel for seven years during the Tribulation Period (Daniel 9:26). But in the middle of the seven years the antichrist will violate the treaty, declare himself to be god and desecrate the third temple in Jerusalem. This event is known as the “*Abomination that Causes Desolation*” discussed in Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15.

We don’t know his name, but we do know he is real. Despite what some commentators may say, the antichrist (in his end-times role) has not yet appeared. He’s not a Roman Caesar, he’s not a past military leader, he’s not an abstract concept and he’s not symbolic. The antichrist will be a man. A real human, who will be supernaturally empowered by satan to make one last-ditch effort to destroy God’s redemptive plan of salvation and assume control of creation. In this role he will be the ultimate culmination of all human sin and disobedience against God across all time.

So the term “*...antichrist...*” as used here by John, refers to this eventual person, but also defines anyone who is in opposition to God; specifically His grace-giving forgiveness of sin through the work of Christ on the cross. Given that, we begin to see that “*...the spirit of the antichrist...*” has been in place since the fall of man, when 100% of mankind became the enemy of God through a single sin of satan-influenced disobedience to God’s command (Genesis 3:6-7). From that point until now satan and God have been in constant conflict, specifically as it applies to the role of Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for sinful man (Genesis 3:15). So John warns us, “**18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.**” (1 John 2:18) and, “**3...this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.**” (1 John 4:3b)

Here John isn’t talking specifically about the final and singularly evil antichrist of Revelation, but is pointing out the fact that all mankind who does not believe in Jesus as the atoning sacrifice of grace is in “*...the spirit of the antichrist...*” because “**2. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3. and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.**” (1 John 4:2-3). So who is John talking about? Very simply, anyone who denies the position of Jesus as the divine Son of God and the single source of salvation. In that sense, they are in “*...the spirit of the antichrist...*” because their actions and attitude are an example of the single evil puppet who is yet to come. These are the false teachers, authors, pastors, politicians, educators, social media influencers, and anyone else being used by satan to confuse

mankind into believing there are other ways to immortality except through faith in Christ. And remember, these agents of the enemy are not just in the secular world. As we have already discussed, they are also in the “church”, **“28. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”** (Acts 20:28-30). So John warns us to be alert and **“...test the spirits...”**. Otherwise, we may fall into the trap of confusion caused by our enemy.

So let’s put this in context. From the day in the garden when satan influenced all of mankind to sin, he has sought to turn man away from God. More specifically, he has sought to destroy God’s redemptive work through Jesus. His intent is to destroy God’s means of providing grace and forgiveness to those who are lost. Over time he has attempted to do this by tempting man to sin, and in some cases, possessing men, nations and empires with deep-seated evil and false religion and ideologies -- with a prime focus on destroying the chosen nation of God - Israel, the birth place and people of the Messiah. But at some point in the future satan will embody himself in a single demonically-influenced human-being through which he will seek to rule the world. This will be the antichrist. But don't worry. When that day comes the Bride of Christ will not be here. The Bible clearly indicates the Rapture will occur before the antichrist emerges (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 / Revelation 3:10). So don’t worry about who he is or when he’ll arise. Just be alert to what you read and listen to so you’re not drawn in by his lies. To do that we must all be like the church at Berea in Macedonia, **“...11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”** (Acts 17:11). Here we see them **“...testing the spirits...”** because they **“...searched the Scriptures daily...”** to understand what was true.

John closes out this section with an encouraging passage, **“4. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”** (1 John 4:4-6). Here he reminds us we are God's children, and as such, we have overcome the world and its evil prince. Not because of anything we have done but because our Savior Jesus **“...is greater than he who is in the world...”**. Through our faith we **“...are of God...”** and He hears us and draws us to Him through His Spirit who is in us.

Praise the Lord.

Lesson #17

First John chapter 4 verses 7-21

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 4 John warns us to “**...test the spirits...**” to determine whether or not what we see and hear comes from the Holy Spirit or from false teachers influenced by, “**...the spirit of the antichrist...**” (1 John 4:1&3). This is critical in today's world where we are inundated with authors, teachers, pastors and social media influencers peddling something other than salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. These are the people and doctrines John is talking about who we must put to the test through the canon of scripture.

Now in verses 7 through 21, John goes back to the familiar topic of love. He starts by imploring us to “**...love one another...**”. This reminds us of God's desire expressed so beautifully in Psalm 133:1, “**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!**” But the key to being, “**...in unity...**” is love because we must first “**...love one another...**” in order to form the bond of unity. A bond that is critical for us to have in order to be an effective body of Christ.

The theme of unity is important and is found throughout the Bible. So let's think of a few examples:

- Genesis 2:24 tells us Adam and Eve were one flesh. “**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**”
 - That's unity in the family.
- Psalm 105:8-10 tells us God gave His covenant promise to Abraham, Issac and Jacob. “**He remembers His covenant forever, The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac, And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant,**”
 - That's unity in doctrine.
- Galatians 3:28 tells us, “**28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**”
 - That's unity in the church.
- Romans 15:5-6 tells us, “**5. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6.**”

that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- That's unity with others.
- And then 1 Corinthians 1:10 commands us, ***“10. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”***
 - That's unity in everything we do.

So, given all that, why is unity so important to God? Well, just look around at our society. What do you see? Lots of friction, conflict, and division - That's dis-unity.

But when society looks at us what do they see? Well...they should see the, ***“...fruit of the Spirit...”*** in Galatians 5:22-23, ***“22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23. gentleness, self-control.”*** These are character traits that foster unity amongst believers, and if that's what the world sees in us then they will see us living out Psalm 133:1, ***“...how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”***

But...is that really what they see in us? Or do they see gossip, conflict, division and disagreements? In other words, do they see dis-unity in us just like they see in themselves? If they do, then our actions may push them away from Jesus because it will appear we have nothing they need. Particularly if our life does not reflect love. So John alerts us to the fact, ***“...7. everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*** Once again John tells us ***“...God is love...”***. This emphasizes His core nature and the fact our life must reflect the essence of our Lord's character. But why is the single emotion of love so important? Because, ***“9. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*** This passage is a brief summary of the gospel. The fact that God loved us so much He sent Jesus to earth, to take the sin of man on Himself, in order to save our wretched souls through His holy sacrifice. Not because we loved Him and then He loved us in return, but because ***“8. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** (Romans 5:8). This is a love that's hard for us to grasp in our human mind. A love so powerful it is offered to us when we are in our lost and most sinful condition, so that ***“...we might live through Him...”***, and live with Him for all eternity. The condition of living ***“...through Him...”*** speaks to our position of being in Christ, ***“26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on***

Christ.” (Galatians 3:26-27). This verse isn't talking about water baptism which is a post-salvation ordinance of obedience, but is speaking of the indwelling Holy Spirit we receive at salvation that makes us “...*in...*” Christ. Here in Galatians Paul describes being in-Christ by the illustration of putting “...*on...*” Christ. This is our position of being “...*in...*” Christ as a child of God. This is the ultimate illustration of the love God has for His wayward creation. A love so powerful that Jesus left heaven and came to earth, “...*to be the propitiation for our sins.*”. How can we get our head around that example of God's love and not seek to be in unity by loving one another?

But why is God's focus on love and unity so important? Because dis-unity - which reflects a lack of love - is a tool of the enemy. Whether he attacks marriages, families, relationships, nations or churches, our enemy wants to segregate and polarize people and ideas. And in doing so, he creates chaos, confusion and dis-unity. Why? Because dis-unity results in fractures and conflict, and dis-unity in the church separates us from one another. And left unchecked, it eventually clouds our vision and our focus on Jesus. That's why loving one another and unity amongst believers is so critically important.

Think about it this way...

As we grow closer together as a body we should become more focused on the Lord and more intent in our love. When we do we form a mighty fortress which the enemy cannot breach. But let dis-unity invade, then conflict will follow and the walls will crumble. And when it does, the enemy gains a foothold and our fortress is weakened. So John reminds us once again, “**11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**”

And that's why, as we've discussed many times, our testimony is so critically important. When the world sees us in unity and loving one another with a love born from being in-Christ they will see something they don't have. But let disunity enter the picture and the world will view us no different than they view themselves. That's vitally important, because often the only view the world has of our Lord is the view they see in us. So John reminds us of this, “**12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**” We cannot see the Father in heaven, but the world saw Jesus who is also God who came to earth as a man, “**15. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.**” (Colossians 1:15). But although the world does not physically see the Father or Jesus today, they can see Their attributes through us, and they see that most clearly when we reflect God's character of love. It is that love, emanating from our salvation that enables us to share the gospel so effectively. Can you imagine the outcome if you tell someone you hate them and then share the gospel. There's no way they're going to listen. But first show them

love and then share the gospel and see the difference in their reaction. When we do that they might actually pay attention when we “**...testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.**” (Philippians 4:14b). Again, that’s why our testimony is so important. Because it is through our life the world can see the very essence of God and the fact that, “**...God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.**” – It’s as simple as that.

John reminds us of a glorious fact; that our salvation should give us confidence because of the Lord’s love for us, and our love for Him. This is what gives us a “**...boldness in the day of judgment...**”, because no matter how difficult our life may be on earth we will not have to stand in judgment because our sins have been forgiven through our faith in Christ (Revelation 20:11-15). Therefore, we should have no fear because we can lean on the love of Jesus for the strength we need, and trust fully in our eternal life with Him. This confidence and strength comes from a love that’s hard for us to fully grasp. The fact “**We love Him because He first loved us.**” The Lord loved us so much that Jesus came to the cross to take the sin of His own creation who had rebelled against Him (John 3:16). He loved us so much He made a provision for our redemption before we even knew who He is. So John reminds us that our love is not simply because He loved us, but it must be seen in our love for others, “**20. If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21. And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.**” It is the love shown through our lives that most effectively shows the world the love of God. At the same time, this type of love should give us an assurance of our eternal salvation because a God loved us before we loved Him - which means He loved us in our lost and most sinful state - but would not take that love away just because we sinned again. So, what kind of love would give us the assurance to have, “**...“...boldness in the day of judgment...”**”? The type expressed so beautifully in Ephesians 1:13-14. “**13. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14. who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.**” Here we have scriptural confirmation of our eternal security and the fact we cannot lose our salvation.. Through God's love and our faith we are “**...sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...**” and given a “**...guarantee of our inheritance...**” as a “**...purchased possession...**”. That should give us confidence, “**...in the day of judgment...**” and confidence in our eternal security..

Lesson #18

First John chapter 5 verses 1-5

Quick Recap:

In Chapter 4 John continued his discussion on the nature of love. A topic so important he confirms, **“8. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”** (1 John 4:8) That may sound harsh, but we must consider the fact the true essence of God's character is love and the sacrifice of Jesus is the ultimate application of God's love for mankind. So as believers, our life - our testimony - must represent our Lord to the world by showing His character of love. But the love we show is not the same superficial love shown by the world. Our love is fundamentally different because, **“8. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8). This is the greatest example of the iconic truth of God's character, **“16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”** (John 3:16a). This is a love unlike any other. A love so pure and genuine it can only be seen in God. But it is a love we must seek to emulate through our lives.

John then warned us to, **“...test the spirits...”**. This is critical in today's fallen world because we are inundated with authors, teachers, pastors and social media influencers spreading false doctrine and progressive ideologies intended to draw people away from the truth of Jesus. These are the people and doctrines we must put to the test through the careful study of scripture. This also serves as a reminder...if we're not in the word then how do we **“...test...”** what influences us? We can't. That's why being in God's word is so critical to living our life for Christ. So to do this we must follow the example of the Bereans, **“11. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”** (Acts 17:11).

Finally John implores us to show the love of Jesus to the dark world when we **“...love one another...”**. This reminds us of God's desire expressed so beautifully in Psalm 133:1, **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”**. But we need to remember, the key to being, **“...in unity...”** is love because we must first **“...love one another...”** in order to form the bond of unity our Lord desires in His children.

Now in Chapter 5 John closes out the first of three instructional and encouraging letters to the church. He continues with his theme of love but brings us back to the reason for our love - the fact our Lord loved us so much He gave his life to redeem our sin. That's the core premise of our faith that is being masked today by works-based and prosperity-based teaching. Just as with the Gnostics in John's day, millions of people today are drawn away from the simple truth of the cross by focusing on their own efforts or religion as a way to earn their way to heaven. So much so, research polls indicate over 60% of people surveyed in America believe they're going to heaven. And yet, very few of them would probably give the cross as the source of their confidence. In other words, they shouldn't be so confident about their final eternity. So John reminds us, **1. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves Him who is begotten of Him.**" This is in essence a summary of the gospel. Our Savior **"...is the Christ..."**, the promised Messiah, who being **"...begotten of Him..."** is the Son of God, who came to earth to die for our transgressions. The phrase, **"...Whoever believes..."** speaks to the decision we make to have faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for salvation, and when we do, we become **"...born of God..."** which firmly establishes our position as a child of God who has been spiritually born again. Just as Jesus told Nicodemus, **"7. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'** (John 3:7). All of this reflects the truth of John 3:16, **"16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."** Here we see the same qualifiers of our faith; God's love for **"...the world..."**, the **"...begotten Son..."** who is Jesus, and **"...whoever believes..."** which is our act of faith.

Then John adds another qualifier to characterize our life lived for Jesus. Not only do we **"...love the children of God..."**, our Brothers and Sisters in Christ, but we need to **"...keep His commandments..."**. This doesn't mean keeping commandments as a way to earn or sustain our salvation, but as an act of obedience to please and glorify our Father. In fact, there is no greater illustration of our love for the Lord than for us to do as He asks and live as He commands. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, **"19. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20. For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As followers of Christ we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and as a result, we are no longer **"...your own..."** but have become children of God, **"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.** (1 John 3:1), As God's children we should strive to honor Him with our obedience. That's what Paul means when he says, **"glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."** Our body and our spirit now belong to God our Father, because it was **"...bought at a price..."** by God the Son, and then indwelt by God the Spirit. Given that,

we should make every effort to glorify our Father, by living our life for Jesus, through walking in the Spirit every moment of every day. In a broad sense this is what John means when he tells us to **“...keep His commandments...”**.

But what should also encourage us in Chapter 5 is John's reminder that as followers of Christ we have, **“...overcome the world...”** (verses 4&5). This speaks to our victory in Jesus, and reminds us no matter how difficult our life may be, or how dark the world around us may become, we will overcome every obstacle. If not on earth, then certainly in heaven when **“4. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”** (Revelation 21:4). This is so encouraging and reminds us of the Lord's promise, **“33. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33). Jesus has **“...overcome the world...”** and tells us to **“...be of good cheer...”**. He doesn't tell us to be cheerful only on our good days, but reminds us that every day we can **“...overcome...”** the challenges of this world because Jesus has defeated our sin and has given us an eternity with Him in heaven. That's why John reminds us we are **“...born of God...”** (verse 4), as children of God, because we believe **“...Jesus is the Christ...”**; the promised Messiah as the sole source of our salvation. But let's think about that. Our faith in Jesus is more than a one time salvation event or a ticket to heaven. Our faith should dictate how we act, what we do, where we go, and every other aspect of our life. That way we can be a light in the world that overcomes the darkness.

So given that, let's look at a few verses that speak to us being a light in the dark world so the world can see how they can overcome too:

Luke 11:33-36

“No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light. The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light.”

- Our body, which here represents our life, is what the world sees. It is our testimony, lived out every day before a dark world. So we need to ask ourselves; when they see us are we a bright light or a dark smudge? Are our actions like a lamp? Are our words a guiding light? What about our attitude? Can Jesus use our attitude to shine Himself on the world? --- In either words, don't crawl under a basket in

darkness. Let the world see the light of Christ in us, and let our life draw them to Him like a moth to a flame.

Philippians 2:14-15)

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

- We live in a ***"...crooked and perverse generation..."***, so the world needs to see something in us they don't see in themselves. They need to see the light of Jesus shining brightly through our life. They need to see us living the bright light of an overcomer. That way the joy of our salvation will shine like a beacon in this dark world and illuminate their path to Jesus.

John 8:12

"Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

- Jesus tells us He is the Light of the world, but then He says we can be a light too. But how is that possible? By simply telling the dark world about Jesus when we walk in the light of our Savior and let the whole world see Him in us.

Matthew 5:14

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."

- If there's one thing we see today that characterizes our society, it's darkness. I mean just think about it. Some of the sinful things our society is doing and debating are so wicked they must be demonically influenced. But Jesus knows how dark this world is so He created a light to shine His love on the world. But what is that light? It's us, His followers. We are the light that shines for Him. So rather than engaging in battle with our society, let's engage with the gospel and let them see the light of Jesus in us.

Ephesians 5:8

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light."

- As we've discussed many times, the term ***"...walk..."*** means how we live. It is our testimony the lost world sees. There are people around us every day who may feel successful or maybe they see themselves as a failure. But either way, if they're lost, they're eventually going to lose everything. Why? Because even though they may not realize it, the darkness of their eternity is quickly closing in. And yet, we were the same way before we accepted Christ, but now our eternity has no

darkness at all. So let's tell the world how Jesus took us from darkness to light and how He will help them make the same journey to an eternity with Him.

1 John 1:6-7

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

- Sadly, there are many well-meaning people who consider themselves to be "Christians" but in reality they're probably not. Why? Because they think they've done enough to earn their way to heaven but they've never truly trusted Jesus as their Savior. As a result they're walking in darkness but don't realize it. So what do we do about that? Very simply; don't talk Christian, but "...**walk**..." Christian. Show the world a life walking in the light of our salvation that shines from our faith in Christ alone.

So what does all this mean? It means we are the light Jesus uses to shine through the darkness of the world. And just as a light overcomes the world's physical darkness, our light can overcome the world's spiritual darkness. But that's not always easy. It takes strong faith and perseverance, but when we succeed there is no greater victory. That's a great reminder of what John asks us, '**5. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

That's us.

Lesson #19

First John chapter 5 verses 6-13

Quick Recap:

In the previous section of Chapter 5 John clarifies the sole source of our salvation, “**1. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...**” (1 John 5:1a). John then implores us to “**...keep His commandments...**”. Not as a way to earn salvation, but as a way to glorify our Father by obedience. All of this speaks to our testimony lived before a lost world that shows them we have “**...overcome the world...**” through our faith in Jesus. We then expanded this thought and talked about our life by looking at a number of passages identifying us as a light in this dark world.

Now in the next section of Chapter 5 John focuses on the divinity of Jesus and His place in the Trinity. John had a very good reason for doing this because the Gnostics believed the spirit of God entered a human man named Jesus at his baptism and then left him just prior to His crucifixion. If that were the case, it would discount the earthly birth of Christ and His dual role as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. It would also discount the fact God came to earth as a man, to live like man, so He could take the sin of man on Himself. In other words, it was just another example of a false theology that must be “**...tested...**” because, “**...many false prophets have gone out into the world.**” (1 John 4:1a). But the Gnostics were no different than false teachers today who adjust Biblical doctrine ever so slightly to draw people away from the truth of Jesus. In doing so they effectively deny the divine and eternal position of Jesus as the Son of God who was born as a man, “**11. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**” (Luke 2:11) So here in verse 6 John clarifies Jesus “**...came by water and blood...**”. A fact proclaimed by the Holy Spirit and the Father, “**16. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.**” (Matthew 3:16-17). The period of time between Jesus’ baptism and crucifixion bookends His earthly ministry, but the Father’s announcement in verse 17 declares the divinity of Jesus as the Son of God and not a man temporarily infilled with the Holy Spirit. So to further emphasize this truth John clarifies the role of each person of God in the Trinity, “**7. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.**”.

So given this statement, let's take a few minutes and explore the Doctrine of the Trinity to ensure there is no confusion.

First let's talk about "God" in general. It can be difficult for us to understand the person of God. As Isaiah proclaims, **"8. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9).** Everything about God is different. That's because His ways are perfect and **"...higher..."** than our ways. Why? Because He is God. He is the Creator and Ruler of all things, but He Himself is not a created being. He is the Almighty, He is holy, and He is eternal, which means He has always existed, and will always exist in the future. As the Psalmist describes, **"2. Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. (Psalm 90:2)** In other words, before there was any creation as we know it, God already existed, **"...from everlasting to everlasting..."**, which means He has existed forever and ever. As difficult as that is to comprehend, Jesus reminds us of His eternal condition in Revelation 1:8, **"8. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."** Here we see Jesus, who is God, declaring His power across all time: **"...who is..."** [present], **"...who was..."** [past], and **"...who is to come..."** [future].

But beyond the fact God is eternal, we need to understand another important fact. God exists in three individual persons - *God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit*. We call this the *"Trinity"*. In our human mind it can be difficult for us to understand how three beings can exist and function as One, but they do, and it is that perfect unity that makes them a Trinity. It is a unique position made possible only because They are God and They function in a triune role as three divine but individual beings. That doesn't mean there is one God functioning in three roles or wearing three hats depending on the situation. It means there are three distinct persons of God who function as One, but do so in complete unity, power and authority. That also means each person of God is an individual being, yet in their specific roles they function together as One.

So given all that, let's look into scripture to better understand the triune nature of God and why we believe one God exists as three distinct individuals, in three distinct roles, but who function in unity as One.

The fact there is one God who exists as three persons is made clear in many verses.

Here are just a few (underlines added):

- Isaiah 6:8 - ***“8. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”***
- Genesis 1:26 - ***“26. Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”***
- Genesis 3:22a - ***“22. Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil...”***

Each of these verses, and many more like them, speak to the plurality of God by using words like “...**Us**...” and “...**Our**...”. Plural root words that clearly indicate more than one being. Yet even though the Bible speaks of God in a plural sense it does not specifically use the word “*Trinity*” to describe God's plural nature. And yet, scripture is clear that God is identified as three distinct individuals. One of the best examples of this is found in Matthew 28:16-20 where Jesus gives us the “*Great Commission*” to spread the gospel to the world. There in verse 19 He states, ***“19. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,...*** Here Jesus makes a clear distinction between “...**the Father**...”, “...**the Son**...”, and “...**the Holy Spirit**...”, by describing the three individual persons of God.

One of the notions John was combating in his Epistles was the Gnostic belief that Jesus was a human who received the Spirit of God at his baptism and lost it at the Crucifixion. But as we've discussed, this denies the truth that Jesus is God and His dual role as both the *Son of God* and the *Son of Man*. That's why understanding the Trinity is important. As part of the Trinity Jesus occupies a role described as the “*Son*”. That doesn't mean He is the physically born “son” as we would define a human father and son relationship. Jesus was not born by a human father, nor was He created by a heavenly Father. Jesus is part of the Trinity of God, and as such, He is eternal and is equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The term “*Son*” simply indicates the position He occupies in the Trinity and helps us understand His primary function.

Let's think about it like this. In their defined triune roles each person of God is equal in every way, but each also has a specific function. God the Father functions in an “oversight” role (for lack of a better term) within the Trinity. That doesn't mean the Father has more authority or superiority over God the Son or God the Holy Spirit, but it means His unique role is to orchestrate events from heaven that are administered by the other two persons of God. For example, we know Jesus ***“...is the image of the invisible***

God..." (Colossians 1:15a), because God the Father and God the Spirit are both spirits and cannot be seen (John 1:18), so God the Son became a human so He could be the visible intermediary between us and the Father. Jesus did this by coming to earth as a man, in order to have a relationship with mankind. But even when Jesus came to earth as a man, who was fully human, He was still fully God, who is divine. He came functioning in both roles to fulfill the plan of redemption the three persons of God had agreed to. A role Jesus confirms when He says, **"38. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."** (John 6:38). This doesn't mean God the Father had a plan of His own and Jesus executed it. Their plan was developed together with the Holy Spirit and in perfect unity, and then Jesus became a human to bring application of their plan on earth in order to glorify God, **"4. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."** (John 17:4-5). This is in essence the role Jesus fulfills as the *Son of God*, who is still fully God and who co-authored the plan of God, but as our Mediator, came to earth as the *Son of Man* to execute the plan They had developed in unity.

That's important. So let's dig a little deeper into how Jesus can be both God and man at the same time:

John 1:1 tells us, **"1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** This clarifies the fact Jesus, who is **"...the Word..."** is God. But how do we know **"...the Word..."** is a reference to Jesus? For that, let's go to verse 14 (underline added). **"14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."**

Let's look at this passage in two parts to get a deeper meaning:

- First it tells us Jesus **"...became flesh..."** which means He was fully human. This describes His humanity and His physical human attributes.
- But then it says, **"...we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father..."**. His **"...glory..."** defines His divine nature as God and describes His role in relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- So taken together, His **"...flesh..."** describes His human characteristics and His **"...glory..."** describes the fact He is still God.

In another very interesting passage of scripture we see both titles being used to describe Jesus. In that story Jesus is at the home of Caiaphas the high priest, and standing before the Sanhedrin the night before His crucifixion. During the interrogation, **"62. And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify**

against You?” 63. But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” 64. Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:62-64) Here Jesus confirms He is the “...**Son of God...**” but then says He will be seen coming from heaven as the “...**Son of Man...**”. An event described in Revelation 14:14, “**14. Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.**” These verses confirm both His “...**flesh...**”, His human attributes, and His “...**glory...**”, His divine attributes. Interestingly, just before he was martyred Stephen had a very similar vision into heaven, “**55. But he, [Stephen] being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56. and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”**” (Acts 7:55-56). Here Stephen was looking at Jesus in heaven and recognized Him as the “...**Son of Man...**”.

So, even though Jesus used both titles interchangeably He was not a man who became God, but He is eternally God, who for a time also became a man. Jesus was not created by God but has Himself been God for eternity, and in His role as God the Son, Jesus is part of the Trinity and therefore is equal in divinity and authority with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. That position does not change just because He took the form of a man on earth.

So let’s establish that fact in scripture. “**5. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6. who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7. but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,**” (Philippians 2:5-9) Here the English term “...**robbery...**”, in the original Greek, “*Harpogmon*”, simply means “*to grasp*” or, “*a thing to be seized upon or to be held fast*”. In other words, as a man, Jesus was not living His life on earth like He did in heaven, by living like God. Instead, He was living like a man, but even so, He was still a “...**form of God...**” (a part of the Trinity of God) and “...**equal with God...**” in every way. This helps us understand that as a man Jesus is still fully God. As Paul confirms, “**9. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.**” (Colossians 2:9). This verse clarifies that in His “...**bodily...**” human form, Jesus is still God, still divine, still holy and still part of the “...**Godhead...**” of the Trinity. And yet, He came as a man for the intent purpose of dying for the sin of mankind to carry out the plan of redemption. In other words, He became a man to do something no one else could ever

do. He could do that because He is a unique and uncreated physical being who is Himself God. So Jesus came to earth in a very unique role. He came in the form of a man in order to take our human sin upon Himself, **“9. But we see Jesus, who was made [in His human form] a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.** (Hebrews 2:9). So given that, we can understand that **“...the Word...”** is Jesus, who John also clarifies **“...was God...”** [is God] (John 1:1&14). Taken together, all of this makes it clear that Jesus is God, just as the Father and the Holy Spirit are God. But in His earthly role He functioned as a **“Son”** to physically carry out the plan developed by the Trinity.

Therefore, Jesus is God, and in His role as the Son of God He came as a man in order to be the sinless offering made for our sin, **“19. but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”** (1 Peter 1:19) And being born a human, He for a time was also a **“Son”** of mankind - the seed of Eve - as the *Son of Man* (Genesis 3:15). And yet, even as He was fully man, He was still the fully God and lived as the Son of Man, but without sin. **“21. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). That’s important to understand. When Jesus went to the cross He took our sin on Himself, but He didn’t become a **“sinner”**. As a man Jesus took our sin, but as God He did not commit any of the sin, because He had no sinful desire to sin. That’s difficult for us to comprehend. Particularly considering the fact that in His 33 years on earth, He lived as a human child, a teenager, young adult and an adult, but Jesus never sinned. He was born poor, lived poor, worked hard and suffered the same physical and emotional challenges we do. Yet He never sinned. But how was that possible? Because as the Son of God He had no human internal desire to sin when He became the Son of Man because He did not inherit the desire to sin through Adam. Although Jesus came to earth as a man he was not the human son of Joseph and therefore did not inherit the sin nature of Adam. We need to remember that. Jesus is not like Adam, even though Jesus became a human. Jesus is fully God and was not created nor was He born **“of”** man. Therefore, even as a human, He did not receive the inherited nature of fallen man. That’s because Jesus came to earth through a surrogate human mother but was divinely conceived through the power of God, **“35. And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”** (Luke 1:35). Therefore, Jesus has no inherited, imputed or in-born desire to rebel against God - which would also be rebelling against Himself because He is God. All other humans have a desire to rebel through the sin of Adam, **“18. Therefore, as through one man’s [Adam] offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,...”** (Romans 5:18). But not Jesus. He was not created like Adam and He was not **“of”** Adam (or Joseph) but was conceived by God and therefore did not have the internal desire to go against God’s

commands. No doubt, Jesus was all man, with human attributes, but Jesus is all God and could not rebel against His own divine nature.

All of this helps us understand John's statement, "**7. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.**" Here we see the three Persons of God who together are the Trinity. Then in verse 8 John relates this truth to the testimony of Jesus on earth.

- At the baptism of Jesus the Spirit and the Father testify - "**...bear witness...**" - that He is the Son of God, **17. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** (Matthew 3:17).
- Likewise, the Spirit bears witness to the role of Jesus, **"35. And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."** (Luke 1:35).
- And "**...the blood...**", shed at the crucifixion testifies to the role of Jesus as our Redeemer, **"54. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"** (Matthew 27:54).

Taken together, these three elements speak to the fact Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth to redeem the sin of His rebellious creation. But the reality that Jesus is the divine Son of God and the sole source of our redemption should also be seen in us so that our life will "**...bear witness...**" to these truths. This is our testimony that shows the world Jesus is real. Not by the "**...witness of men...**" but by the "**...witness of God...**" which we exhibit through our lives. This is exactly what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, when he says, **"20. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** God trusts us to be His "**...ambassadors...**" and to "**...bear witness...**" to the world. In a beautifully profound manner Paul says God is "**...pleading through us...**", "**...on Christ's behalf...**" to share the truth of Jesus. His "**...pleading...**" is the truth that those who are lost and headed to hell can be "**...reconciled to God...**" by the testimony of our lives. How? Because, **"10. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."** (1 John 5:10-11). We who are believers in Christ have, "**...the witness in himself...**". This is speaking about our lives as a follower of Christ, who being *in-Christ*, becomes the platform through which God can "**...bear witness...**" by "**...pleading through us...**" to the world. I mean, think about that. Our life, the things we do and say every day, can be used by God to "**...bear witness...**" of His Son to a lost

world. And we can do that because we embody the truth of **“...the testimony that God has given of His Son”** (1 John 5:11b) for the forgiveness of sin (John 3:16). So it is our testimony God uses to share the truth that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth to redeem the sin of mankind. We have this truth through our faith in the gospel, which is why anything other than the gospel makes God a liar. So John brings us to the harsh reality of God’s gift of grace; the difference between an eternity with Him in heaven or an eternity apart from Him in hell, **“12. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”** This is talking about eternal life. As followers of Christ, who have confessed their sin and believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the sole source of salvation, we are guaranteed eternal life with the Lord (Ephesians 1:13-14). Those who reject the truth of Christ, **“...does not have the Son of God does not have life.”** It can’t get any more clear than that. And that is why the testimony of our life is so critically important. Because the way we **“...bear witness...”** before the world may be the deciding factor in whether or not someone watching us is drawn to Jesus or driven away by what they see in us.

John ends this section with a comforting thought, **“13. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”** We have eternal life because of our faith in the work of the Son on the cross. That is a promise that will not be taken away, and is a promise that should prompt us to share that beautiful truth with the whole world.

Lesson #20

First John chapter 5 verses 14-21

Quick Recap:

In the last section of Chapter 5 John talked about Jesus who “...**who came by water and blood...**”. This was to clarify the divinity of Jesus who is both the *Son of God* and the *Son of Man*, and a part of the holy Trinity. John did this to discount the Gnostic’s teaching that Jesus was a human only indwelt by the Holy Spirit between His baptism and crucifixion. He emphasizes our Lord’s role in the Trinity by reminding us, “**7. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.**”. As we know, Jesus is “...**the Word...**” who “**14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**” (John 1:14). Given this important distinction we talked at length about the Trinity to clarify the role of Jesus as God, who is equal with both the Father and the Spirit. This is why our personal testimony is so important. Whether they realize it or not, the world seeks to discount the role of Jesus. That's why so many belief systems replace redemption through Christ with good works, religion or their own prosperity. In essence, they deny the divine role of Jesus just as the Gnostics did. So it is our role, through our life, to show the world Jesus is real and He is all they need.

Now John closes out his first Epistle by comforting us with the assurance of our salvation, and the fact that as believers we have unlimited and open access to the throne of God our Father, “**14. Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.**”. This passage of scripture is often misunderstood and can lead to false doctrine and even false hope. In fact, in one sense, the entire Prosperity Gospel movement and the emerging belief in “*Manifesting*” can come from this verse because people believe God will give them “...**whatever we ask...**” for. But, that’s not the way it works. God certainly hears our prayers (Psalm 145:18). In fact, God already knows what we’re going to pray for before we do (Matthew 6:8). But...God answers our prayers the way He wants, and not necessarily the way we want. That’s why John clarifies “...**if we ask anything...**” it must be asked “...**according to His will...**”, not our will. That’s the point the Prosperity Gospel folks miss. They pray for what they want and they pray God will do their will. But God is going to provide what He wants and always “...**according to His will...**”. Jesus explains this very clearly, “**13. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that**

the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:13). Note the qualifiers. We get “...***whatever you ask...***” when we ask for things where “...***the Father may be glorified...***”. That certainly causes us to step back and think about the type of things we should ask for. The premise of the whole “*Health and Wealth*” gospel movement is focused on our wants and desires, and what will glorify us. Not what God wants or desires and what will glorify Him. Frankly, God’s will may not be our will, but His will is always perfect because He knows what we need much better than we do. For example, we can pray for God to heal us, and we should. But the reality is, He may not heal us in this lifetime. As a believer we will one day be healed in ways we can’t even imagine. The Lord affirms this in Revelation 21:4-5, “***4. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.***” ***5. Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.***” In that sense, our prayers for healing will always be answered, but maybe not in this lifeline. If they were Christians would never die and go to be with the Lord. So, if God can heal us, why are there times when He doesn’t? Because there may be times when the challenges and struggles in this life remain so that “...***the Father may be glorified...***”. That may be hard to understand, but think about how many people we have met who during an illness or other challenge in life grew closer to the Lord, or dug more deeply in His word, or more fervent in prayer. And what about the people whose challenge becomes a witnessing tool by bringing credibility to their testimony. This is what Paul meant when he said, “***12. But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13. so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;***”. Paul had a long list of things that had happened to him (2 Corinthians 11:12-13), and he undoubtedly prayed God would take them away, but obviously He didn’t. And yet, two-thousand years later we are encouraged by Paul’s steadfast faith and through his example we may learn to have steadfast faith as well. And when that happens, “...***the Father may be glorified...***”. How? Because our illness or other challenges in life may fortify our testimony and allow us to show the world the power of God in our lives? Then the reality is the Lord may allow us to walk through a trial in life if that trial brings glory to Him. As an example, think back again to a familiar passage from Paul we’ve discussed many times, “***8. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***” (2 Corinthians 12:8-10). Here the Apostle Paul prayed repeatedly for the Lord to remove a challenge in his life. But instead of removing it, God

assured Paul He would walk through the trial with him. So what does Paul do? He used these challenges to fortify his testimony with the understanding that, “... **when I am weak, then I am strong.**”. So, we must remember to pray for God’s will to be done, even if it’s counter to what our will would be. Then we need to be alert to understand how the Lord can use our challenge to spread His redemptive plan to those around us.

Then John talks about prayer in relation to sin. **16. If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.**” (1 John 5:16-17). This verse is a little complicated but it serves as a reminder that we should approach God in humble repentance, and not when we are in open sin. But what does John mean when he talks about “...**sin leading to death...**”? In his Epistles John talks a lot about sin. That’s because he’s speaking primarily to believers and teaching us how to identify and avoid sin in our lives so that our lives may glorify the Lord. But this can be confusing because earlier in chapter 3 John made a statement that is often misinterpreted, “...**Whoever abides in Him does not sin...**” (1 John 3:6). A thought he repeats in 1 John 5:18, “**18. We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.**”. But this doesn't mean believers can't sin. In the original Greek the phrase “...**does not sin...**” speaks to habitual sin, as in living an unrepentant sinful life, not to individual sins.

Unfortunately, we all sin, and unrepentant sin results in death, “...**but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**” (Genesis 2:17). Every believer sin, which John clarifies in chapter 1, “...**8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**”. Even as followers of Christ we are still capable of sinning. That's because until we achieve our glorified state at death or by Rapture, we still have the ability to act on temptation. But John’s point is simple. As a believer we should avoid intentional and habitual sin in our lives. In other words, our daily walk should not reflect a life of sin but a life of righteousness. Otherwise, our life will reflect lawlessness towards God because our sin is a rebellion against God’s will. Sadly, we’re all going to fail at times. Even a single unclean thought can be sin. But as a follower of Christ we should actively seek to live in such a way our life is not reflective of sin, “**5. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**” (Romans 8:5).. Also, as believers, sin should cause us to continually repent and restore our relationship with the Lord, “**9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**” (1 John 1:9). We don't repent because sin removes our salvation, but unrepentant sin clouds our spiritual life and must be addressed between us and our

Lord. This perspective is reflective of the prayer in Psalm 139:23-24, “ **23. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24. And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.**”

So given all that, what is John talking about when he compares, “**...a sin which does not lead to death...**” to “**...sin leading to death...**”? On the surface sin is sin because it is all rebellion against God’s commands, but specific sins can have a different outcome. For example, lying is a sin but it has a different outcome than the sin of murder. Both are sin but one causes death and one does not. Also, there are sins that if practiced habitually, like drug addiction, could lead to death. In addition, the Bible gives examples of sin so egregious to God it resulted in death. The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were killed because they violated the ordinance of offering (Leviticus 10:1-7). Likewise, Annias and Sapphira died when they lied about their gift to the church (Acts 5:1-11) and the Bible indicates some believers died for abusing Communion (1 Corinthians 11:30). These sins resulted in their death. But the message here is to live our life in a way to avoid intentional and habitual sin, and when we sin, to confess it to the Lord to confirm our relationship with Him.

John then closes his first Epistle with a warning, “**19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.**” Our enemy satan is much more dangerous than most people realize. They see him as a funny little cartoon character with a pointy tail. But he is the most cunning, crafty and evil creature ever created, whose sole purpose is to draw people away from the truth of Jesus Christ. We see that more and more everyday as our society seeks to normalize positions and ideologies that are clearly satan inspired. But sadly, most people are so far removed from the truth of Jesus they don’t understand the trap they’ve stepped into. But...as followers of Jesus the enemy may be able to tempt us, but he cannot have us or control us. Why? Because we belong to God through our faith in the truth of the gospel. So John reassures us, “**20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.**” Three times John uses the word “**...true...**” reminding us that Jesus, our precious Savior, is “**...full of grace and truth...**” (John 1:14b). He is “**...the way, the truth, and the life...**” (John 14:6b), and through Him our testimony brings truth to a dark world.

Lastly, John reminds us, “**21. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**” This isn’t talking about idols of wood or stone, but of the things, thoughts, influences and ideologies that pull us away from a life lived for Jesus. It is anything in our lives we put above our love for the Lord. We need to think about that each day to help us live a life so that, “**27. Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in**

one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” (Phillipians 1:27).

Conclusion:

John’s First Epistle is not deep in doctrine or theology. It is intended to help us, as followers of Christ, to follow Him with obedience and love. Once again, we are brought back to the importance of our personal testimony because it is our life, on exhibit before a lost world, that will reflect the reality of Jesus.

Now, let’s move on to John’s Second Epistle and continue to be encouraged by the words the Lord gave to us through John,

Our Journey Through the Epistles of John

Second John

Mike Butler
First Edition
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Lesson #1 - Introduction

Welcome to the Second Epistle of John

Note: For historical and biographical information related to the Apostle John and his Epistles please refer to the Introduction section of "Our Journey Through the Epistles of John - First John".

This Epistle is the second of three instructional letters written by the Apostle John to the early church. It was probably written about the same time as his first letter - 90-95AD - while John was ministering to the church at Ephesus. Unlike his first letter, which was written to the church at large, the second and third letters were written to individuals. This was done so John could address specific concerns in his letters that could then be shared with others. John continues his focus on love and reminds us that the core premise of our faith is salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But John also continues to address his primary concern. The spread of false doctrine that risked luring believers away from the simple truth of the gospel.

Setting the Stage:

*John was an old man, and as best he could tell he was the last remaining Apostle who actually walked with Jesus during His ministry. John missed His savior and like Paul he looked forward to the day when he would be reunited with Him for eternity (Philippians 1:20-26). But also like Paul, John knew his current assignment was here on earth to share the truth of Jesus, teach new believers how to live a Christ-filled life and protect the Lord's doctrinal truths. As Paul would say of his own life, **"25. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26. so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me."** (Philippians 1:25-26). But John was tired. He had spent his*

entire adult life sharing the beautiful news of redemption made possible by faith in the simple truth of Jesus and the cross. As a result, he had seen the early church grow and prosper even though they were under constant persecution from both Jewish leadership and the Roman Empire. And yet, he was tired of the interlopers. Those with a false gospel who worked hard to pull people away from the truth of Jesus by complicating it with “special” knowledge and philosophy they felt only a few would possess. John knew these people were influenced by satan so he had already warned the church to, **“1...test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”** (1 John 4:1b). John also knew these aberrant preachers, the “Gnostics”, sought to influence the early Christians and lure them away with teaching that sounded good, but was fundamentally false. But John also knew people are gullible and the idea of having some kind of “special” knowledge was attractive and would draw them away from the truth. So John wanted them to know the danger of these peddlers of false doctrine. To the point John wanted them to stay away from them and not risk their influence. On the surface this was counter to John’s teaching on love and unity, but John knew that to show love to these imposters risked the chance of inviting them in and being subjected to their false teaching. So John wrote his second letter to a friend, a dear lady of the church and her children. A multigenerational letter warning them of the danger so she could help him warn others.

Second John verses 1-13

John begins his second letter in a classic Greco-Roman letter format. He clarifies himself as the author of the letter and addresses it to a lady believer and her family. He then greets her with a beautiful salutation of love, **“...3. Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”** This not only emphasized the position of Jesus as the **“...Son of the Father...”**, which the Gnostics denied, but also pointed to the character of God’s **“...truth and love...”**. John calls himself **“...The Elder...”**, which indicates both his advanced age and his position as a revered leader of the church. He didn’t need to give his name. They would know it was him because as a leader who personally walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry no one but John wrote with such authority and knowledge. This gave John’s message unique credibility so that anything he shared would be accepted by the church to instruct and encourage them.

Although we don’t know the name of this lady John wrote to, she was obviously a close friend and a faithful follower of Christ. John addresses her as one, **“...whom I love...”**, but also points out the fact she was respected by others. And yet the real connection between John and the lady appears to be her strong faith because, **“...of the truth which abides in us...”**. The truth of the gospel that both of them shared. Here John uses the

same term he did in his first letter to describe how the truth of Jesus lives in us (1 John 2:14). It “...**abides...**”, a word translated from the original Greek, “*meno*”, which means, “...*Something has established itself permanently within my soul, and always exerts its power in me...*”. We talked about that earlier from the perspective of God's truth abiding in us through His word. This is the truth that, “...**abides in us and will be with us forever...**” because we follow the words of God and not the words of men (2 John 1:2b).

But as we've discussed many times, isn't it interesting that the same false teaching John was fighting in the first-century church still exists today in the modern church. We might not call it Gnosticism, but the end result is the same. False teachers today lure people away from the simple truth of the gospel by masking it in grand religious observances or even worse, the notion that our own prosperity and wealth is an indication of God's love for us. On the surface that sounds so good. I mean doesn't the Bible teach us that God wants us to have a bigger house and more money as an indication of our salvation? No. Not at all. The Bible teaches salvation comes only one way, through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The Lord doesn't place “health and wealth” qualifiers on our faith. Our faith is based on our belief in Jesus. No matter who we are. That's why Paul clarified we're all one in Christ, whether we be, “...**slave nor free...**”, rich or poor (Galatians 3:28b). Our salvation is not predicated on our success in life or our financial acumen. Salvation comes one way, through simple faith in the simple truth that Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins. This doesn't require wealth. It requires faith. It doesn't require special knowledge. It requires Biblical knowledge in the simple truth of the gospel. But unfortunately, people today, just as they did in John's time, are drawn-in by the enemy with good looking fruit from the tree of false doctrine. And well-meaning people fall for this because they do not, “...**test the spirits...**” (1 John 4:1b). Why? Because they are not in God's word and Biblically questioning what they are told. That's why John wrote this letter. He was burdened because his believing friends were at risk of being influenced by the false Gnostic teachers. So John was determined to root them out and expose their lies.

And there's a lesson in here for us. It might be inviting to read modern “Christian” books or watch the video sermons of Prosperity Gospel authors and preachers. It sounds so good and their wares can even be encouraging, but they are no less false doctrine than the Gnostics of John's day, or the Judaizers the Apostle Paul was fighting. So when we read or listen to their teaching we are in effect promoting their lies.

We need to really think about that.

In verse 4 John expresses his joy because the lady and her children are “...**walking in truth...**”. But what I find interesting is the way John states this. He says, “...**some of your**

children...”, but not all of her children. This may be an indication John is starting to see some of them turn away, or at least are at risk of turning way. So John further clarifies what “*...truth...*” is. It is “*...as we received commandments from the Father...*”. This is a reminder that truth comes from one place - from God - through His word. It does not come from man and their nonBiblical teaching. So John pleads with her to understand the truth and not be led astray. He does this the same way he did in his first letter. Not as a “*...new commandment...*”, but through the truth of the gospel they have had “*...from the beginning...*”. You’ll recall from First John the discussion about a “*...new commandment...*”, which is actually the same as the “*...old commandment...*” (1 John 2:7-8). The commandment to love God first and then to, “*...love one another...*”. Just as Jesus tells us, “**35. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**” (John 13:35). That’s the “*...old commandment...*” John is talking about, that has been made fresh and anew through the sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. The “*...old commandment...*” of love now illustrated by Jesus on the cross is “*...new...*” because His death brings new life as we are born again, and are given the promise of an eternal life with Him (John 3:3). It is this love that brought Jesus to earth, and put Him on the cross. As Jesus tells us in John 15:12-13, “**12. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.**”. But why is that so important? Because the love we have through our faith comes from our belief in Jesus as the sole source of our salvation. This is the truth John wants his reader to understand. Although the Gnostic’s teaching might sound good, his readers must go back to the core message of salvation which is through Jesus and the cross. So he reminds her, **6. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.**” Remember how we should “*...walk [live] according to His commandments...*”. We are to, “*...walk in the light, as he is in the light...*” (1 John 1:7b). Our “*...walk...*” is our life, our testimony, on exhibit every day before the lost world. It is the world seeing us live for Jesus and in doing so they see the power of the Lord in our lives. Not to highlight our own power, but to highlight our Lord’s power. John reminds us of this in his first letter, “**3. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.**” (1 John 5:3). It’s not “*...burdensome...*” to walk in God’s commandments. It might not always be easy but we should find absolute joy in knowing we are pleasing our Lord by walking in His Spirit and doing His will (Galatians 5:16).

But we need to be very careful. As we walk through life the enemy is constantly trying to make us stumble. So we must stay true to God’s word (His “*...commandments...*”) and not allow ourselves to be distracted by false doctrine. So John warns us, “**7. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.**”. You’ll recall from our study of First

John we discussed the antichrist (see “*Our Journey Through the Epistles of John - First John*”, Lesson # 14). So John reminds his lady reader of the dangers of those who spread any gospel other than the truth of Jesus. Not only does he call them a “**...deceiver...**” but he aligns them to the antichrist who will one day deceive the whole world (Revelation 13:8). In fact, he labels them “**...an antichrist...**” because their message discounts the divinity of Jesus and the fact He came to earth as a man in order to be the sole provider of redemption. The Gnostics did not believe Jesus was God, but was a man who was indwelt by the Holy Spirit at His baptism. That’s what he meant when he said they, “**...do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.**”. They did not believe Jesus is God who came to earth as a man.

I find John’s reference to the “**...antichrist...**” very interesting from another perspective. Not long after writing his three letters John would be arrested for preaching the gospel and sent to the Island of Patmos. A Roman penal colony in the Aegean Sea, “**9. I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.**” (Revelation 1:9). There the Lord would give John the most amazing view of the future. A view that when recorded would become the Book of Revelation. As a result, John would see things that are hard for us to imagine. One of these things was the rise and fall of the real antichrist (see Revelation Chapters 13 and 18). That would give John a unique view of evil none of us can even imagine. So John warns his readers, “**...Look to yourselves...**” for self-examination to ensure we’re not allowing false doctrine to creep into our lives. Paul warned the church at Galatia about the same thing, “**6. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7. which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! 9. As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!**” (Galatians 1:6-9). Like John’s example, these were “**...deceivers...**” who were influencing careless believers with false doctrine and, “**...throwing you into confusion.**”. So both John and Paul warned their readers not to “**...lose those things we worked for...**”. The gospel they had fought so hard to spread. The gospel that had been paid for on the cross with the most precious gift of all.

Then John instructs his readers to do something that might seem counter to his message of love, “**...do not receive him into your house nor greet him...**”. Prior to this John’s message of love had been unconditional. Even Jesus had told us, “**27. “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28. bless**

those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” But now John is telling us to ignore these people and do not allow them in your house or show them hospitality. But why? Because they are in essence agents of satan, bent on discounting the role of Jesus as the divine Son of God and the sole source of redemption. On the surface the Gnostic’s message may sound “good”, but it was only a smattering of Christian doctrine wrapped in the sinful gauze of Greek philosophy and spiritual mysticism. To those who were seeking enlightenment this would come across as legitimate because it promised them “special” knowledge imparted only on those who followed their teaching. But their teaching was false because it removed Jesus as the source of salvation and replaced it with the works and ideals of man.

We need to pay close attention to this because the same thing is happening today even more than it was in John’s time. Simply review the latest “Christian” books or scan through on-line sermons and you will find dozens of offerings that sound very good. Messages with encouraging statements and promises of a better life, but under the surface they are nothing more than the fruit of Eve’s tree. Remember, ***“...Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”*** (Genesis 3:1). God’s enemy satan is more crafty today than he has ever been. He’s no longer limited to offering fruit from a tree, but now he has infiltrated journalists, publishers, educators and the pulpit with “feel good” messages that are nothing more than the words of, ***“...a deceiver and an antichrist.”*** But how can messages, books and videos be so deceitful? Because, whatever, ***“...does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”*** Think about what this says. The ***“...doctrine of Christ...”*** is the truth that God the Father sent God the Son - who was fully divine and holy - to earth as a man so He could take the sin of man on Himself. Anything counter to that is a sinful doctrine and cannot be tolerated. That’s what Paul meant when he said, ***“9. As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”*** (Galatians 1:9). Both John and Paul are warning us not to entertain these people. Don’t read their books, don’t watch their sermons and don’t attend their churches. Why? Because they are a tool of the enemy whose only intention is to draw you away from the truth to believe their lies. That’s why the modern Prosperity Gospel movement is so dangerous. Simply because it sounds so “good” but it focuses on our earthly prosperity, and when it does it discounts the eternal prosperity found only in Jesus. I realize I talk about this a lot, but it’s important. Millions of people are drawn to this false gospel because they are looking for more in life. They want to dig out of their financial struggle and be successful, or they have allowed their success to be the top priority of their life. When that happens the “feel good” messages sound really “good”. But they’re not, because they focus on us and what we do, rather than focusing on Jesus and what

He did on the cross. Don't get me wrong. These people may "believe" in Jesus and may even view Him as the source of redemption. But that's not enough, so they seek earthly and material wealth as a way to justify salvation in their own minds. But then they do they slowly and perceptively chip away at Jesus until He is no longer the focus of their life. Instead, they become the focus. So Paul tells us, "**...let them be under God's curse!**" (Galatians 1:8b), and John tells us, "**...do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11. for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**". Pay very close attention to the last phrase. When we read or watch the Prosperity Gospel garbage we "**...share in his evil deeds...**", because we are in-effect promoting the trash they are spreading. That's why we will not sing songs in church published by particular production companies who are based on Prosperity Gospel doctrines. When we play their songs we have to pay copyright fees to use them, and when we do that we are financially supporting the sharing of a false doctrine. Sadly, some of their songs are beautiful, with moving and encouraging words that sound so good, but their underlying doctrinal position is the same thing Paul and John are talking about. By refusing to use their songs we are doing our part to fight "**...his evil deeds...**".

So do as John says and, "**8. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.**" (2 John 8). Be careful what you watch and read. Make sure you "**...test the spirits...**" to ensure you know it is Biblical and backed by solid doctrine. Do not "**...receive him into your house nor greet him...**" because when you do you will, "**...shares in his evil deeds.**" No matter how good it sounds or how good it makes you feel.

John closes his letter of warning with a warm ending. He could continue writing but would instead prefer to come meet with her "**...face to face...**" so that "**...our joy may be full...**". This reflects the love John has for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our Journey Through the Epistles of John

Third John

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Lesson #1 - Introduction

Welcome to the Third Epistle of John

Note: For historical and biographical information related to the Apostle John and his Epistles please refer to the Introduction section of "Our Journey Through the Epistles of John - First John".

This Epistle is the third and final of three letters written by the Apostle John around 90-95AD. His first letter was written to the church in general, the second to **"...the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth..."** (2 John 1a), and now the third is written to **"...To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth..."** (3 John 1a). All three letters have a common opening theme. They are written to emphasize the **"...truth..."** of the gospel. John's first letter stressed the **"...truth..."** about Jesus to warn the church about false teaching being spread by the "Gnostics". A group of philosophers who sought to draw people away from the true Christian faith by denying the fact Jesus is God who came to earth as a man to offer atonement of sin. In his second letter John continues to focus on **"...truth..."** to further expose the Gnostics. Even to the point of telling his readers, **"10. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."** (2 John 10-11). In other words, do not show Christian hospitality to those peddling false doctrine, because if you do, you are helping them share their evil lies.

Now in his third letter John will call out two men. Diotrefes who is unfaithful and leading his church in a sinful way, and Demetrius who is a faithful follower of doctrinal **"...truth..."** He points out the differences in these two men to illustrate the necessity of staying true to the doctrine of Christ.

Setting the Stage:

John sat down to write another letter. This would be his third in a series. The first was written to all believers in the churches he ministered to, the second was to a dear lady friend and her children, and now he would write a third letter to one to his beloved friends, Gaius to encourage him to “...walk in the truth...”. And that’s what John was seeking to explain in all three letters. The simple truth that salvation comes from faith in Jesus, the Son of God. But there was a wicked element at work in the church that risked destroying all they had accomplished. A group of false teachers who called themselves Gnostics were spreading a false narrative about Jesus. They proclaimed He was not the divine Son of God but was instead a man who was infilled with the Holy Spirit at His baptism and lost the infillment at His crucifixion. The Gnostics claimed to have special knowledge imparted only to a select few. Of course their theology was flawed because it discounted Jesus as being God and the sole source of redemption. But just like the fruit of Eve, satan was using this false story to lure people away from the truth. So John wanted to stress the truth by affirming the gospel of Jesus and His cross of sacrificial grace. In this letter he would also single out a man named Diotrephes who appears to be the leader of a church. But he was a poor leader who refused to recognize the authority of John and gave no hospitality to believers of the true gospel. So John informs Gaius he will soon visit and hold Diotrephes accountable for his sinful actions.

Third John verses 1-14

As with his two previous letters John uses the term “...**The Elder...**” at the beginning of his letter. John was the premier spiritual leader of the churches in Asia Minor, so there was no reason to use his name. They would know who he was and recognize his authority. He wrote this letter to his “...**beloved Gaius...**”. The Bible doesn’t tell us who Gaius was and he’s not mentioned anywhere else in scripture. His name was of Latin origin and one of the most common in the Roman Empire, so from his name we can’t tell much about him. But he must have been a faithful servant of the Lord because John calls him “...**beloved...**” four times. A word that in Greek, “*agapetos*”, can mean “*divinely loved or esteemed*” and reflects the respect John had for Gaius. As he did with the lady mentioned in his second letter John references Gaius as one, “...**whom I love in truth...**” which indicates his faithfulness as a believer in the gospel. John starts by comforting Gaius with a prayer that he may prosper in his ministry and in his health. Physical health was a big deal in the ancient world where diseases were common and treatments were few. For a man like John, who was probably in his 90’s, he had seen many friends die of multiple health issues. So his salutation, “...**and be in health...**” would be very

encouraging to Gaius and mirrors something we might say in a modern letter today; “*I hope this finds you well.*”. In any case, it is a warm opening to a letter from John to a disciple he greatly admired for his strong faith. This would have been very important for a first-century believer at a time when Christianity was relatively new and its followers were often persecuted. To wish someone spiritual prosperity and good health in that difficult environment would have been very encouraging indeed.

In verse 3 John references conversations he has had with others about Gaius in which they praised him for “*...the truth that is in you...*” and the fact “*...you walk in the truth...*”. Once again John talks about our “*...walk...*”, our personal testimony that people see. In Gaius’s case his testimony was solid and had been reported favorably back to John by those who had observed how he lived. This is a reminder that those around us who are lost often watch how we live and deal with problems in our life. It is often our “*...walk...*” that shows them the power of our faith, but only if they can see that we, “*...walk in the truth.*” of Jesus. Their observation would also be encouraging to John because as their teacher he could see the fruits of his labors in Gaius’s life which brought him, “*...no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth...*”. Here again John uses a term of endearment, “*...my children...*” to describe those in the flock he ministered to. What joy it must have been for John to see faithful believers and fruitful churches emerging from his efforts to “*... go and make disciples...*”. A task Jesus had commanded him to do many years before (Matthew 28:19a).

John also recognized Gaius for his hospitality to others. Both for “*...the brethren [believers] and for strangers...*”. Gaius was showing Christian love to everyone which would encourage the believers and may draw the strangers to Christ. These actions were recognized by others who had brought it to John’s attention who had, “*...borne witness of your love before the church.*”. Here verses 6 and 7 may indicate Gaius possibly sent people from the church to witness because they, “*...went forth for His name’s sake...*” “*...on their journey...*”. In other words, they were going out to spread the message of Jesus. But in doing so they were, “*...taking nothing from the Gentiles...*” which may indicate they sought no offerings from the Gentiles they were sent to witness to. This was such a positive and encouraging message for Gaius who appears to have been working hard to show the love of Jesus and spread His gospel.

But then John’s tone changes to one that’s not so encouraging. He mentions a man named Diotrephes who John is clearly unhappy with. He had evidently written about him in a previous letter to the church that has been lost. John is critical of Diotrephes as one, “*...who loves to have the preeminence among them...*”. Here the Greek term for “*...preeminence...*”, “*philoproteuon*”, means “*One who loves to be first.*” In other words, Diotrephes thought very highly of himself. This would have been a serious character flaw because it appears he may have been a local church pastor or leader who, “*...does not*

receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church..”. But even more incriminating is the fact he did not receive John and talked about John and others with **“...malicious words...”**. John describes this as **“...prating...”** which in Greek, means **“accusing and babbling”**, and indicates lots of criticism about John and other believers. Obviously John was not happy about this and said he would confront Diotrephes and hold him accountable for his actions.

John then encourages Gaius to focus on his testimony and, **“...do not imitate what is evil, but what is good...”**. Again, this is talking about Gaius’s **“...walk...”** with Christ which would be opposite of the example set by Diotrephes. Also in contrast John mentions Demetrius who has **“...a good testimony...”** based on **“...the truth itself...”**.

John closes his third letter the same way he did with the second letter. He plans to see Gaius soon and share more with him when they will, **“...speak face to face...”**. This beautiful sentiment reminds us of what God said to Moses as a sign of their special relationship, **“11. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”** (Exodus 33:11).

Conclusion:

The three letters of John are not deep in theology but they are rich in the fundamentals of our faith. Here John writes first to the church and then to two early believers. He stresses the love of God that must be seen in our testimony and he encourages his readers to walk in the truth of the gospel. That was important because John was combating the false teaching being spread by the Gnostics. A group who discounted the divinity of Jesus and based their salvation on "special" knowledge only given to a select few. So John emphasizes the divinity of Jesus and His role as the Son of God. But John goes even further and explains the importance of not entertaining or showing hospitality to those spreading this false doctrine. Why? Because to support them was in effect helping them spread their lies.

But we have the same issue to contend with today. Christianity is inundated with false teaching. Maybe more than at any other time in history. Mankind's self-centered focus on success and prosperity has resulted in false gospel movements that discount Jesus and the cross as the sole source of redemptive grace. Instead, they focus on their own efforts and success as a way to gauge God's love. But just as with Gnosticism, today's false teaching is drawing people away from the truth and leading them to follow Satan's lies. This is important for us to understand because there is so much in print and social media that sounds so good, but is in reality a message of deception. So as John asks us to do, may we learn to test the spirits so we can determine if the things influencing us are from the Lord.

"1...but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world..." (1 John 4:1b).

I hope you've enjoyed this study of John's Epistles and I pray it helps you be more discerning and faithful in a rapidly falling world.