



1ST JOHN THAT
WE MAY
KNOW

BY

AL JOHNSON

THAT WE MAY KNOW: A STUDY IN 1ST JOHN
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As John writes the letter of 1 John, he does so with the heart of a father.

Now an old man, he has endured much for the cause of Christ. He has seen many people come and go through the churches he oversees, officiated countless weddings, and presided over numerous funerals. Yet, he is not a weary or grumpy old man weighed down by war stories from his past. Though he certainly has stories to tell, he remains full of life, joy, and passion—still on the battlefield for the cause of Christ. His love and zeal for Jesus have not diminished; they have only increased.

There are many things John wants us to know, which we will explore in this study guide, but the central theme running through his letter is this: staying close to Jesus. We do this by loving him, obeying his commands, and loving his people. When we center our lives on Christ, God reshapes our hearts and desires, causing us to love his commands. When we live in shared relationships and formative friendships with other believers, we experience the fullness of life that Christ offers.

This is my desire for you and for our church. I want to help you better understand and apply God's word in practical ways. My hope is that through this study, you will not only grow in your understanding of the Scriptures but also deepen your love for God. I want to help you walk with Jesus daily and experience the life-giving transformation he promises to those who abide in him.

This study guide is designed to help individuals and groups slow down, absorb, and apply the truths of God's Word. As you use with this guide, my prayer is that your relationship with Jesus will be strengthened and that you will walk more closely with him.

-Pastor Al Johnson

HOW TO USE **STUDY GUIDE**

To help you better know and apply God's Word in practical ways, we create content like this 1 John Commentary and Study Guide. We do this because, at The Well, we believe that a life of knowing, loving, and walking with Jesus leads to practical and visible changes in our lives. I hope that you would not only know God more, but that you would also find that walking with him daily is essential, life-giving, and transformative.

Each chapter consists of an entire verse by verse commentary, contemporary application, study, and group questions for the corresponding chapter in 1 John.

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

When setting out to write this study material, I wanted to create a resource that helped make 1 John assessable to the everyday Christian. The commentary section will help you understand what is happening in each verse, making the difficult passages simple. By breaking down each verse, readers can uncover both context and clarity on the text. My goal is that you understand the heart of what John is intending to impart to his readers and be equipped with understanding that empowers you to live out your love for Jesus more effectively in your daily lives.

Contemporary Application

While you will certainly find breadcrumbs of application dropped throughout the commentary, the application section of each chapter is designed to make a particular point for today's

Christians. The benefit of the application section following the commentary lies in its ability to bridge the gap between ancient texts and contemporary life. While understanding the historical and theological context of Scripture is crucial, the application section translates these insights into practical guidance for everyday living. It challenges readers to consider how biblical principles can inform their choices, relationships, and spiritual journeys today. By offering concrete examples, this section encourages personal reflection and action.

Study Guide

This section was designed to be used for both group and individual study. The study guide portion is broken into two parts: one for personal journaling and note taking and the other a list of questions for group discussion. There are several questions offered. The reason for this is that the leader of a group discussion can pick and choose what line of questioning would be best for their particular group of people. This will allow for a variety of uses from personal study or church small group setting to conversations around the family dinner table. I hope that these questions will help others have opportunities to open their Bibles and grow in their love for Jesus together.

INTRODUCTION TO 1ST JOHN

John's first letter is a call to remain close to Jesus in a world filled with distraction, deception, and compromise. Written to strengthen Christians, 1 John emphasizes abiding in Christ, walking in Christ's love, and holding fast to the truth of Jesus to the end. John had seen Jesus, walked with him, and now, as an old man, he keeps talking about him. He writes to encourage Christians in a culture of spiritual confusion and moral decay.

Historical Background

The Greco-Roman world was wildly progressive, much like our modern culture. Syncretism was everywhere, showing itself as a broad tolerance that blended various religious beliefs. People worshiped the Roman emperors as divine figures while simultaneously paying homage to the pantheon of Greek and Roman gods. This merging of faiths created a spiritual landscape where truth was subjective. Similarly, just as in our time, the culture was saturated with sexual perversion and temptation, luring many away from the truth of Jesus and the purity of his church. The early Christians were constantly pressured to conform, to compromise their faith for the sake of social acceptance or political safety. John, in his writings, stands as a firm voice against these dangers, urging believers to remain steadfast in Christ despite the world's ever-changing values.

Date & Authorship

John does not name himself in 1 John, but neither did he name himself in the Gospel he wrote. This bothers some in regard to

the legitimacy of his authorship. However, there are testimonies from Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp—who was directly disciplined by John himself—that he indeed wrote this letter. Furthermore, scholars agree that the number of references to the Gospel of John corroborates this claim as well. “The internal evidence strongly supports the testimony of the early church that he [John] wrote this epistle” (MacArthur 2007, 3).

The dating of the letter is most certainly before 90 A.D. because his disciples began quoting the letter in their writings before then. However, it is possible that he wrote even before 70 A.D. “This dovetails with the testimony of church fathers that, shortly before A.D. 67, John joined other Christians in departing from Jerusalem prior to the destruction of the city by Rome. John reportedly resumed his apostolic ministry in the vicinity of the great but highly idolatrous city of Ephesus (in modern western Turkey)” (ESV 2008, 2425).

Jesus's Best Friend

Jesus had a group of close friends who are referred to in Scripture as disciples. While the term disciple doesn't explicitly mean friend, it certainly doesn't exclude it. Jesus's disciples were indeed his close friends. They spent three years with him in close proximity, witnessing his miracles, learning from his teaching, and often gathering together to feast and enjoy the goodness of God.

Among this close-knit group of disciples, one man stood closest to Jesus—his name was John. John is often referred to as the “beloved disciple” because of his uniquely close relationship with Jesus. He was a faithful friend to him.

Life is almost unbearable without the faithfulness of friends—or to say it another way, without at least one faithful friend.

One of the key themes we will see in our study of 1 John is Christian love for one another. It's often these type of deep friendships among believers that help us endure to the end. We all have a great need for a faithful friend—someone who stands by us when everyone else walks away, someone who remains close even when there is nothing for them to gain.

At great risk, John stood by Jesus until the end. When Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him, and Thomas later doubted him—John remained. In fact, he was the only one of Jesus's disciples present at Christ's crucifixion. John stayed close to Jesus even when it cost him greatly. These experiences not only shaped John but are also at the forefront throughout 1 John as he calls believers to a life of love and faithfulness to Jesus.

Remaining Near Jesus

John wants us to stay close to Jesus. This theme of abiding or remaining near Jesus permeates John's letter. John portrays abiding in Christ as a vibrant, ongoing commitment and relationship with the Lord Jesus. For John, this closeness with Jesus is not optional—it is the very foundation of the Christian life. Jesus himself taught as John records, *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me"* (John 15:4).

John took these words to heart, and now, in his letter, he is urging believers to do the same. He knows that the pressures of the world, the temptations of sin, and the presence of false teachers threaten to pull Christians away from Christ. Christians therefore must abide, stay close, and hold fast to Jesus.

Drifting away from Jesus is a real a danger. John had walked with Jesus long enough to see close friends and church members

leave the Christian faith altogether. The world we live in is full of distractions, temptations, and pressures that seek to pull believers away from Jesus. For me personally, this is why I see 1 John as more than a letter; it is an invitation—an invitation to Jesus, to remain in Jesus, and to experience the fullness of joy and eternal life that come from abiding in Jesus. Our enemy has not changed his attempts to draw us away from Jesus, and so, neither has the call to abide. As we walk through this letter, John will remind us again and again: Stay close to Jesus. This is the key to a life of true joy, assurance, and unwavering faith.

A Father's Heart

By the time John wrote this letter, he was an older man, having spent decades following Jesus and pastoring people. His words in 1 John are not dry doctrine but the passionate plea of a spiritual father urging his children to remain in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

When he first met Jesus, he was somewhat of a wild man—passionate, impulsive, and ready to call down fire from heaven on those who opposed him. He and his brother James were the sons of Zebedee, a fisherman, and they were known by the nickname “*Sons of Thunder*” (Mark 3:17). I imagine they could have had a famous career as tag team wrestlers with a fight name like that. James and John were rough, rugged, fun dudes—probably loud, headstrong, but quick to action type guys

One day as Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem, he sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival. However, the Samaritans did not welcome him, because of the deep-seated hostility between Jews and Samaritans. John and James, asked Jesus “*Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?*” (Luke 9:54).

This is not the tone of 1 John. Early on, John was fiery like an Old Testament prophet, and as he writes 1 John, he is a wise seasoned father. John's transformation is a testimony to the sanctifying power of Jesus, who takes the roughest, most headstrong individuals and molds them into instruments of his grace.

That You May Know

What I love about John is that he simply won't stop talking about Jesus. His entire life was consumed by the person and work of Jesus. From the opening of his Gospel to the final verses of his letters, John's message is clear: if you get Jesus, you get everything, if you miss Jesus, you miss everything.

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." —1 John 5:13

This is why John writes so that his readers might have certainty in their faith. He doesn't want them to be unsure or wavering; he wants them to know. The word "know" appears over 30 times in 1 John alone. For John, Christian faith is rooted in the unshakable knowledge of Jesus Christ.

John's relentless focus on Jesus is a challenge to us today. In a world full of distractions, doubts, and competing priorities, John reminds us that nothing is more important than truly knowing Jesus. Not just knowing about Jesus but walking with and experiencing life with him day in and day out.

Jesus's Faithfulness to John

When nearly everyone else had abandoned Jesus in his darkest hour, John remained a faithful friend. At the cross, when the crowds jeered, the soldiers mocked, and even Jesus's closest disciples had fled in fear, John stood by his side (John 19:25-

27). His loyalty to Jesus was unwavering, even when there was nothing to gain and everything to lose. As Jesus hung there in agony, Jesus entrusted his mother to John's care (John 19:26-27). John was not just a friend of Jesus in times of miracles and celebration; he was also a friend in suffering and sorrow. John's presence at the cross shows the love and devotion he had for Jesus—devotion that certainly shapes his writings.

John was faithful to Jesus, but even more importantly, Jesus was faithful to John—just as he is to all his followers. After decades of ministry, John found himself exiled on the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). John was old, alone, and suffering for his testimony about Christ. Yet, in that place of isolation and hardship, Jesus showed up. Jesus had not forgotten his friend. Even in exile, John was not abandoned. The Lord reassured him, *“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore”* (Rev 1:17-18). Just as Jesus had entrusted his mother to John at the cross, now he entrusted John with his final revelation—a vision that would strengthen and encourage the church for generations to come. Jesus's faithfulness to John on Patmos is a reminder that he never leaves his people, even in their suffering. When we feel alone, forgotten, or exiled by the world, Christ is still near, speaking, sustaining, and revealing himself to those who remain faithful.

It's All About Jesus

John loved Jesus and wanted everyone to love him too. John would tell anyone who would listen—and even those who wouldn't—about his savior and friend. Even under persecution John wouldn't stop talking about Jesus. In Acts chapter 4 John and Peter keep running into trouble because they keep preaching Jesus. After being arrested and told not to talk about Jesus anymore, they denied the request stating, *“we cannot but speak*

of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Years later, they finally thought they could silence John, so they threw him on a deserted island called Patmos where instead of keeping silent he writes the book of Revelation—which is all about his best friend Jesus! First John is no different. Jesus is the hero John wants you to know and love.

CHAPTER 1

THE GREATEST INVITATION

1 JOHN 1:1-4

12

1ST JOHN THAT WE MAY KNOW

Commentary

1:1

John begins by speaking about Jesus and his earthly ministry. However, a careful reader of Scripture—particularly familiar with the apostle John’s writings—will quickly notice the striking similarity in how he opens both his Gospel and this epistle. John always starts with Jesus because, for him, there is no greater subject than his best friend and the Savior of the world. In both the Gospel that bears his name and here in his first epistle, John uses the phrase “*the beginning*.” In the Gospel of John, this refers to the “*Word*” (Jesus) existing before the creation of the world. However, in this epistle, he shifts his focus to the “*Word of life*”—meaning he is speaking primarily

of Jesus in his incarnation, not just his eternal existence before the foundation of the world (Kruse 2000, 51).

John wants the reader to understand that the incarnation, God becoming man, is true and reliable. The same Jesus who existed before time itself stepped into human history as a man. He and others physically heard Jesus speak, saw him with their own eyes, and touched him with their hands. In John's day there was a heretical group called the Gnostics forming and they believed that "matter was inherently evil and spirit was good" (MacArthur 2007, 8). John is doing two things here with his claim of physical interaction with Jesus. First, he is refuting any claim that Jesus was merely a spiritual presence. Jesus shook hands, embraced His followers, and personally engaged with real people in real time. Second, by coming into physical contact with Jesus, John is denying that the physical is evil and that only the spirit is good.

1:2

John not only claims that he and others bore witness to the person and work of Jesus, but he also underscores the certainty of his testimony—even under legal scrutiny. In Jewish tradition, credible testimony required multiple eyewitnesses (Deut 19:15). The phrases "*seen it*" and "*testify to it*" are courtroom terms, commonly used in legal depositions where a witness not only provides firsthand evidence but also vouches for the truthfulness of others' testimonies (Jobes 2014, 52). John meets this standard, positioning himself as one who physically encountered Jesus and now bears witness to his life, death, and resurrection.

In short, John wants his readers to be assured that what he is saying is absolutely true. Therefore, the reader should approach this epistle with the understanding that the author fully believes his testimony is both credible and verifiable.

The phrase “*the life was made manifest*” once again points directly to the incarnation—Jesus, the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh and was revealed to the world. This was not a hidden or secret event; it was public and tangible, making John’s testimony firsthand and authoritative.

Furthermore, John proclaims “*eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us*” (v. 2). This statement points to the preexistence of Jesus. Jesus is eternal life itself—both its source and embodiment. Before his incarnation, he existed with the Father in perfect fellowship, yet Jesus stepped into human history so that people might experience salvation through him.

Christianity is built on the historical, visible, and living person of Jesus Christ—the eternal life made manifest.

1:3

The person and work of Jesus is not merely theological information but an invitation into a relationship, a shared life—a fellowship. The message of Jesus is not to be merely intellectually believed but to be received and participated in.

John’s desire for his readers “*is that you too may have fellowship with us.*” The word used here for “*fellowship*” is the Greek word; *koinōnia*. This word carries the idea of a deep bond, a close participation and partnership with one

another. Christianity is not a solitary pursuit—it is a shared life with other believers. To be in Christ means to be united not only with him but with his people. The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone, but in the context of shared relationships and formative friendships where believers encourage, challenge, and grow together in faith.

However, this fellowship is not merely human, *“and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”* True Christian fellowship is rooted in communion with God himself.

John makes no distinction between the Father and the Son in terms of their centrality to this fellowship. To know Christ is to know the Father (John 14:9), and participation in this relationship is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3).

1:4

John states his secondary purpose in writing: *“And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”* The phrase *“our joy”* can refer both to John’s personal joy and to the collective joy of the Christian community. There is a fullness of joy that comes when others enter into the same fellowship with God that John and his fellow believers already enjoy. The Scriptures tell us that all of heaven rejoices when sinners repent and turn to Jesus (Luke 15:7). Furthermore, the joy of the human experience is incomplete without the presence of God (Ps 16:11). In Christ we have access to deep abiding joy found in relationship with God himself.

Verse 4 echoes Jesus’s words in John 15:11, *“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your*

joy may be full.” True joy is not rooted in circumstances but in communion with Christ. Our hearts long for a joy and happiness that is neither fleeting nor dependent on our circumstances. We need Christ’s joy poured into our hearts.

John, once again, calls us into fellowship and relationship with the Lord Jesus—and, as we will see, away from sin and rebellion against him. One of the greatest lies our enemy wants us to believe is that repentance of sin and obedience to Jesus rob us of pleasure and joy. In fact, the opposite is true. As John will soon detail, the need for confessing and repenting of sin is not meant to deprive us of joy but to maximize it. As people come to faith and grow in fellowship with Jesus and one another, joy overflows and reaches its intended completion.

John’s message, therefore, is one of invitation, participation, and joy. He proclaims Christ so that others may have true life, experience true fellowship, and know true joy that comes through Jesus.

***Application* of 1 John 1:1-4**

Jesus is the hero of the Bible and of all human history. My hope, prayer, and goal is that you would know, love, and trust Jesus—this is the big idea behind the entire letter of First John. John was one of Jesus’s closest friends; many scholars even suggest that he was Jesus’s best friend.

John spent several years of his life learning directly from Jesus, walking with him daily, witnessing his miracles, and hearing his teaching firsthand. There is something unique and powerful about learning from someone with firsthand experience. We tend to trust eyewitnesses because they

have encountered something we haven't. John's testimony isn't based on secondhand stories or abstract ideas; it's rooted in personal experience. He heard Jesus's voice, saw his compassion, and even touched his resurrected body.

Throughout this letter, John makes it clear that knowing Jesus isn't just for those who physically walked with him 2,000 years ago. We too can know and experience him personally. The same Jesus who transformed John's life is alive and at work today.

Jesus Revealed to Us

John states that Jesus was "*made manifest*," meaning he was revealed to humanity in physical, bodily form (1:2). The testimony of this revelation is recorded and sealed in the four Gospels of the New Testament and is further affirmed throughout the entirety of Scripture (John 5:39). From the Law and the Prophets to the writings of the apostles, the Bible consistently points to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

Jesus, the eternal Son of God didn't remain unseen; he stepped into our world, taking on flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). This is the heart of the Christian faith—God has made himself known. Since Jesus was revealed in history, our faith isn't based on speculation or human philosophy but on the reality of who he is. The same God who created the universe made himself known in a way we can understand. Jesus, as John describes him in chapter one, is the "*word of life*," not distant but near, not unknowable but revealed (1:1).

Jesus Proclaimed

This great news of the person and work of Jesus cannot be kept hidden, and that's exactly what John says his intentions are—to "*proclaim*" (1:3). Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves.

When we truly meet Jesus and encounter his mercy, his love, his grace, his and his life transforming power—it naturally leads to proclamation. John can't keep silent about Jesus and neither should we. Proclaiming Jesus isn't just for pastors and preachers. It's for everyone who knows him. When we understand who Jesus is and what he has done, it overflows into our conversations, our actions, and our lives. Proclaiming Jesus is not about having all the right words; it's about testifying to who he is and what he has done in your life (1:2).

What we must all reckon with is that Jesus didn't just live a real life, but he died a real death for real people. The good news proclaimed is that Jesus loves sinners and took the just penalty for sinners upon himself. The cross of Christ is where God's mercy and justice collided. Mercy, in that we now can receive what we didn't earn or deserve, salvation, forgiveness of sins, adoption into the family of God. Justice, in that the just penalty for sin was paid. Jesus paid for our release from the bondage of sin with his own blood. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection accomplished for us something we could never achieve on our own—we can now become children of God. The payment for our freedom was made on the cross and we gain access to this freedom by faith.

Fellowship Jesus and His People

Complete joy is found with Jesus and his people (1:4). The Christian life was never meant to be walked alone. From the very beginning, God designed us for relationship—both with himself and with one another. *“Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ”* (1:3). But this fellowship isn't limited to a personal relationship with Jesus; it extends to his people. The invitation to follow Christ is an invitation into the family of God—a shared life with fellow believers. John's desire

is that we not only experience fellowship with God but also with him and the entire community of faithful Christians.

Fellowship is more than attending church or participating in a Bible study. It is an active, daily connection—abiding in Jesus, conversing with him in prayer, allowing his Word to transform our hearts—all in the context of Christian community. Walking with Jesus draws us into deep, life-giving relationships with his people. Knowing, loving and trusting Jesus is not a private endeavor. To follow Christ is to be united with his family. True Christian fellowship isn't just casual social interaction; it's a bond of real encouragement and mutual support as we journey together in our shared faith. In this shared life, our joy is made complete (1:4).

Seek Jesus daily and surround yourself with people who point you to him. Fellowship with Jesus and his people isn't something you happen upon, but it's something you commit to. As you do, your joy will deepen, your faith will grow, and you'll experience the richness of life in Christ together.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding the Context: John opens his letter by emphasizing the physical reality of Jesus's incarnation. Why was it important for John to provide an eyewitness testimony about Jesus? How does his testimony strengthen our confidence in the Christian faith?

Jesus Proclaimed: John says that he is proclaiming Jesus so that others may have fellowship with him and other believers. Why does he see proclamation as essential to the Christian life?

Following Jesus: How can we follow John's example of proclaiming Jesus in our daily lives? What are some practical ways to share the gospel testimony with others?

The Role of Testimony: In what ways have you personally experienced Jesus in your own life? How can your testimony help others come to know Him?

Fellowship with Jesus and His People: What does true Christian fellowship look like? How is it more than just attending church or Bible study?

Joy In Fellowship: How does fellowship with Jesus and his people contribute to complete joy? In what ways have you experienced joy through Christian community?

The Importance of Joy in Christ: Jesus also spoke about joy in John 15:11. How does abiding in Christ lead to true joy? How can we cultivate that joy in our daily lives?

Application and Reflection: What steps can you take this week to deepen your fellowship with Jesus? With other believers?

CHAPTER 2

**WALK IN
THE LIGHT**

1 JOHN 1:5-10

*Commentary***1:5**

God is light. Throughout the Bible, light represents truth, purity, holiness, and revelation. Darkness, on the other hand, represents sin, ignorance, and deception. John emphasizes that in God, there is no darkness at all—not even a shadow. He is perfectly holy, perfectly just, and absolutely pure. There is no corruption, no evil, and no hidden motives in him. If you want to know what is true, what is right, and what is good, you look at the God of the Bible because he is the definition of those things.

1:6

If someone claims to be in fellowship with God but continues living in sin without repentance, they are lying—to others and to themselves. Fellowship with God is more than just words; it's a way of life. Repentance is not just feeling sorrow over your sin, but

about returning to Jesus. The Christian life is one of continual repentance, continuing to return to Jesus.

To walk in darkness means to live a lifestyle of sin, secrecy, and disobedience to God's Word. *"While darkness is present in the life of every child of God, it is not engaged in with habitual delight and boasting, but with sorrow and repentance"* (Hannah 2016, 51-52). If we are consistently choosing sin while claiming to follow Jesus, we are not practicing the truth. If your life is marked by a habitual pursuit of sin—you're not actually in fellowship with God.

1:7

Jesus is the light, so to walk in the light is to walk according to his Word, will, and ways. Another way to think of it is that to walk in the light is to live in honesty, purity, and obedience to God. When we walk in the light, we reflect Jesus's goodness and glory in word, thought, and deed. It doesn't mean you never sin, but it does mean you live openly before God and others. You aren't hiding, faking, or covering up sin. Instead, you are continually bringing your life into alignment with the truth of God's Word.

Two key things happen when we walk in the light:

1. We have fellowship with one another. Walking in the light isn't just about a personal relationship with God; it deeply affects our relationships with others. When we live according to God's Word and ways, this has immediate impact on real people in our lives. Likewise, when we walk in darkness and live in sin our rebellion against God has real effects on our relationships. Sin breaks fellowship first with God, then with one another. This is exactly what we see when sin enters the world in Genesis 3—

fellowship with God is broken. Then in Genesis chapter 4, we see that sin breaks fellowship between brothers when Cain kills Abel because sin dominates him.

2) The blood of Jesus cleanses us. Where sin distorts and destroys, Jesus's blood redeems and restores. Jesus's blood doesn't just cover our sins, it washes them away. This is ongoing, meaning that even though we still sin, Jesus's sacrifice continually cleanses us as we live in repentance and faith. Many Christians understand they are forgiven, but few understand they are clean. Jesus doesn't just forgive us for our sins, but cleanses us from all sin.

1:8

Sin is in all of us (Rom 3:23). If someone claims they don't sin or don't need forgiveness, they're lying—to themselves and to God. The only sinless person was Jesus Christ. Moreover, if we claim we have not sinned then we are saying Jesus died for no reason, because we could save ourselves.

Here, John says if you think you're sinless, you're deceived. If you redefine what God calls sin, as if it is not sin—you are also deceived. Our modern culture loves to redefine sin, saying, "I'm just being true to myself" or "It's not really wrong if it doesn't hurt anyone." Walking in the light is walking according to what has been revealed to be true. Not seeking to redefine what is true. The truth of the gospel begins with recognizing you are a sinner who needs a Savior, and Jesus is your only hope. If you deny that, you're rejecting the very reason Jesus came, moreover you are rejecting Jesus's love for you.

1:9

This is the good news, that though we are all sinners Christ came to die in our place for our sins. Therefore, we can confess our sin freely. If Jesus dies for our past, present, and future sin, then we can trust that when we become aware of our sin, Jesus has already paid the price to atone for it. We can confess freely, without fear of condemnation, for Jesus has already stood in our place. Because Jesus is risen from the dead, when we confess our sin, we can trust Jesus is faithful to forgive. This is one of the greatest promises in the Bible!

Confession is agreeing with God about our sin, seeing it the way he does, turning away from it, and bringing it into the light.

Here's what happens when we confess:

God is faithful. He always keeps his promises. If he says he will forgive, he will.

God is just. Because of Jesus's death on the cross, God can forgive sin without compromising his justice. The penalty for sin has already been paid—Jesus took it.

We are cleansed. Confession is about being made clean. God not only forgives the sin we confess but cleanses us from all unrighteousness, even the stuff we aren't fully aware of.

1:10

John doubles down on what he just said in verse 8. If anyone claims they haven't sinned, they aren't just

deceived, they are calling God a liar. Why? Because God's Word clearly states that all have sinned (Ro 3:23). To deny our sin is to reject the truth of God's Word.

A refusal to acknowledge sin proves that God's Word is not in us. If we belong to Christ, his Word convicts, corrects, and transforms us. If we reject the reality of sin, we're rejecting God and his Word altogether. God is light, and we are called to walk in that light. The Christian life is not about pretending to be sinless but about being honest about our sin and bringing it before a God who forgives and cleanses.

Jesus's blood is more powerful than your sin. There is far more mercy and grace in Jesus than sin in you. If you've been walking in darkness, the way back is simple—confess, repent, and step into the light. You'll find forgiveness, freedom, and real fellowship with God and his people.

***Application* of 1 John 1:5-10**

What I love about John is that he is a “one-hit wonder” with his messaging—it is always, only, and entirely about Jesus. The path forward for John is always more Jesus. What Jesus teaches, John teaches. What Jesus emphasizes, John emphasizes. Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12). And so, this is exactly what John proclaims (1 John 1:5).

God is Light

“God is light” is not a metaphysical statement about God that leads to pantheism, as if the photons in the universe had some divine quality (Jobes 2014, 63). Rather, God is holy and pure, set apart as awesome and wonderful in all he does. Just as light and darkness cannot exist in the same space, neither can

there be any darkness in God. Darkness, then, is understood as anything against God—namely, sin, deception, and rebellion. There is no gray area, no middle ground. God is not 99% light and 1% darkness. He is pure, perfect, and completely set apart. Everything that follows is built on this foundation. If that is who God is, then that is what we are called to be too. If we claim to follow Jesus, we must step into the light—not just on Sundays, not just when people are watching, but all the time. True Christianity is about walking in the truth of who God is.

Walking in the Light vs. Walking in Darkness

John states that if we claim to have fellowship with God but still walk in darkness, we are lying (1 John 1:6). While this may seem like strong language in our time, his point is to help us see things simply. He is not trying to make following Jesus harder but easier. A life of following Jesus is about transformation—stepping into the light and allowing God to expose, heal, and restore us.

If we have fellowship with God and claim to walk with him, who is light, we cannot continue walking in darkness. Light reveals, guides, and exposes what has been hidden in darkness. When you walk into a dark room, what is the first thing you do? You turn on the light. Similarly, when we walk with Jesus, his light shines into our lives, exposing our sin, hardened hearts, selfishness, pride, lust, and more. To have fellowship with Jesus is to walk with him, and if we walk with him, darkness cannot help but be exposed.

We live in a world and culture where people often make claims that are not congruent with reality. This was also true in John's day. If someone claims to follow Jesus but willfully walks in darkness, they are not truly following Jesus but something or someone else. John simplifies this for us: you cannot say you follow Jesus if you do not actually follow him.

“Walking in darkness” does not just mean messing up occasionally; it refers to a lifestyle, a pattern of living that contradicts God’s Word. It is saying one thing and doing another. It is living in sin while claiming to follow Jesus. And John states plainly—that is not real Christianity. That is self-deception.

The alternative is walking in the light, living in truth. The incredible thing about when we walk according to God’s ways is that it allows us to have proper fellowship with one another. The cleansing that comes through the blood of Jesus makes us clean and holy to live a life among people. Christ’s blood makes us clean but enables real community, real relationships, and real transformation. The blood of Jesus does not just make us right with God—it makes a way to be made right with one another.

Confession and Self-Deception

Lest we conclude that sin causes us to lose our salvation and become separated from God again, John clarifies that Jesus’s blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Since Jesus died for all sin—past, present, and future—we can willingly confess our sins to God, who forgives us (1 John 1:9).

If we pretend we are not sinners, we miss the point of the gospel. The good news is that Jesus deals with our sin. Which leads us to confession. Confession is not merely listing our failures like a grocery list. It is about seeing sin the way God sees it and bringing it into the light. And when we do? *“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). That is a promise. Not “maybe.” Not “if you’re good enough.” God is faithful. He will forgive. Every time.

The Danger of Denial

How we see God matters. If we refuse to acknowledge our sin, we reject the very truth of God's Word, which reveals that we are sinners in need of a Savior. If we say we have not sinned, we are essentially rejecting the cross of Christ and saying, "Jesus, I don't really need what you did for me." That is a dangerous place to be because the reality is that every single one of us needs Jesus. We need his grace, his forgiveness, and his cleansing. Denial does not change our condition; it only blinds us to it. The only way forward is honesty with ourselves before God.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding the Text: What does John mean when he says, “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5)? How does the Bible use the imagery of light and darkness to describe God and sin?

Self-Examination & Reflection: John warns about claiming to have fellowship with God while living in sin. Are there areas in your life where you might be walking in darkness while claiming to walk in the light?

Relationships With Others: How does sin impact our relationship with both God and others? Why do people sometimes deceive themselves into believing they have no sin (1 John 1:8, 10)?

Modern Culture: What are some ways this self-deception manifests in today's culture? How does the truth that Jesus's blood continually cleanses us help us fight shame and guilt?

Confession & Repentance: What is the difference between merely admitting sin and true confession before God (1 John 1:9)? Why is confession essential for our relationship with God? How does it also impact our relationships with others?

God Is Faithful: What does John mean when he says God is “*faithful and just*” to forgive us our sins? How does Jesus's sacrifice ensure that God's justice is upheld?

Practical Application: What role does Christian community play in helping us walk in the light? How can we encourage one another to be open and honest about sin? What steps can you take this week to practice repentance and confession in a deeper way?

CHAPTER 3

ABIDE IN CHRIST

1 JOHN 2:1-11

Commentary

2:1

This is the first of nine times that John refers to his audience as “*children*” in this letter. Through his leadership in the church, John has become a spiritual father to many. He speaks with a tone and temperament of a father: there is maturity, tenderness, and deep care. Discipleship, at times, can resemble spiritual parenting, especially in a generation where many have grown up without a formative relationship with their earthly father (1 Cor 4:15).

John’s desire is that God’s children would not fall into sin. Sin distorts everything and pulls us away from our Heavenly Father, creating separation between us and God (Isa 59:2). Yet, like a good father, John also reminds us of our redemption in Christ Jesus, our advocate. Jesus intercedes on our behalf, pleading our case before God. Our sins are not merely excused, rather, the penalty for them has been fully paid, and the eternal debt we owed has been cleared.

2:2

This is possible because Jesus *“is the propitiation for our sins.”* Propitiation refers to the act of appeasing or satisfying God’s wrath against sin through a sacrificial offering. Jesus is the ultimate propitiation, meaning his death on the cross fully satisfied God’s justice and turned away his righteous wrath, granting us forgiveness and reconciliation with him.

In Romans 3:25, Paul says, *“[Jesus] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”* Hebrews 2:17 further emphasizes this point: *“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*

Propitiation is at the heart of the gospel—it reveals both God’s justice in punishing sin and his love in providing a way for sinners to be saved through Jesus. In 1 John 2:2, we see that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. This means Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient to cover the sins of all who trust in him.

2:3-5

When it comes to obedience, many people—including Christians—tend to think about it incorrectly. We often view obedience as something we do to earn God’s love, maintain his love, or enter into his love. If we are not careful, we might read this misunderstanding into this passage.

John is stating that those who have come to know Jesus will keep his commands. In his Gospel, John has already

recorded Jesus's teaching on this subject, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). The result of loving Jesus is a desire to obey him. His commands are not meant to take away our joy or to harm us—instead, they exist for the maximization of our joy and the safety and protection of our lives and eternal souls.

John is not suggesting that obedience is what it takes for God to love us. He is saying that knowing and loving Jesus results in obeying him. If you want to know if you truly love Jesus, the question you can ask yourself is "Do I even want to obey him?" Just as a branch naturally produces fruit when it remains on a tree, so too will those who know and love Jesus naturally produce the fruit of obedience. And just as a tree's health is determined by the quality of its fruit, so the strength of one's relationship with Jesus can be assessed by the fruit of obedience. This is the connection John makes in the next verse when he uses the term *"abide."*

2:6

To abide, means to remain or stay. Jesus uses this analogy in John 15:4, *"abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."* While this is a reemphasis on a point made in prior verses, it shines light as to what abiding can look like for the everyday Christian. John describes abiding in Christ as walking in the same way or manner Jesus walked. If we think about the Christian life as a following Jesus, walking within him, and living our lives according to his ways, then abiding is simply staying close to Jesus. Staying close to him relationally changes the entire trajectory

of our lives. Moreover, it changes us from the inside out, resulting in Christlikeness lived out by us in our lives.

2:7-8

At first glance, verses 7 and 8 may seem difficult to understand because the specific command John is referring to isn't explicitly mentioned. However, by the time we reach verses 9 and 10, it becomes clear that he is speaking about love. Even so, the reader may still be confused about John's reference to both an old and a new commandment.

The command John is referring to is *"to love one another."* This is not a new command, as it has existed since the Old Testament (Lev 19:18) and was further reinforced by Jesus (Matt 19:19; Mark 12:28-34). In this sense, the command to love one another is old. However, what makes it new is the emphasis Jesus gives in John 13:34: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."* Here, Jesus redefines the standard of love, not merely loving others as we love ourselves, but loving as he has loved us.

John is essentially saying that this command is not truly new; it has always been God's intent from the beginning. However, people often redefine love based on their own preferences. Jesus himself defines what love is, and if we want to know how to love others, we must look to how Christ has loved us.

2:9-11

Here, the command to love one another is further expounded upon as John returns to the imagery of light

from chapter 1. Anyone who claims to have knowledge of God, who professes to be in fellowship with him, abiding in him, and walking with him, yet harbors hate for his brother, is still in darkness. Up to this point John has presented two ways to test the fruit of one's faith: 1) obedience to Jesus and 2) love for one another.

Harboring hate in our hearts blinds us spiritually. It keeps us in darkness, impairing our ability to see and understand the truth. "Darkness attacks those living in it so they become increasingly trapped in this realm of confusion and blindness" (Akin 2001, 100). The longer one remains in darkness, the more difficult it is to escape.

In contrast, walking in love toward one another is the way of Christ; it is walking in the light. This type of love should be defined as Christ's love for us—a love that forgives and redeems. So, hate is rooted in bitterness and resentment, leading to anger, division, and destruction (1 John 3:15). While love builds relationships, hate tears them down.

Hate often stems from past wounds, unresolved grievances, or a hardened heart. Forgiveness serves as the bridge between love and hate. It is the act of releasing resentment and extending grace, just as God has forgiven us in Christ (Eph 4:32). Unlike hate, which festers and poisons the soul, forgiveness frees us from bitterness and allows healing to take place. Jesus teaches that forgiveness is not optional for his followers—if we do not forgive, we ourselves will not be forgiven (Matt 6:14-15).

While hate thrives on bitterness and destruction, love and forgiveness bring life and restoration. They go hand in hand. When we love as Christ loves, we are

quick to forgive. But when we allow bitterness to take root, it breeds hate, which leads to spiritual darkness. Ultimately, John presents us with a choice, to walk in the freedom of Christ through love and forgiveness or to remain bound by resentment and lost in darkness.

Application of 1 John 2:1-11

John carries God's heart as a Father. Repeatedly, he addresses his readers as "*children*." This shouldn't be received as condescending or belittling to adult readers. John speaks with the warmth, care, and guidance of a father who wants the best for his children. His words aren't harsh corrections but loving encouragements, meant to draw believers closer to the Jesus and obedience to him.

Beloved Children of God

It's important not to miss this: if you know, love, and trust Jesus, you are a child of God. To be God's child means you are fully known, fully loved, and fully secure in him. A good father doesn't abandon his children when they fail; he teaches, disciplines, and leads them toward growth. In the same way, John reminds us that God's fatherly love is not based on our perfection but on our relationship with him. It is with this tone and temperament that he writes inviting us to trust, obey, and rest in Christ.

John, like a good father, desires his children not to sin. John is shepherding us towards the path of joy that God has intended for his creation. Just as any loving parent longs to see their children flourish, protected from harm and walking in the best path, John desires that his spiritual children live in the fullness of life that comes from obedience to God. He knows that sin is destructive, that it blinds, deceives, and leads people away from true joy and fellowship with God.

At the same time, John understands mankind is prone to sin. He knows that while the goal is to walk in the light, believers will stumble. That's why he immediately follows with the reassurance that when we do sin, we have an advocate—Jesus Christ, the righteous one (1 John 2:1). John's fatherly heart doesn't just urge his children to avoid sin; it also reminds them of the grace available when they fall. The call to holiness is an invitation to live in the freedom and joy of God's design. And when we fail, we don't run from God in shame; we run to him in repentance, knowing that our Father is always ready to forgive, restore, and guide us forward.

Jesus Is Our Propitiation

The reason we can trust Jesus to be our righteous advocate and be assured that forgiveness is continually available is because he has fully atoned for our past, present, and future sins. John refers to Jesus as our propitiation (1 John 2:2). Jesus's sacrifice wasn't partial, temporary, or limited—it was complete, final, and all-encompassing.

Propitiation means that Jesus's sacrifice satisfies the justice of God and turns away his righteous wrath against sin. Sin isn't just a personal failure; it's an offense against a holy God. God is perfectly just; he cannot ignore or overlook sin. Our sin demands payment. Instead of leaving us to bear the punishment ourselves, Jesus, in his unconditional love, took our place. On the cross, Jesus bore the full weight of our sin, absorbing the wrath we deserved so that we could stand before God fully forgiven and completely justified.

This is why we can have unshakable confidence in our forgiveness. It's not based on our ability to be good enough, repent hard enough, or make up for our wrongs. It's based entirely on what Jesus has already accomplished. Jesus's work is finished (John 19:30). His atonement is sufficient.

And because of that, forgiveness is not just a possibility—it's a certainty for all who put their trust in him.

A New Desire to Obey

When we truly encounter Jesus—our righteous advocate and propitiation—we don't just receive forgiveness, we receive new life. And with that new life comes a new desire: the desire to obey him. Obedience is not about earning God's favor; it's the evidence that we already have it. If we truly know Jesus, we will naturally desire to keep his commandments.

Before Christ, obedience may have felt like a burden, something we had to do out of fear or obligation. But in Christ, obedience flows from love and acceptance in him. We obey not to be loved by God, but because we already are. His grace transforms our hearts so that we no longer see his commands as restrictions, but as the pathway to true life and joy.

Abiding in Christ

In our new life in Christ, we must stay near to him. This is exactly what it means to abide in Christ: remain in him, to stay close, to depend on him daily, and to live in step with his commands. Just as a branch draws life from the vine (John 15:5), we draw life, strength, and direction from Christ. The more we abide in Jesus the more we reflect Jesus with our lives.

When we abide in Christ, obedience becomes not just possible, but more natural. When a branch abides in a vine, it can't help but to produce fruit. When we remain in Jesus, we begin to desire what he desires. Furthermore, we start walking as he walked. Abiding is all about staying near to Jesus.

Loving One Another

The natural outcome of abiding in Christ and walking in obedience is love for one another. When we truly know and follow Jesus, it changes how we see and treat others.

Love is the fruit of obedience and is the clearest sign that we are walking in the light. If we claim to follow Jesus but still harbor hatred and bitterness in our hearts, then we are not truly abiding in Jesus as we should. Loving others is the evidence that God's love has taken root in our hearts.

But what about when love feels impossible? What about when we've been hurt, betrayed, or wronged? Bitterness and hatred often take root in the absence of forgiveness. When we refuse to let go of offenses, our hearts become hardened, and we step out of the light. But the gospel gives us a better way; forgive as we have been forgiven (Eph 4:32). Holding onto bitterness keeps us in darkness, but forgiveness brings freedom. It allows God's love to flow through us, healing our wounds and softening our hearts.

Jesus himself is our example. On the cross, he forgave those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). He didn't wait for them to deserve it—he gave it freely. Moreover, Jesus has also forgiven us long before we even recognized our sin and need for a savior. When we abide in Christ we can forgive in the same way he forgave us. The more we grasp the depth of God's forgiveness toward us, the more it transforms how we extend grace to others.

STUDY GUIDE

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What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

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How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Father Heart of God: Why does John repeatedly refer to his audience as “*children*”? How does John’s approach reflect the heart of a father in discipleship? In what ways can discipleship resemble spiritual parenting today?

Jesus as Our Advocate and Propitiation: What does it mean for Jesus to be our advocate before the Father? How does the concept of propitiation help us understand the seriousness of sin and the depth of Christ’s sacrifice? How does knowing Jesus has fully atoned for our sins give us confidence in our relationship with God?

Knowing Jesus and Obedience: What is the difference between obeying God out of love versus obeying out of obligation? Why is obedience a natural result of abiding in Christ rather than a requirement to earn his love?

Abiding in Christ: What does it mean to “*abide*” in Christ? How does John 15:4 deepen our understanding of abiding in Jesus? What are some practical ways we can stay close to Jesus in our daily lives?

Loving One Another: How does understanding Christ’s love for us shape the way we love others?

Love, Hate, & Forgiveness: What does it reveal about a person’s spiritual condition if they claim to know God but hate others? How does harboring hatred or bitterness affect our spiritual life? In what ways does forgiveness serve as an antidote to hate and bitterness?

Personal Reflection & Application: Is there someone in your life you need to forgive in order to walk in love? In what areas do you struggle with obedience to Christ, and how can you grow in abiding in him? How can you practically show the love of Christ to those around you this week?

CHAPTER 4

GROWING IN CHRIST

1 JOHN 2:12-17

Commentary

2:12-14

Bible scholars have a variety of opinions when it comes to these verses. The issues revolve around the categories John brings into focus: children, fathers, and young men. There is no real disagreement or issue surrounding the exhortation given, but rather over who specifically John is talking to with these titles. Are these symbolic titles referring to the maturity stages of the Christian? Or are they specific age demographics John is speaking too? Some scholars and commentators hold a hybrid position. The term “*little children*” is believed by some to be a general statement referring to all of John’s readers because John has already used this term in that way. Yet others hold that it is referring to new believers. Those who hold to the latter perspective maintain that the term “*fathers*” refers to the older believers and “*young men*” are those maturing in their Christian faith. Still yet, this

passage serves as an encouragement, reminding believers of their identity in Christ and their growth in him.

1. Assurance of Forgiveness (Verse 12)

"Little children," is a term John often uses for all believers (1 John 2:1). Here, he reassures them that their sins have been forgiven because of Jesus. This forgiveness is not based on human effort but is granted *"for his name's sake"*—because of Christ's work on the cross. The foundation of the Christian life begins with this truth: our sins are forgiven through Jesus.

2. Encouragement to Fathers (Verse 13a, 14a)

John then speaks to the *"fathers,"* referring to mature believers who have walked in relationship with God for a long time. Their defining characteristic is knowing God, particularly *"him who is from the beginning"*—a reference to Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 1 John 1:1). These spiritually mature believers have experienced God's faithfulness over time and are deeply rooted in their knowledge of him. Their wisdom and stability in faith serve as an example for younger believers.

3. Strength of Young Believers (Verse 13b, 14b)

"Young men," likely refers to believers who are actively growing in their faith. They are in the middle of the spiritual battle and have been victorious over the evil one, meaning they have resisted sin and stood firm against the attacks of Satan (Eph 6:10-12).

John explains the source of their strength in verse 14: *They are strong, not in their own power but in the Lord. The Word of God abides in them, meaning Scripture is deeply rooted in their hearts and minds.*

As a result, they overcome the evil one—living victoriously against sin and temptation. This is a powerful reminder that strength in the Christian life comes from God's Word. When we are filled with his Word, we can resist the enemy's lies and walk in victory.

4. Repetition for Emphasis (Verse 14)

John repeats these truths to reinforce their importance. The spiritual fathers continue to know God deeply, and the young men continue to be strong through abiding in God's Word. This structure seems to highlight the different stages of Christian growth and the importance of both spiritual wisdom (fathers) and spiritual warfare (young men).

2:15

John issues a strong warning to believers about the dangers of loving the world and its desires. He contrasts the temporary nature of the world with the eternal promise of those who do the will of God. While the Greek word for "*the world*" is *kosmos*, which can refer to creation itself, John does not mean that we should refrain from loving the physical world (as the Gnostics believed) or its people, as that would contradict John 3:16. Rather, by "*the world*," John refers to everything that opposes God. This includes the values, priorities, and pursuits driven by sin and rebellion against God. John is speaking of fallen humanity that is hostile to God (Stott 2009, 105).

John warns that love for the world (the fallen humanity that is hostile to God) is incompatible with love for God. If someone is devoted to the world and its pursuits, it reveals that their heart is not fully given to God the Father. Jesus taught that no one can serve two masters (Matt

6:24). Our affections must be set on the worship of God, his Word, will, and ways, not the fleeting desires of this world. Our aim is to be God's glory, not the world's glory.

2:16

The desires of the flesh – This refers to sinful cravings and desires, including lust, gluttony, and other pleasures that gratify the body in ways that oppose God's design.

The desires of the eyes – This includes coveting, materialism, and being enticed by what looks appealing but leads to sin (ex: greed, envy, and lust). The first sin in the Bible involved Eve seeing that the forbidden fruit was "*pleasing to the eyes*" (Gen 3:6).

The pride of life – This is arrogance, boasting, and seeking status, power, or independence apart from God. This is a self-sufficient attitude that elevates personal achievement over humble reliance on the Lord God.

These temptations mirror the ways Satan tempted Eve in the Garden (Gen 3:6) and Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). They reveal a heart set on self-gratification, material gain, and personal glory rather than on God.

2:17

John reminds believers of the temporary nature of the world. The things people chase—pleasures, possessions, status—are all fading away. What seems important now will eventually be worthless. Jesus urges his people in the same way in, Matthew 6:19-20: store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. The things of the world can be stolen, lost.

In contrast, “*whoever does the will of God abides forever.*” Those who seek after the Lord and live according to his ways will remain relationally near him forever. This calls the Christian to align themselves and their priorities with God’s eternal kingdom (his Word, will, and ways), rather than the fleeting things of this world. The point is not that we cannot enjoy earthly possession, it’s simply that this world is temporary and doing things God’s way abides forever. So, we should steward our lives and our possessions in such away that glorifies God, and that doesn’t seek the glory of the world.

Application of 1 John 2:12-17

This is my daughter’s favorite section of 1 John. She particularly loves how John addresses three groups within the body of Christ: children, fathers, and young men. While these terms may reference physical age, many scholars believe they represent different levels of spiritual maturity. When I asked my daughter about the various titles, my 9-year-old daughter astutely commented, “It’s like when John wrote to the churches in Revelation—he had specific things to say to them, but it’s for us too.” So, we need not trip over the terms, but ought to take note when it comes to application for ourselves.

New Life in Christ

Coming to faith in Jesus is a life-changing experience. It is more than just adopting new beliefs or attending church—it is entering into a new life, a fresh start with God. The Bible tells us that all believers in Christ are forgiven children of God. This is the foundation of our faith; God has forgiven us through Christ’s atoning work on the cross. He has removed our sin, brought us into his family, and given us a new identity as his beloved children.

When someone becomes a Christian, they are spiritually reborn. Jesus described this transformation as being “*born again*” (John 3:3), emphasizing that faith in Jesus is not just an improvement of the old life but the beginning of an entirely new one. Just as a newborn child enters the world and begins to grow, a new believer embarks on a journey of spiritual growth, learning what it means to follow Jesus.

This can be both exciting and overwhelming. It is sometimes hard to comprehend, especially for those who come to Christ later in life. A person who has spent years thinking and living a certain way might struggle to grasp what it means to be a “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17). Habits, thought patterns, and past struggles don’t disappear overnight. Like a child learning to walk, a new Christian will stumble and fall at times. This can be discouraging, but it is part of the process of growing in faith.

One of the most important truths for new believers to remember is that God’s grace is sufficient. This is at the heart of what John is writing here to the new Christians. He simply reminds them their sins are forgiven (1 John 2:12). The Christian life is a life-long journey, not a sprint. Our God is patient with his children. Psalm 103:13-14 says, “*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*” John, capturing the heart of God the Father reminds the new believer of the foundation of their faith: they are forgiven, and God is their Father (1 John 2:12-13).

God understands our weaknesses. He knows that spiritual growth takes time. Just as a loving parent does not scold a baby for falling while learning to walk, God does not condemn his children for struggling in their faith. Instead, he provides strength, guidance, and encouragement along the way.

Spiritual Fathering

For new Christians, challenges will come, and it is important for them to have other more mature believers to help them along the way. This type of discipleship can be a type of spiritual parenting, like John is giving to all of us who read his letter. For the new Christian, there may be moments of doubt, struggles with old habits, or feelings of unworthiness. Our enemy would love nothing more than to discourage new believers and make them feel like failures. A good disciple-maker reminds the new believer of the truths of Christ's finished work on the cross. When John addresses the spiritual fathers, he says he writes to them because they, "*know them who is from the beginning*" (1 John 2:12, 15). They know God! They know his love, his forgiveness, his presence, his power; they know their heavenly Father well. Thus, it's been imparted to them to help walk with and grow those less mature in their faith.

Philippians 1:6 reassures us, "*He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" This means that God is actively working in our lives, shaping us, teaching us, and helping us grow. God often uses others to help that maturing process. God wants us to know that we are not alone in our journey.

Learning To Fight

The last group John addresses in this passage are the young men, or the spiritually maturing Christians. These believers are not new to the faith; they have grown in their knowledge of God and are actively engaged in the battle against sin and the attacks of the enemy. John commends them for this twice (1 John 2:13-14), emphasizing their strength and their victory over the evil one. This is how Jesus overcame the enemy.

When he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11), Jesus responded to every temptation with Scripture, declaring the truth of God's Word and standing firm against the enemy's lies. In the same way, believers overcome Satan and temptation to sin by knowing, believing, and applying God's Word to their lives. The Bible is our offensive weapon. We must learn to wield it if we are to stand firm against the enemy's schemes (Eph 6:11-12).

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In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding Our Identity in Christ: What does John remind the “*little children*” of in verse 12? Why is this foundational for all believers? In what ways have you experienced spiritual growth similar to the categories John describes?

Victory In Christ: What does it mean to “*overcome the evil one*” (vv. 13-14)? How does God’s Word play a role in this victory?

Resisting Temptation: John warns against loving the world in verse 15. How would you define “*the world*” in this context? What does it mean to love the world rather than God? How can we evaluate where our affections lie? What are some specific ways we can resist the temptations of the world today?

For new Christians: What are some struggles you have faced in learning to walk with Christ? How does the truth of forgiveness (v. 12) encourage you?

For mature believers: How can you use your knowledge of God (v. 13) to help disciple and encourage younger believers?

Do Not Love The World: How do you see the three categories described in verse 16 (desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and the pride of life) manifest in your daily lives? How do these temptations compare to the way Satan tempted Eve and Jesus (Gen 3:6; Matt 4:1-11)? What can we learn from their responses?

Reflection & Application: How can we strengthen ourselves spiritually like the “*young men*” John commends (vv. 13-14)? What practical steps can we take to abide in God’s Word? How can we support each other as we aim to follow Jesus, fight our sin, and remaining faithful to God’s and his Word?

CHAPTER 5

BEWARE OF
DECEPTION

1 JOHN 2:18-27

*Commentary***2:18**

When it comes to the term antichrist, many Christians tend toward paranoia. May we be encouraged by Robert Candlish's words from 1870, "We need not be setting up the phantom or ideal of a coming antichrist that is to torment and try the church in the future. We have enough antichrists around and beside us now" (Candlish 1993, 164). This seems also to be John's heart and sentiment as he warns believers about the presence of antichrists, encourages them to remain firm in their faith, and reassures them of the eternal life promised in Christ.

The "*last hour*," refers to the time between Christ's first and second coming.

John states that "*many antichrists have come*", meaning that people who oppose Christ and spread false teachings were already active in the early

church. These individuals distort the gospel, deceive believers, and work against Christ's mission.

2:19

John highlights that those who were once part of the church but later abandoned it prove that they were never truly believers. This verse teaches the doctrine of perseverance—true believers remain in Christ. Those who permanently turn away from the faith demonstrate that they were never genuinely saved.

This warning serves as a reminder that not all who profess Christ actually belong to him. Genuine faith is marked by endurance and commitment to Jesus's Word, will, and ways.

2:20-21

In contrast to the false teachers, true believers have been "*anointed by the Holy One*", meaning they have received the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The Spirit teaches, guides, and protects believers from deception.

John reassures his readers that they already know the truth, meaning they have received the true gospel. Unlike the deceivers, who spread lies, believers have been given divine wisdom through God the Holy Spirit.

2:22-23

Here, John defines the core characteristic of the antichrist spirit—denying that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). Any teaching that rejects Jesus as the Son of God and the only way to the Father is a demonic lie.

To deny Jesus is to deny God altogether. The people and other religions that claim to believe in God while rejecting Christ are lying to themselves and to others. John states that true knowledge of God is only possible through faith in Jesus (John 14:6). Those who confess Christ have a relationship with the Father; those who reject him do not.

2:24-25

The message they “heard from the beginning” is the same gospel message of the person and work of Jesus that saves and sustains all Christians. John is urging them to abide—remain—in the truth of Jesus as it was originally preached. To abide in the message is to enjoy communion with God himself. The promise attached to this is eternal life. In John 17:3, John defines eternal life as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. Eternal life is not just a future reality in heaven, but a deep, personal, and saving relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son, beginning now. It is a life of communion with God that starts in the present and continues forever.

2:26

John’s warnings continue against false teachers while encouraging believers to remain steadfast in the truth of Christ. He reassures them of the Holy Spirit’s role in guiding them and the importance of abiding in Christ as they anticipate his return.

Satan is a master counterfeiter and deceiver, working tirelessly to distort the truth and lead people astray. In John 8:44, Jesus describes him as “*a liar and the father of lies*,” revealing his very nature as one who deceives. Satan’s deception is so convincing that in Matthew 24:24,

Jesus warns that false Christs and false prophets will arise, performing great signs and wonders to mislead even the elect if possible. Paul echoes this warning in 2 Timothy 3:13, stating that *“evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”* Satan’s schemes infiltrate even the church, as seen in Revelation 2:20, where false teaching and sexual perversion are tied to the demonic deception of his schemes. Satan’s strategy is not to create something new but to twist what is true, presenting evil in a way that seems good, trapping those who are not firmly rooted in God’s Word (Allen 2013, 119-120).

2:27

The Holy Spirit who dwells within believers, enabling them to discern truth from error. This is what John means, when he says, *“you have no need that anyone should teach you.”* He is not dismissing the role of pastors or teachers in the church (Eph 4:11-12).

Verse 27 encourages Christians to rely on the Spirit for guidance and to remain in the truth of God’s Word that they first received, rather than chasing after novel teachings that contradict the gospel. Christians do not need new, secret, or additional revelations beyond what they have already received in Christ and bound in his Word. The Holy Spirit confirms the truth of God’s Word in the hearts of believers as we read, study, and apply it.

Application of 1 John 2:18-27

Deception is often far more subtle than we realize. It doesn’t always come in the form of blatant lies but often seen through half-truths, misplaced priorities, or subtle compromises. We

are constantly bombarded with messages that appeal to our desires, making deviation from Jesus seem harmless or even desirable. Our enemy is cunning—he deceived Eve in the garden by twisting what God had said, making rebellion against him seem appealing while downplaying its consequences (Gen 3:1-6). Likewise, our own hearts can deceive us (Jer 17:9), leading us to justify actions that go against God's will. Furthermore, the enemy uses people to spread deception, employing Satan's tactics by distorting the Scripture and appealing to the desires of the flesh. This is why believers must remain vigilant, tethered to the Bible, and close to Jesus.

False Christians

Not everyone who claims to be a Christian truly is. The Bible is full of warnings about counterfeit believers—people who look the part but lack a transformed heart. Judas Iscariot walked with Jesus, witnessed miracles, and heard every sermon firsthand, yet he was a fraud. Paul warned about “*false brothers*” (Gal 2:4) who infiltrated the church, twisting the gospel for their own gain. Here, John himself warns of those who “*went out from us, but they were not of us*” (1 John 2:19). They were around, they blended in, but in the end, their departure proved they never truly belonged.

John warns about the presence of antichrists—false teachers and deceivers who oppose Christ who have influence on other people. Today, it is very clear that there are many people who are anti-Jesus and their objective isn't to keep quiet but to actively work against Jesus and his people. They themselves are deceived and they are seeking to deceive others, though they would probably use another term. Their deception is rooted in a denial of Jesus as the Christ (1 John 2:22). These false Christians reject Jesus in a variety of ways. Some reject Jesus's humanity, for others it's his divinity, yet others it's his

saving work on the cross, or his authority in their life. The bottom line is anyone who opposes, distorts, changes, or edits Jesus in their teaching and influence is an anti-Christ.

But the problem isn't just individuals—it's a spirit. John later writes, *"This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already"* (1 John 4:3). The spirit of antichrist is the demonic force behind false teachings, corrupting truth and leading people away from Jesus. It is alive and active in every generation, taking different forms but always pushing the same agenda, replacing God's truth with lies or distortions, leading people to trust in something or someone other than Christ.

The Spirit of Antichrist in Our Age

The spirit of antichrist has shaped contemporary culture. We see it in world systems that reject God's authority, redefine morality, and celebrate rebellion against God's design. We see it in false teachers who twist the Bible to fit cultural trends rather than calling people to repentance and true faith in Jesus. We see it in ideologies that promise salvation through politics, activism, personal enlightenment, or self-worship instead of the finished work of Jesus.

This spirit infiltrates the church by watering down doctrine, replacing biblical truth with emotionalism, and convincing people that love means accepting sin rather than confronting it. It distracts by keeping people consumed with worldly pursuits rather than eternal realities. It divides by creating false versions of Christianity that lead people away from the true gospel.

Standing Firm Against the Spirit of Antichrist

John's warning in 1 John 2 is not meant to create fear but to equip believers to stand firm. He does not tell us about

the antichrists and their deception to make us paranoid or discouraged, but rather to make us prepared and discerning. The enemy's tactics rely on confusion, distortion, and deception, but God has not left his people defenseless. John reminds us that we have the Holy Spirit, the anointing from God, which enables us to recognize and reject false teaching (1 John 2:20, 27). The Holy Spirit illuminates the truth of God's Word, strengthens our faith, and guards our hearts from deception.

The antidote to deception is abiding in Christ—a life centered around Jesus in faith, love, and obedience. This means remaining in God's Word and reading, meditating on, and believing in it so that we can recognize truth from error. It means loving Jesus, cultivating your relationship with him through prayer and worship, treasuring him above all else. It means obeying Jesus, submitting our lives to his commands and resisting the temptations that would lead us away from him. Ultimately it means staying near Jesus, walking in daily fellowship with him, depending on his strength rather than our own.

The battle has already been won. Christ has conquered sin, death, and the powers of darkness through his death and resurrection. His victory is our victory. While deception may increase, and opposition to the truth may grow stronger, we do not stand in fear—we stand in faith.

Later John will give even more assurance, "*Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4). The Holy Spirit within us is greater than the enemy around us. No false teaching, no deception, no worldly pressure can overpower those who are rooted in Christ. The key to standing firm is not relying on our own wisdom or strength but abiding Jesus who has already overcome.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding the Passage: John says that “*many antichrists have come*” (2:18). How does he define an antichrist in this passage? In 1 John 2:19, John speaks of people who “*went out from us.*” What does this reveal about false believers?

The Holy Spirit: How does the Holy Spirit help us discern truth from deception?

False Teaching: Why does John emphasize that to deny Jesus is to deny the Father? How does this challenge other religious beliefs that acknowledge God but reject Jesus?

Recognizing Deception: How do false teachers distort Scripture to deceive people? Can you think of any modern examples? What role does Satan play in deception, and how did he use similar tactics with Eve in Genesis 3:1-6? How can our own hearts deceive us (Jer 17:9)? What are some ways we justify compromise in our faith? What are some of the most subtle ways deception creeps into the church today?

The Spirit of Antichrist: How is the spirit of antichrist seen in our culture today? Can you identify specific examples in media, politics, or social movements? Why does the spirit of antichrist seek to replace or distort Jesus rather than just outright denying God's existence?

Standing Firm in the Truth: John reassures believers that they already know the truth (2:21). How can we strengthen our ability to discern truth from error? What does it mean to “*abide in Christ*” (2:27), and how does this protect us from deception?

Staying Near Jesus: How does reading and meditating on Scripture help us recognize false teachings? What are some practical ways to deepen our understanding of God's Word? How can we cultivate a stronger relationship with Jesus through prayer and worship to guard against deception?

Encouragement & Application: What practical steps can we take to stand firm in our faith and not be led astray? How can we lovingly help others who are caught in false teaching or deception? In what areas of your life do you need to rely more on the Holy Spirit's guidance to discern truth from error?

CHAPTER 6

CHILDREN OF GOD

1 JOHN 2:28-3:10

Commentary

2:28

John reminds us again to abide in Christ, meaning to remain in close relationship with him through faith, obedience, and dependence on his grace.

The motivation for abiding is that Jesus is coming again. At his return, believers should be able to stand before him with confidence, rather than feeling ashamed because they strayed from him. We ought to live our lives today with eternity in view. When we abide in Christ, we are prepared for Christ's return, and we look forward to it with joy rather than fear.

2:29

Since Jesus is righteous, those who are truly born of God will naturally reflect his righteousness in their lives. This does not mean that believers achieve perfection, but rather that they consistently pursue holiness as evidence of their

relationship with Christ. Obedience and righteousness are the fruit of genuine salvation (Matt 7:16-20).

3:1

Here we have a strong call to behold and marvel at the kind of love God has given us. The phrase “*See what kind of love*” invites us to gaze upon the magnitude of the kind of love God has for us. “The Greek term *potapen* means ‘of what country’ and thus implies that God’s love is so unusual, so unearthly, so unique to our experience, that we barely expect its result: ‘we are children of God’” (Burge 1996, 145). John is calling us to pause and reflect on the greatness of God’s love. This is not a mere sentiment but an overwhelming, other, and extraordinary kind of love that the world cannot comprehend. John confirms the legitimacy of this love and our acceptance of it by following up with the statement, “*and so we are.*” If God has called us his children, then we in fact are his children.

This status as God’s children brings a disconnect from the world. John explains that the world does not know us because it did not know Jesus. Just as Jesus was rejected, misunderstood, and opposed, so too will those who belong to him be rejected, misunderstood, and opposed. The world operates by a different system—one that does not recognize God’s ways.

3:2

Believers can be assured that their identity as God’s children is not a future promise but a present reality: “We are God’s children now.” Even though we do not yet fully resemble Christ, our adoption into the heavenly family is already secured.

John, however, points to a future transformation that is yet to come, *“what we will be has not yet appeared.”* This means that while we are already God’s children, we have not yet reached the fullness of what that means. The process of sanctification is ongoing, and one day it will culminate in our glorification—our complete transformation into the image of Christ.

John anchors this transformation in the return of Christ: *“when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”* At Christ’s second coming, believers will experience the final stage of redemption. This means we will be fully conformed to the moral and spiritual likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29; Phil 3:20-21). We will finally see Jesus in his glorified state, no longer through faith but by sight, and this encounter will complete our transformation.

3:3

Many Christians treat the return of Christ as a distant theological idea without real-life implications. True hope in Christ produces real change in our lives. It moves us to reject sin, pursue righteousness, and live in a way that glorifies God.

John connects our future hope to our present holiness. If we truly believe that we will be transformed into the likeness of Christ, then that hope should lead us to pursue purity now. This purification is not passive, it is something we actively do, i.e. *“purifies himself.”*

Jesus is the standard, *“as he is pure.”* Holiness is not optional for the believer; it is a defining mark of our

identity as God's children. Since Christ is pure, we are called to be pure in our thoughts, actions, and desires.

3:4

The practice of sin isn't just making a mistake—it's rebellion. It's lawlessness. That means it's not just slipping up; it's willful defiance against the authority of God. The world we live in teaches us to minimize sin, but John calls it what it is: breaking God's law.

The phrase “*makes a practice of sinning*” speaks to an ongoing lifestyle. This isn't about struggling with sin or stumbling. It's about living in it, justifying it, and refusing to repent. If you see sin as something small, you'll never take holiness seriously.

It was our sin that sent Jesus to the cross, Christian's therefore cannot view sin as small or unimportant. We must be honest with the reality that habitual, continual, willful practice of sin is blatant defiance of God. It is living with divided loyalties—seeking to have one foot in God's kingdom, and the other in the world.

John is trying to help us see sin for what it is, to see it how God sees it, and therefore bids us to fight sin and follow Christ.

3:5

Jesus came to take away our sin. He didn't come to make us comfortable in our sin or affirm us in our sin. He came to remove it. The bloodied cross of Christ isn't about self-improvement—it was about total deliverance.

Jesus didn't die so we could keep sinning and just feel less guilty about it. He died to free us from its power.

In verse 5, John also emphasizes a critical point that *"in him there is no sin."* Jesus wasn't just another good man or moral teacher. He was and is perfect. He was the sinless sacrifice. If Jesus wasn't sinless his death couldn't atone for the sins of the world. John isn't showcasing Jesus as merely a good example but as the atoning lamb that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

3:6

If you truly belong to Jesus, your relationship with sin changes. Like the previous idea of *"practicing sin,"* the phrase *"keeps on sinning"* points to an unrepentant lifestyle, not the occasional failure. Are you fighting sin, or are you embracing it? Real salvation produces real change.

3:7

John is continually drilling down the reality that true faith in Jesus leads to real life transformation. There will always be voices telling you that obedience doesn't matter, that grace means you can live however you want. True righteousness, however, is visible and practiced, and any alternative is a deception.

The opposite of *"practicing sinning"* is to *"practices righteousness."* This looks like a willful desire to love God and obey God and the practice of walking according to God's Word, will, and ways. Righteousness isn't just something we believe in; it's something we do. If you belong to Jesus, your life will reflect his character.

Christians have been declared righteous and been given Christ's complete righteousness by faith (Rom 5:1). Through what theologians call "imputation," Jesus not only takes our sin upon himself, but he also gives us his righteousness. The moment we put our faith in Jesus, our spiritual account is credited with Christ's perfect obedience. Even if we don't always feel righteous, the truth remains; we are righteous because of Christ. *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Cor 5:21).

Righteousness is not just a status; it is also something we now live out through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because of Jesus, we are not only declared righteous, but we are also made able to live righteously before others.

3:8

If you are living in sin, you are aligning yourself with the devil, whether you realize it or not. But here's the good news: Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Not tolerate them, or accommodate them, but destroy them. Jesus's mission was to break sin's grip on our lives.

3:9

Repeatedly the Bible teaches that we were born into a world broken by sin. We are therefore sinners both by nature and choice and therefore must be rescued and saved. This salvation is referred to in a variety of terms, one of them being *"born again"* (John 3:1-15).

John described this new birth as being born of God. It's not just a fresh start; it's a new nature. When God's life and Spirit abide in you, you cannot live in ongoing sin.

Again, John is talking about habitual sin. Believers still struggle, but they don't stay in rebellion. We repent. We fight. Why? Because God has placed something new inside of us. His Spirit convicts us, transforms us, and refuses to let us be comfortable in sin.

3:10

Here John gives us two marks of a true Christian.

- 1. They practice righteousness.**
- 2. They love their brothers and sisters in Christ.**

If those things are absent, John says you're not of God. That may sound harsh, but it's congruent with the logic of everything he has stated thus far. Faith that doesn't produce righteousness and love is a counterfeit.

It's passages like this that forces us to examine ourselves. John is calling us to live the transformed lives in Christ that Jesus has already purchased for us. Sin should grieve us, not define us. Righteousness should be our pursuit, not an afterthought. Love for others should be the overflow of knowing God.

Application of 1 John 2:28-3:10

John writes with the heart of God the Father, urging his spiritual children to stay near Jesus. Why? Because a good father provides, protects, guides, and sustains. A child finds security in the strength of his father's arms, and in the same way, Christians find security by remaining close to their Heavenly Father. The further we drift, the more vulnerable we become to deception, temptation, and destruction. John's desire is that we live with

confidence—not in ourselves, but in the unshakable bond we have with God through Jesus. Our nearness to Jesus is our strength.

Like Father, Like Son

Now that we've been adopted into God's family, we're called to reflect our Heavenly Father. Just as God is pure and holy, we are to live in purity, reflecting his character in every part of our lives. When we walk in purity, we aren't just obeying a set of rules, we are revealing who we truly are—sons and daughters of God.

As God's children, our lives should reflect the holiness of God. In 1 John 3:1-3, we see the breathtaking love of God. We are the King's kids! And because of this, we live differently. We should think of living godly lives as our new birthright.

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

We don't live according to the world's shifting standards. Instead, we align our lives with God's Word, will, and ways. Purity is the daily choice to walk in step with the Spirit, and the constant dependence on God's grace to transform us.

Practicing Sin vs. Walking in Righteousness

To practice sin is to live in ongoing rebellion against God, refusing to turn from wickedness. It's a lifestyle that rejects the transforming power of Christ. As children of God, we don't make a habit of sin, we make a habit of righteousness.

It's not that we never stumble and sin, it's about the trajectory of our lives. The question we should ask ourselves is, am I running

toward Jesus or away from him? Living the pure life John describes is choosing righteousness over sin, aligning our will with God's, and depending on his strength to overcome temptation. When we sin, we run back to God not further way from him. We run again and again back to our loving Father who is faithful to forgive our sin and cleanses us from unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Children of God vs. Children of the Devil

There are only two categories of people: children of God and children of the devil. There is no middle ground. Those who belong to God reflect his nature through purity and righteousness because we have received the Holy Spirit and been imputed Christ's righteousness. Those who persist in sin, without repentance, show who they take their cues from. It's not Christ, but the devil. It's important however, that we see those who are currently apart from Christ in need of being rescued. They are deceived and enslaved by the enemy; they are not our enemy. Just as we needed to be rescued, and so do they.

This is what it means to be a child of God, you've been rescued. It means God has claimed you as his own. He has put his family seal on you by giving you his Spirit. Through faith in Jesus the Holy Spirit produces real fruit of righteousness in our lives. The Spirit enables us to not just talk about righteousness at Bible studies but actually practice it. God himself has chosen us as his beloved children and who now enables us to live as God has called us to live by the power of his Spirit.

Living Out Our Identity

When we live in purity or walk in righteousness we are simply living out our true identity. We walk as Jesus walked. We reflect his character in every part of our lives. Obedience is no longer a burden, it's the natural result of knowing who we are in Christ.

By pursuing righteousness, rejecting sin, and staying close to the Father, we live in the freedom and confidence as God's children. As we do, we show the world what the power of the gospel looks like—real transformation, real holiness, real redemption and real hope. The invitation to a life of transformation in God's family is open to anyone who would come to Jesus by faith.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Abiding in Christ: What does it mean to “*abide in Christ*”? How can we practically live this out in our daily lives? Righteousness is presented as evidence of being born of God (2:29). In what ways should a Christian’s life reflect the righteousness of Jesus?

Children of God: John invites us to marvel at the kind of love the Father has given us (3:1). How does truly grasping God’s love for us shape our identity and the way we live? Why does the world not recognize us as children of God?

The World Does Not Understand You: Have you ever experienced rejection or misunderstanding because of your faith? What are some practical ways we can actively pursue purity in our thoughts, actions, and attitudes?

Sin, Righteousness, and Allegiance to Jesus: In 1 John 3:4, John describes sin as “*lawlessness*.” How does this definition challenge the way many people view sin today? John contrasts a lifestyle of sin with a life of righteousness. What’s the difference between someone who struggles with sin and someone who “*practices sin*”?

Children of God: John draws a sharp contrast between “*children of God*” and “*children of the devil*” (3:10). How does this challenge the common belief that “*everyone is a child of God*”? John gives two marks of a true believer: practicing righteousness and loving others (3:10). How can we evaluate whether these are evident in our own lives?

Application & Reflection: How does understanding your identity as a child of God change the way you approach temptation and following Jesus? What are some ways you can cultivate

a deeper closeness with God to remain strong in him? Based on this passage, what is one specific area where you feel called to grow in purity and righteousness? What steps can you take this week to walk in greater obedience to God?

CHAPTER 7

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

1 JOHN 3:11-18

77

1ST JOHN THAT WE MAY KNOW

Commentary

3:11

John is coming back to the subject he taught on back in chapter two. This command to love one another is not new, it's been the message from the start. Jesus himself declared it in John 13:34, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*" Love isn't optional for the believer; it's the defining mark of our faith. It's not just a feeling—it's a commitment, an action and a calling. The world defines love in shifting, self-centered terms, but God's love is sacrificial and steadfast. John reminds us that loving one another is not a secondary issue; it's the core of our identity in Christ.

3:12

If love is the mark of true faith, then hatred is the mark of rebellion against God. Cain serves as an example of a heart corrupted by jealousy and sin. His murder of Abel

wasn't random—it was fueled by resentment toward his brother's righteousness. When our hearts are not in step with God, we become hostile toward those who are. This verse is a warning that unchecked sin leads to destruction. Cain's hatred began long before he acted. His bitterness grew in secret, eventually spilling over into violence. Sin always starts in the heart before it manifests in action. We must guard against jealousy, bitterness, and resentment. A heart not surrendered to Christ will naturally drift toward destruction.

3:13

Next, John prepares believers for opposition. If we walk in righteousness, we will face resistance. The world is not neutral; it's in rebellion against God. Just as Cain resented Abel's righteousness, the world resents those who follow Christ. This hatred may come in subtle forms—exclusion, ridicule, pressure to conform—or in more direct persecution. But Christians shouldn't be caught off guard. Jesus warned his followers in John 15:18, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."* Expect resistance. Stand firm. Our goal is not to be liked by the world but to be faithful to God.

3:14

Love for Christian brothers and sisters is not just evidence of spiritual life; it's proof that we've crossed over from death to life. Before Christ, we were spiritually dead. We lived in selfishness, ruled by sin. "John therefore reminded his readers that anyone who does not so love has not received spiritual life but abides in the condition of spiritual death" (MacArthur 2007, 133). Those who belong to Jesus are to see fellow Christians as family

whom they love, care for, and serve. A Christian who doesn't love others is a contradiction in terms. If we lack love for God's people, we must ask ourselves "Have we truly been brought from death to life?" Genuine salvation produces love; Christ's blood bought family.

3:15

At the heart and soul level, hatred is murder. Jesus taught this in Matthew 5:21-22, anger and hatred are the seeds of murder. This doesn't mean every angry thought leads to physical violence, but it reveals the seriousness of unchecked hatred. A heart filled with hate has no room for Christ. A person ruled by hatred is still in spiritual death. Love and hate cannot coexist in a heart truly transformed by Christ. For true Christians, when the sinful hatred that lies in their heart is exposed and they are made aware of it, they gladly repent. There is a grave warning here for those who are unwilling to repent even after sinful hatred is exposed in their heart.

3:16

This is the definition of love: Jesus willingly laid down his life for us. Jesus didn't wait until we were worthy, he gave himself for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8). If we claim to follow Jesus, our love must look like his. It may not always mean dying for someone, but it does mean dying to self to love others.

3:17

Practically speaking, if we have resources and see a brother in need, yet do nothing, our love is empty and our hearts are not aligned with the heart of God. If God's love

is in us, we will be moved to generosity. This doesn't mean we can meet every need, but it does mean we don't turn a blind eye. We look for ways to help. We live with open hands, knowing that everything we have belongs to God.

3:18

Our love must be more than words. Words are easy and talk is often cheap—real love shows up in tangible ways. Real love looks like 1 Corinthians 13, it looks like Jesus—it is patience, generosity, forgiving, and tangible. It's seen in the way we treat our family, our church, our coworkers. Love isn't about what we say; it's about what we do. Jesus didn't just talk about love, he demonstrated it. We are called to do the same. So, don't just say it, show it. Let Christ's love define you, direct you, and drive you.

Application of 1 John 3:11-18

I often hear Christians complain about other Christians. In fact, I've even heard some say they would rather spend time with non-Christians than with believers because they find them to be more enjoyable to be around. If I'm honest, I've been guilty of this mindset myself. It's easy to focus on the flaws of your family members. We tend to be the harshest on those closest to us. We grow frustrated with the imperfections we see in the church, and distance ourselves when we experience hurt or disappointment. But when we look at Scripture, we see that love for fellow believers is not optional—it's a defining mark of a true Christian.

Loving One Another

Jesus didn't say the world would know we are his disciples by our knowledge, our moral superiority, or our personal devotion; he said they would know us by our love for one another (John 13:35).

This is the same thing John is making in chapter three. Loving other believers, even when they frustrate or disappoint us, is not just a suggestion, it's a command. If we truly belong to Christ, our hearts should reflect God's love, patience, and grace, even toward those we find difficult; especially our blood-bought siblings.

To be honest, some of the greatest pain I've ever experienced has come from brothers in Christ. I've been lied about, plotted against, insulted, and slandered—sometimes by church members, other pastors, and even those I once considered close friends. The wounds cut deeper because they came from people who were supposed to be Christian brothers. Betrayal from within the body of Christ feels different—it shakes your trust, not only in people but sometimes even in the church itself. Over the years, I've struggled with anger and bitterness toward those who hurt me. At times, I justified my resentment. After all, wasn't I the one who had been wronged?

But the weight of that bitterness was crushing. It poisoned my thoughts, hardened my heart, and affected my relationship with God and other people. It all came to a breaking point when the Holy Spirit convicted me through 1 John 3. I saw myself in Cain, allowing resentment to fester, with sin crouching at my door, ready to consume me. I had a choice to make, was I going to let bitterness rule me? Or was I going to surrender my wounds to Christ and choose the path of forgiveness?

Forgiving Others

Forgiveness wasn't easy. It wasn't a one-time decision either, but sometimes a daily surrender. I've had to continually bring my hurt before the Lord, allowing his grace to do what I couldn't do in my own strength. It didn't mean pretending the pain never happened or excusing the wrongs done to me. It meant

releasing my right to hold on to anger, trusting that God is the ultimate judge and defender. As I did, I experienced a freedom that bitterness could never offer. My heart, once heavy with resentment, became light with peace. I actually started desiring good for those who I once prayed imprecatory psalms for. I genuinely want good for them now. This doesn't mean I want to hang out with them but it does mean God has changed me and I hope wherever they are at that they would walk close to Jesus and enjoy God's best for their lives. I learned that forgiveness isn't just about the person who wronged me—it's about my own relationship with God. Choosing to love and forgive, even when it feels undeserved, isn't weakness, it's strength (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Hatred is a sickness that slowly eats away at our hearts, distorting our thoughts and hardening us against the very love God calls us to walk in. It keeps wounds fresh, fuels bitterness, and blinds us to grace. But forgiveness is the antidote. Forgiveness breaks the cycle of resentment and frees us from the burden of carrying past offenses. It shifts our focus from seeking justice on our own terms to trusting God as the ultimate judge. When we forgive, we reflect Christ, who forgave us when we least deserved it. In a world that teaches us to retaliate and hold grudges, choosing forgiveness is a radical thing. Forgiveness softens our own hearts, restores relationships, and aligns us with the heart of God. While hatred chains us to the past, forgiveness releases us into the freedom God has for us in the future.

Love in Word and Deed

Loving one another is also demonstrated by caring for the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Think about it. They are literally family. 1 John 3:16-18 calls us to love not just in words but in deeds too. True Christian love requires us to see the needs of other brothers and sisters and respond with generosity,

compassion, and selflessness. John makes it clear that if we see a fellow believer struggling and turn away when we have the means to help, we are failing to reflect the love of Christ. Loving others the way God calls us to is tangible. *“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth”* (1 John 3:18).

Christian love is more than just words; simple gestures like offering encouragement, meeting a need, or extending grace in difficult moments are tangible ways we show God's love to others. We are called to love like Christ—demonstrating love through service and selflessness toward one another. The church should be a place where we both feel and are loved by one another. This love should be evident and felt, not just a theological point we agree to. And yes, I know that love sometimes involves correction, but that's not the focus of John's message in chapter three.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

The Command to Love: John emphasizes that love for one another is not a new command but has been central from the beginning. How can we practically live out this command to love in our daily lives?

The Contrast Between Love and Hatred: John contrasts love with hatred, using Cain's example to illustrate the dangers of unchecked sin. How can we guard our hearts against jealousy, bitterness, and resentment?

Facing Opposition for Righteousness: John prepares believers for the opposition they will face. How do we respond to criticism or persecution for our faith? How can we stand firm in love when faced with resistance?

Hatred as Murder: Jesus teaches that hatred is equivalent to murder in the heart. How can we deal with anger or hatred before it leads to division or destruction? What steps can we take to surrender our hearts to Christ when we feel hatred building?

Love in Action: John challenges us not to love just in words but also in actions. How can we ensure that our love for others is more than just talk? Can you think of a recent example where you showed love through tangible acts of service? How do we balance meeting others' needs with wisdom and discernment? How can we ensure that our generosity reflects God's love?

Loving the Difficult Ones: It's easy to love those who are easy to love, but John calls us to love even those who hurt or disappoint us. How do we respond when we experience conflict or hurt from fellow believers? How can forgiveness play a role in moving forward?

Forgiveness and Healing: The application part of the passage discusses forgiveness as the antidote to hatred. What role does forgiveness play in healing relationships? Have you experienced freedom through forgiveness, either in your own life or by offering it to others?

Application and Reflection: How can we contribute to making the church a community where God's love is truly felt? What can we do to be more intentional about loving others in our church family?

CHAPTER 8

GOD IS GREATER

1 JOHN 3:19-24

87

1ST JOHN THAT WE MAY KNOW

Commentary

3:19

Walking in the confidence of Christ is a powerful reality. Even those with what seems to be the strongest in faith struggle with assurance of their salvation. John is writing to believers who have a similar struggle.

How do we know we truly belong to God? The answer is simple: by the evidence of Christ's love in our lives. If we are actively loving others in word, thought, and deed (as stated in the previous verses), then we can have confidence that we are truly in Christ. This is not about earning salvation but rather about recognizing the fruit of salvation in our lives. When love flows from us, it confirms that we are walking in the truth of Christ.

But John also acknowledges that there will be times when we doubt. Our hearts may feel uncertain or accuse us. This is why he speaks of assurance. Our

assurance before God isn't based on how we feel at any given moment but on the truth of God's Word. The believer doesn't have to live in constant fear of whether they are truly saved—God has given us clear markers, and one of them is our love for others.

3:20

The human heart can be fickle. It can condemn us. Often our past failures and sin remind us of our failings. But John points us to a greater reality—God is greater than our heart.

Our hearts may accuse us, but God knows everything. He sees the full picture. He sees our struggles, our repentance, our desire to follow him even when we fall short. And he sees the finished work of Christ covering us. This is a call to trust in God's knowledge over our feelings.

Feelings fluctuate but truth does not. If we belong to Christ, then even in moments of doubt, we can rest in the knowledge that God's grace is greater than our failures.

3:21

John moves from addressing a troubled heart to a heart at peace. When we are walking in obedience and love, we experience confidence before God. This confidence is not arrogance; it's assurance. We can come before God with boldness, knowing that we are living in alignment with his will.

Confidence before God means that we are not living in fear or doubt. It means we are secure in our relationship with him. We don't have to hide like

Adam and Eve did in the garden. We can approach God knowing that he welcomes us as his children.

3:22

At first glance, this verse might seem like God will say yes to anything we ask. But the text is not saying that God will give us whatever we want. Rather, it is explaining that those who are abiding in Christ, obeying his commands, and walking in his ways will begin to pray according to God's will because God has changed their heart.

When our hearts are aligned with God's, our desires start to reflect his desires. We don't just ask for things as often out of selfish motives. We begin seeking what pleases God. And when we do, we can have confidence that God hears us and answers us according to his perfect plan.

3:23

The Christian life can be simplified into two foundational commands: faith and love. First, we are to believe in Jesus Christ, a wholehearted trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Everything begins with faith in Christ.

Second, we are to love one another. Faith in Christ is always accompanied by love for others. These two cannot be separated. A faith that does not produce love is not true faith. A love that does not flow from faith is not the love of God. True Christianity is marked by these two things—believing in Christ and loving as he loved. “Both are test of a true Christian” (Stott 2009, 151).

3:24

Here everything is tied together by emphasizing the idea of abiding. To abide in Christ means to remain in him, to live in close relationship with him. It's not about momentary obedience but a lifestyle of faith and love. When we keep God's commandments—specifically, to believe in Jesus and love one another—we are demonstrating that we truly abide in him.

How do we know that we abide in God? How do we know that God abides in us? The answer is the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the ultimate confirmation that we belong to God.

The Spirit convicts, teaches, guides, and empowers us to live as Christ calls us to live. The Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). When we see the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, we can have confidence that we are truly his.

***Application* of 1 John 3:19-24**

Many Christians struggle with assurance of salvation. Even some of the strongest and most influential believers in history have wrestled with this. The great Protestant reformer Martin Luther often battled doubts about his salvation. If you tend to measure your Christian maturity solely by your visible fruit while focusing on your failures, you may find yourself feeling condemned. Many who study 1 John fall into this trap, and perhaps even more so in John's time, which is why he emphasizes assurance throughout his letter.

Human Hearts Are Fickle

The human heart is fickle, easily swayed by emotions, desires, and external influences. The Bible does not paint a flattering picture of the heart's natural state. In Jeremiah 17:9 we see that, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"* This is a direct contradiction to the world's message that tells us to "follow our hearts" and trust our feelings as the ultimate guide. The Bible warns that our hearts are not reliable compasses—they are prone to sin, self-deception, and rebellion against God. Left unchecked, the heart leads people into error, convincing them that their emotions define truth. This is why feelings alone can never be the foundation of faith or identity. Truth is not subjective, and reality is not determined by our ever-changing desires.

Yet, we live in a culture that elevates personal feelings above objective truth. Nowhere is this more evident than in the gender ideology sweeping our nation. The world insists that how a person "identifies" defines who they truly are, even if it contradicts biological reality. But simply identifying as something does not make it so. I don't mean this as pejorative. This is part of the struggle for those who believe their biological gender isn't congruent with how they feel. And, if their feelings are correct as they are taught something like a gender change might solve the inadequacy they feel. "What must I do to be made right" is the call of their heart which dictates the quest of their life.

Many Christians are doing the same thing in their quest for righteousness looking for a list of things to do to earn their righteousness. While feelings are real, they are not always right. In the same way, if someone "feels" unworthy of salvation or doubts that they truly belong to God, those

feelings do not override the truth of God's Word. Just because the heart wavers does not mean God's promises do.

God Is Greater Than Your Heart

This is where the good news breaks through, “*God is greater than our heart*” (1 John 3:20). When doubts creep in, when emotions betray us, when we wrestle with insecurity, God remains constant. The truth of who God is and what he has done for us is not dictated by our shifting moods or internal struggles. Assurance of salvation is not built on how we feel in any given moment—it is built on the unchanging promises of God. 1 John 3:23-24 gives us a clear foundation for confidence: believing in the name of Jesus Christ and walking in obedience to his commands. A true believer's life is shaped by faith and a desire to follow Christ. Romans 8 further strengthens this assurance by reminding us that those who belong to Christ have the Spirit dwelling in them, testifying that they are children of God. Our emotions may fluctuate, but God's Spirit confirms what is true.

In a world of uncertainty, we need something stronger than our feelings to anchor us. We need assurance that is rooted in the character of God, not the instability of the human heart. Trusting in Jesus—not our own hearts—is the only path to true security. What does God say? How does Christ define things? When the world tells us to look inward for the truth, the Bible tells us to look upward to God who is the truth. Our hearts may be weak, but God is greater. Our feelings may waver, but his word remains firm. This is what John is calling us back to. John wants us to have unwavering certainty that we are children of God. He wants us to rest in the finished work of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit's Reminder

One of the things I pray we will see in our day is a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit so powerful that every lingering doubt is washed away in the flood of truth. John testifies that this is one of the ways we know we abide and are in Christ by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Paul explains that God the Holy Spirit gives us an internal assurance that we are indeed children of God. So, while many people may still struggle with assurance of salvation, assurance is possible.

My longing for a movement of the Spirit would be for those who feel certainty is something they can't grasp. I pray that there would be a supernatural reality pressed into our souls, undeniable and unwavering. That the Spirit would bear witness with our spirit that we are indeed children of God (Rom 8:16), silencing the accusations of the enemy and the insecurities of our hearts. I pray that the entire body of Christ would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are declared righteous, not by our own works, but by the finished work of Christ. And the righteousness of Jesus, fully imputed to us, would feel as real and tangible as the breath in our lungs. No longer would we measure our standing before God by our failures or fleeting emotions, but by the unchanging fact that Jesus has atoned for all our sins, Jesus has called us righteous, and Jesus has given us his righteousness when we were adopted into his kingdom by faith. We are legitimate sons and daughters of God.

With this assurance, the Christian life would no longer be marked by striving but by abiding. The Holy Spirit, who grants us assurance, is the same Spirit who empowers us to live righteously so we would walk in righteousness filled with God's power to obey. Sin would lose its grip, not because of our sheer willpower, but because the Spirit would be actively conforming

us to the image of Christ. The righteousness imputed to us would become the righteousness lived out through us. Love, obedience, and boldness would flow from us, not from a place of fear, but from the security of being fully accepted, forgiven, cleansed, freed, saved and empowered by God himself.

John wants the anxious to rest, the weak would be strengthened, and the doubting would stand firm. I want this too! May we not live as orphans striving for approval, but as sons and daughters walking in the full assurance of faith. May the Spirit take what we know in our minds and drive it deep into our hearts.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding the Text: Why do you think many Christians, even strong believers, struggle with assurance of salvation? According to 1 John 3:19, how does love for others serve as evidence of our salvation?

God is Greater Than Our Heart: What does it mean when John says, “*God is greater than our heart*” (1 John 3:20)? How does this truth help us when we feel condemned? What is the difference between biblical confidence before God (1 John 3:21) and false confidence?

Two Repeated Commands: John simplifies the Christian life into two commands in 1 John 3:23—faith in Christ and love for others. Why are these two inseparable?

Confidence in Christ: What does it mean to “*abide*” in Christ (1 John 3:24)? How does the presence of the Holy Spirit confirm our relationship with God? How have you personally struggled with assurance of salvation? What truths from 1 John 3:19-24 help you find confidence in Christ?

Don’t Follow Your Heart: Our culture often tells us to trust our hearts, but Scripture warns us that the heart is deceitful (Jer 17:9). How have you seen emotions lead people astray in their faith or identity? In what ways do Christians sometimes seek assurance in the wrong things (e.g., feelings, good works, spiritual experiences) rather than in Christ?

Application and Reflection: What practical steps can we take to remind ourselves that God’s Word is greater than our feelings, especially when we experience doubt? How does the Holy Spirit assure us of our salvation, and how have you

experienced his work in your life? How does understanding imputed righteousness free us from striving for approval? What role does the Holy Spirit play in not only assuring us of salvation but also empowering us to live righteously?

Seeking Transformation: If God gave you full assurance of salvation in a new way today, how would it change the way you live? What is one step you can take this week to grow in confidence before God and trust in his promises rather than your emotions? Take a moment to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to increase your assurance in Christ.

CHAPTER 9

TEST THE SPIRITS

1 JOHN 4:1-6

Commentary

4:1

Not everything that is spiritual in nature is from God. John says, “*Do not believe every spirit.*” Just because something sounds spiritual doesn’t mean it’s true. Just because someone says, “God told me,” doesn’t mean he actually did.

Instead, “*Test the spirits.*” Test the messages, test the teachers, test the ideas. How? By holding them up to God’s Word. Every preacher (including myself), every book, every song, every podcast—test them. Are they pointing to the true Jesus, or are they distorting the gospel?

False teachers were a major problem in John’s day, and they still are today. They don’t always come in obvious forms. Sometimes they mix truth with just enough error to lead people astray. The enemy loves to disguise deception in religious language. This is why discernment

matters. This is why we must not be passive consumers but measure everything against the Scriptures.

4:2-3

Here is a clear test when testing the spirits: Does this teaching confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh? In other words, does it affirm the full identity of Jesus—fully God and fully man? The outward expression of the inward faith of the teacher must be affirmation of the person and work Jesus (Akin 2001, 172).

False teachers always try to distort Jesus. Some downplay Christ's divinity, saying things like he was just a good teacher. Others attack his humanity, making him more of a mystical figure. When it comes to teaching, philosophies, and ideologies if they deny Jesus, it's not just wrong—it's antichrist. There is no neutrality when it comes to Jesus. If someone rejects, redefines, or diminishes him, they are operating under the spirit of the antichrist.

The antichrist spirit is demonic. It doesn't mean a person who is espousing antichrist doctrine is demon possessed per se but is certainly influenced by the same spirit of opposition against Christ. John says this spirit is already in the world; it's happening now.

Think about our culture. Everywhere you turn, there's a push to redefine Jesus or to silence his people. Our culture's view of Jesus is often an antichrist version—a Jesus who approves of everything and never calls for repentance. Pay attention to the world's portrayal of Jesus. If it doesn't align with Bible, it is antichrist.

4:4

Again, we see John call believers *"little children"*. This should encourage us and remind us of our identity, *"you belong to God."* And because of that, we have already overcome the false teachers and the spirit of the antichrist.

How so? Not because of anything in us, but because *"he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."* This is one of the most powerful promises in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is greater than any demonic force, any deception, any worldly power.

False teaching is strong, cultural pressure is strong, but God is stronger. You don't have to fear deception if you stay rooted in Christ. The enemy is real, but he is defeated. Therefore, Christians can stand firm in confidence as beloved children of God. We have been adopted into the King's family and kept safe and protected by the King himself. You and I are not fighting alone. The Holy Spirit, who resides in all believers, is greater than the enemy against you.

4:5

False teachers will always be popular. Their message appeals to the worldly desires our rebellious hearts are prone to chase after. False teachers, however, don't challenge sin, they justify it. They don't call for repentance, they aid and abet rebellion against God. Verse 5 helps us understand why so many in the world listen to false teachers. The world listens to them because they speak its language. That's why certain teachings gain massive followings. When one refuses to preach the parts of

the Bible that are offensive, it will be that teaching that will be appealing and attractive to a large audience.

However, the truth is rarely popular. Jesus himself said, *"The world hates me because I testify that its works are evil"* (John 7:7). If our message never offends the world, we might not be preaching the real gospel. We shouldn't judge a teaching by its popularity but by the Scriptures.

4:6

True believers listen to the truth. False teachers and their followers reject apostolic teaching, but those who are truly of God will recognize his voice in his word.

There are only two spirits at work, the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. You're either being shaped by God's truth or by the lies of the enemy. There's no middle ground. This is why biblical teaching matters. If we stray from the Scriptures, we open ourselves up to deception.

Application of 1 John 4:1-6

We live in a very spiritual culture. Spirituality is often seen as something to be celebrated regardless of its source or substance. Many assume that if a person is deeply spiritual, they must be on the right path. But here in 1 John 4 we are warned that not all spirituality is from God. Just because someone is spiritual doesn't mean they're godly. Evil spirits are spiritual too. John doesn't want us to walk into deception; he wants us to test the spirits of our day. There are false teachers, deceptive philosophies, and demonic influences that masquerade as light all around us. Our politics, our businesses, our media, our education systems, everything has been infiltrated. Being spiritual apart from Christ is not a virtue, it is a danger.

False Prophets

John warns Christians that false teachers and false prophets have already arrived on the scene by the time he writes. This isn't the first time a New Testament writer has made this claim. Almost every New Testament writer warns Christians on the subject. This warning serves as a clear reminder to stay vigilant, as there are those who seek to mislead and draw people away from Jesus.

For some, false spirits lead false teachers, and the danger is far greater than they realize. Throughout the New Testament teachings, we are warned that deception does not originate merely in the minds of misguided individuals but is fueled by spiritual forces of darkness. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul warns that *"In later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons."*

False teachers are not just people with bad theology, they are often pawns in a greater spiritual war, spreading lies that oppose Jesus. These teachers may appear sincere, even passionate, but they are driven by influences that distort, edit, and change the gospel. They twist the Scriptures leading people away from the genuine faith and obedience to Jesus.

Jesus warned of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matt 7:15). They claim to speak for God, yet they pervert his Word for personal gain, power, or the approval of the world. They do not point people to Jesus as Lord but to themselves, their movements, or their ideologies. Some empty the gospel of its power by making Christianity about self-empowerment and self-improvement rather than repentance and faith. Others add legalistic burdens, enslaving people to rules and traditions instead of the freedom found in Christ. What makes them so dangerous is not that

they openly oppose true biblical Christianity but that they act as if they are truly Christian teachers (2 Cor 11:13-15).

This is why discernment is crucial. Christians must be anchored to their Bibles, testing every teaching against the revealed Word of God. Not all who claim to speak for Jesus truly know him. The presence of spiritual power does not guarantee truth, only the Spirit of God, speaking through his Word, does. Those who belong to Christ must be vigilant, for false spirits lead false teachers, and their goal is always the same: to lead people away from the life-giving savior Jesus Christ.

Testing The Spirits

John provides believers with a crucial litmus test for identifying false teachers (1 John 4:2-3). The core test of truth is what someone believes and teaches about Jesus Christ. A true teacher, influenced by the Holy Spirit, will confess that Jesus has come in the flesh—that he is the incarnate Son of God, fully God and fully man. This is not merely an acknowledgment of his historical existence but a declaration of his divinity and redemptive mission. False teachers, influenced by deceptive spirits, will either deny Christ's true nature or distort his work. They might reject his full deity, dismiss his humanity, or redefine his teachings.

The latter is the most prevalent in our culture today. Many will teach about Jesus but twist and distort what Jesus has said. Another common issue is when people claim to follow Jesus while contradicting other parts of the Bible. The problem with this is that Jesus himself taught that all of Scripture points to him (Luke 24:27). To distort or reject any part of the Bible is ultimately a rejection of Christ's teaching. A false teacher does not have to outright deny Jesus—they only need to subtly alter his message, leading others away from the truth. This is why

John's test is so essential, if a teacher does not uphold the biblical Christ and his Word, they are not speaking by the Spirit of God.

John emphasizes that any spirit—or teacher—who refuses to affirm the biblical Christ is not from God. Instead, they operate under the spirit of the antichrist, which opposes Christ's truth and leads people towards apostasy. This is why theological accuracy matters. False teachers may use Christian language, but if they do not uphold the true identity of Jesus as Lord and Savior, they are not speaking by the Spirit of God. John's test is asking, "What do they say about Jesus?" Any teaching that diminishes, distorts, or denies him is not from God.

Do Not Fear

As believers, we do not need to fear false teaching or be shaken by the deception in the world. John reminds us that we belong to God, and because of that, we have overcome the world (1 John 4:4). The Spirit within us is greater than the spirit of deception in the world. Our responsibility is to listen to Jesus, do what he says, and stay close to him and his Word. We don't need to panic or lose heart when we see false teaching spreading, we need to keep going, holding fast to the truth. We know that Satan counterfeits what God has said, so rather than being afraid of the counterfeit we should concern ourselves with the real thing. The key to discernment is not fixating on the lies but anchoring ourselves in what is real and true. When we remain close to Jesus, tied to his Word, and live by the power of his Spirit in the context of biblical community, we will stand firm against the deception of the enemy.

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In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding Our Context: In today's culture, spirituality is often seen as a good thing regardless of its source. Why do you think John warns us to test the spirits rather than accept all spiritual claims? Have you ever encountered a teaching or message that sounded Christian but later seemed off? How did you recognize it?

Understanding the Text: According to 1 John 4:1, why is it necessary to test the spirits? What does this tell us about the presence of false teachings in the world? John gives a specific test for discerning truth from error (1 John 4:2-3). What is it, and why is confessing Jesus's full identity so important?

Spirit of Antichrist: What does John mean by the "*spirit of the antichrist*" (1 John 4:3)? How does this spirit operate in today's world?

Overcoming The World: In 1 John 4:4, John reminds believers that they have already "*overcome*" false teachers. What does this mean, and how does it encourage us? Why does the world so easily accept false teachers (1 John 4:5)? How does this contrast with how the world responds to true biblical teaching?

Test The Spirits: John teaches that we are to distinguish between the "*Spirit of truth*" and the "*spirit of error*" (1 John 4:6). What does this tell us about the role of God's Word in discerning truth?

Going Deeper: 1 Timothy 4:1 warns that some will depart from the faith by following "*deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*." How does this passage reinforce what John is saying? Jesus warned about false prophets in Matthew 7:15. How does his warning compare to John's message in 1 John

4? How does understanding the nature of false teaching and spiritual deception equip us to stand firm in our faith?

Applying the Text: What practical steps can you take to test the messages, teachings, and media you consume against Scripture? How can you guard yourself and others from being deceived by teachings that distort Christ? How can staying rooted in Christ and his Word protect you from fear and deception? How can we lovingly correct and guide those who may be influenced by false teachings?

CHAPTER 10

GOD'S LOVE THROUGH US

1 JOHN 4:7-21

Commentary

4:7

John takes us back to loving one another, but before he gives any exhortation, he starts by calling his Christian audience “*beloved*.” This should serve as a reminder to Christians everywhere that you are deeply loved by God. This is the starting point. We are loved deeply by God. Now, because of that, we are called to love others.

Notice the source of love. “*Love is from God.*” Love doesn’t originate from human effort or good intentions. It’s not something we manufacture. True, godly love is only possible through God himself. God’s love flow to us and overflows through us to others.

Next, John says, “*whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*” Real love is evidence of a transformed heart. John is reiterating things he has already mentioned. If you truly know God, love will be a natural outflow of your life. Another way for us to think about it is that our love for others reveals your relationship with God. If you struggle to love others, the answer isn't just to try harder, it's to get closer to Jesus.

4:8

If someone does not love, it reveals something deeper. It's not just a character flaw or a lack of effort. It exposes a fundamental spiritual reality. They do not truly know God. This does not mean that every struggle with love is proof that someone is unsaved. All believers wrestle with selfishness and impatience at times. When a person's life, however, is consistently marked by indifference, bitterness, or a refusal to love others, it signals something far more serious: a heart that has not been transformed by the love of God. John is not talking about occasional failures; he is describing a life pattern that contradicts the character of God.

At the heart of this verse is one of the most popular statements in the entire Bible, “*God is love.*” But notice what John does not say. He does not say “love is God,” as if love itself is some vague, impersonal alternative force to God. This is where many go wrong. Love is not the highest virtue in the universe. God is. And because he is love, God defines what love is.

This also means that God's love is never at odds with any of his other attributes like his holiness, truth, or justice. In

our culture, love is often reduced to mere tolerance, an acceptance that avoids confrontation or correction. God's love is a holy love. It does not affirm sin, but it does redeem sinners. It does not ignore truth, but it leads people to truth. If our understanding of love allows for unrepentant sin or compromises God's holiness, then it is not the love of God.

If we claim to know God, then our lives must reflect his character and his definition of love. We must love as he loves. God has already given us the perfect example of what this love looks like.

4:9

God himself reveals to us what love is and the ultimate revelation of his love is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. If we ever wonder what real love looks like, we need only to look to Jesus.

John tells us that God's love was *"made manifest among us."* This means that love is something that was visibly demonstrated in human history. Love stepped into our broken world, walked among us, and made itself known in the flesh. This is what sets Christianity apart from every other religion. God does not love us from a distance. He entered into our suffering. He came to us.

John explains that in love God sent *"his only Son"* into the world. This should immediately remind us of John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son."* The phrase *"his only Son"* speaks to the uniqueness of Christ. Jesus is not one of many paths to God. Jesus is the only way, the only Savior, the only Son

of God. God's love is seen in the fact that he gave his most precious, most beloved Son to rescue sinners.

Why did God send Jesus? *"So that we might live through him."* The implication is that apart from Christ, we are spiritually dead. We are not just struggling, not just lost—we are lifeless. Without Christ, we are cut off from God, separated by sin, and incapable of saving ourselves. Through Jesus we can now be made alive. This is not just life in the biological sense; this is real, abundant, eternal life.

The world offers countless counterfeits of love but the ultimate proof of God's love is found at the cross of Christ. That is where we see the love of God on full display. As the next verse makes clear, it is not love that we initiated, it is love that was freely given to us when we least deserved it.

4:10

Love does not begin with us; it begins with God. John wants us to understand that we do not set the standard for love; God does.

"Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us." This is a humbling truth. Our natural tendency is not to love God; it is to reject him. Scripture tells us that before salvation, we were enemies of God (Rom 5:10), dead in sin (Eph 2:1), and incapable of seeking him on our own (Rom 3:11). If love were something that depended on us, we would be hopeless. But God took the initiative.

How did he love us? By sending his Son to be *"the propitiation for our sins."* We've already seen the term propitiation used by God. It refers to a sacrifice that

satisfies wrath. Jesus came to bear the full weight of God's righteous judgment against sin. He did this so that he could forgive us of our sin. "Forgiveness of sin is at the heart of atonement and the clearest expression of God's love. We cannot truly love God or others until we have reviewed God's redemptive love offered in Christ" (Jobes 2014, 193).

4:11

If we have received such love, how can we not extend it to others? We must love others the same way Christ loved us.

Think for a moment about what is being taught here, the perfect, holy, all-powerful God has shown love to a broken, sinful people. He had every right to reject us, to condemn us, and to leave us in our sin. Yet, he did not, but instead, he pursued us, forgave us, and restored us. That is the kind of love we are called to imitate.

Let's be honest, this is one of the hardest commands in the entire Bible. Loving people is messy and difficult. Loving others like Jesus loved us requires sacrifice and means forgiving when we would rather hold a grudge. It means showing kindness to those who don't deserve it. It means being patient, even when others test our limits.

Yet, this is precisely what God has done for us. If we truly understand the depth of his love, we will not withhold love from others. The more we grasp how much we have been forgiven, the more freely we will extend grace. Love is not optional for the believer. It is a defining mark of our faith.

4:12

"No one has ever seen God." This is true because God is spirit (John 4:24), and no human has fully seen God the Father. Yet, John's point is this—when we love one another, God's love becomes visible in our lives. *"If we love one another, God abides in us."* God's Spirit takes up residence in us, and God's love is perfected in us. In other words, our love for others is one of the clearest pieces of evidence of God's presence in the world.

This is why our love matters so much. The way we love is how the world sees God. You might be the only representation of Christ that someone encounters. If your love is selfish, conditional, or hypocritical, then what kind of God are you showing them? But if your love is sacrificial, truthful, and full of grace, then you are displaying the very heart of God. At times you will love imperfectly, you will sin against others, and you will be reflections of the world. It is in these moments we must continue to run to Jesus and receive again and again God's love and grace toward you. The more we do this the more we are reminded of God's unending love for us and the more this love will flow through us. The world is watching. Let them see the love of Christ in us.

4:13

John has spent much of this chapter describing the nature of God's love and how it should be reflected in the lives of believers. Now, he shifts to how we can know for certain that we belong to God. The answer being because he has given us his Spirit.

The Spirit's presence is the defining mark of a true believer. Paul also teaches this in Romans 8:16 when he says, "*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*" This means that our confidence in our relationship with God is not based on our performance or how we feel on any given day, it is based on the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

What does the Spirit do? He assures us of our salvation, transforms our hearts, convicts us of sin, illuminates Scripture to us, and empowers us to love as God loves. The Holy Spirit is God with us. When we struggle with doubt or insecurity, we do not have to rely on our emotions. We can rest in the fact that God's Spirit dwells within us.

4:14

John now reinforces what he and the other apostles have experienced firsthand. He writes, "*And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*" John and the early disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and their testimony is grounded in historical reality (1 John 1:1).

The phrase "*savior of the world*" teaches us that Jesus did not come just for one group of people, one nation, or one religious group. His salvation is for all who believe—regardless of background, ethnicity, or past sins. This is the heart of the gospel: God sent Jesus to the world to save sinners.

4:15

John continues by emphasizing the importance of confessing Jesus as the Son of God. He writes,

“whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”

This confession is not merely about saying the right words. To confess that Jesus is the Son of God means acknowledging he is fully God and fully man, his authority, and his role as our only Savior. It means surrendering to Jesus as Lord and aligning our lives with his ways.

Notice the promise, *“God abides in him, and he in God.”* God is not distant or detached from us. He takes up residence in our lives. This mutual abiding relationship is the essence of Christianity. It is not about religious rituals or striving to earn God’s favor. It is about being united with God through faith in Jesus.

This also means that a person cannot truly know God apart from Christ. There is no neutral ground. To reject Jesus is to reject God himself.

4:16

John now brings the focus back to the love of God. *“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.”* There are two key words here, *“know”* and *“believe.”* It is one thing to intellectually acknowledge God’s love, but it is another thing to truly believe it, to stake your life on it, to live in the reality of it. Many people struggle to believe that God really loves them. They may know it theologically, but in their hearts, they wrestle with doubt, shame, or fear.

John wants us to understand that God’s love is not something we have to earn—it is something

we receive by faith. The more we know God, the more we will trust his love for us.

Once again, John repeats, *"God is love."* This means that every action of God, every command, every purpose he has for us is rooted in his perfect love.

So, *"Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."* This shows us again that love is the overflow of a life that is connected to God. When we truly abide in The Lord, love will not be forced or artificial, it will be his love through us.

4:17-18

These verses are some of the most freeing words in the Bible. John writes, *"By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment."*

Many people live with a deep fear of God's judgment. They wonder if they have done enough, if they are good enough, if they will make it into heaven. John says that when we truly know and experience God's love, we can have confidence. Not because we are perfect, but because God's love has been perfected in us.

Then comes one of the most famous statements in the Bible: *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."* Fear is paralyzing and keeps us from intimacy with God when we fear God's wrath all the time. God so loved us he sent Jesus to take our punishment and remove the wrath due to our name. We need not fear punishment for our sin, but in Christ, by faith, we can know that God's love drives out fear.

When we grasp the depth of God's love for us we no longer fear condemnation, but can rest in his grace.

John clarifies, *"For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."*

This does not mean that we will never struggle with fear, but it does mean that the more we understand God's love, the less fear will control us. The gospel frees us from the fear of judgment, because Jesus has already taken that judgment upon himself.

4:19-21

"We love because he first loved us." Our ability to love is not something we generate on our own. It is a response to God's love. He took the first step. He loved us when we were unlovable. He pursued us when we were running from him. We have been loved like this, and so, we must love others the same way.

Again, John says, *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar."* Once again we see that our love for God is directly connected to how we treat others. If we claim to love God but harbor hatred, bitterness, or unforgiveness, we are deceiving ourselves. *"Whoever loves God must also love his brother."* This is not optional. Loving others is the evidence that we truly know and love God.

Application of 1 John 4:7-21

John returns to some of the major themes of 1 John in this chapter. He focuses again on Christians loving one another and repenting of any hatred toward their brothers and sisters in Christ. This repeated exhortation highlights the significance of love as an essential mark of genuine faith.

Christian love is a tangible expression of a transformed heart, one that has truly received and understood the love of God.

Another theme that appears again in this section is propitiation, the sacrificial love of Christ that made atonement for our sins. John roots all of this in God's nature, declaring that God is love (1 John 4:8). His argument follows a clear progression; because God has loved us first—choosing us, saving us, and demonstrating his love through Christ's sacrifice—we are now called to extend that same love to others. This is not optional or secondary, it is the natural overflow of experiencing the gospel. A life transformed by Jesus will, by necessity, reflect Christ's love to others.

Furthermore, John connects loving others with confidence before God. When we walk in love, we gain assurance in our faith. Love is evidence that we are abiding in Christ. Conversely, hatred or division among believers is a sign that something is spiritually amiss. John repeatedly calls for love because true fellowship with God is inseparable from love for his people.

John also re-emphasizes the theme of abiding—remaining near Jesus. Those who abide in Christ reflect his character, and that character is primarily revealed in love. This follows the same logic your parents may have used when they warned you to be careful about who you spend time with because you will become like them. The same is true with Jesus. When you stay near him, you begin to live like him. You love, serve, care, give, help, confront, problem-solve, and even deal with false teachers—everything—just like Jesus.

Why Again?

But why does John feel the need to address this theme again? Likely, it is because the believers he was writing to were struggling

with division, false teaching, and possibly even animosity among themselves. Some may have claimed to know God while failing to love their fellow Christians. Others may have been discouraged, doubting their faith because of these conflicts. By returning to these themes, John reinforces what he's been teaching.

The Gospel Saves and Sustains

As Christians, we never graduate from the gospel. The gospel is not just news or information; it is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16). It is not merely the message that brings us to faith, it is the very foundation that sustains and transforms us daily. The same good news that saved us is the same good news that sustains us.

Far too often, people treat the gospel as something to keep you out of hell. The Bible views the gospel differently. It teaches that the gospel is the lifeblood of the Christian life. Paul reminds the Corinthians, *"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved"* (1 Cor 15:1-2). The gospel is not only our entry point into the faith but our source of our maturity within the faith.

The power of the gospel continues to work in us, shaping our hearts, renewing our minds, and empowering us to live in obedience to Christ. It continually reminds us of our identity in Christ. When we struggle with sin, we do not move beyond the gospel, we return to it. Remembering Christ's finished work, press forward in freedom and repentance.

The saving work of the risen Lord Jesus is the foundation of our faith, the source of our joy, and the power of our endurance. Colossians 2:6-7 says, *"Therefore, as you received Christ*

Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith.” Just as we were saved by grace through faith, we continue to walk in that same grace every day.

The gospel sustains us because it continually points us back to Jesus. It reminds us that we are fully forgiven and accepted in him, that Jesus’s grace is sufficient, and that his Spirit is at work within us. No matter how long we have been following Christ, we never outgrow our need for the gospel.

Growing In Awe of God’s Love

The love of God is so vast, so immeasurable, that no human mind can fully grasp its depth. The more we know and grasp God’s love for us the more we are changed. We love others, because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). And this is why Paul wants the church *“to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”* (Eph 3:19). The more we meditate and reflect on God’s love, the more it transforms our hearts, our minds, and our lives. God’s love is infinite and he invites us to experience it more and more.

One way we grow in awe of God’s love is by recognizing that it is undeserved. Romans 5:8 tells us, *“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* This love is not based on our merit, performance, or worthiness, but purely on God’s grace. The more we understand our own sinfulness, the more we see how amazing God’s love truly is. God did not love us because we were lovable. He loved us despite our rebellion, making a way for our salvation through the sacrifice of his Son. God’s love is inexhaustible—there will always be more to discover, more to cherish, and more to stand in wonder of. May our hearts be continually overwhelmed by the glorious, unshakable, and unending love of God.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

God's Love: What does John say is the source of love?

Why is this important to understand? What does it mean that “*whoever loves has been born of God and knows God*” (4:7)? How does John define love in 1 John 4:8?

Understanding the Passage: What does John mean when he says, “*God is love*”? How is this different from saying “love is God”? How does God's love differ from the world's definition of love?

Jesus and the Gospel: In what way did God make his love “*manifest among us*” (4:9)? What does it mean that Jesus was sent “*so that we might live through him*” (4:9)? Why does John emphasize that love starts with God, not with us (4:10)?

Applied Theology: What does the word “*propitiation*” mean, and why is it crucial for understanding the gospel (4:10)? How does 1 John 4:11 challenge us to love others? How does loving others make God's presence visible in the world? What does it mean that Jesus is the “*Savior of the world*” (4:14)?

God's Love: Why does perfect love “*cast out fear*” (4:18)? What kind of fear is John referring to? How does John describe the relationship between loving God and loving others (4:19-21)?

Application and Reflection: What does this passage teach us about how God's love should shape our daily lives? How can we reflect God's love in practical ways in our relationships? Why do you think John repeatedly emphasizes love throughout this letter?

Applying the Text: How does understanding God's love impact the way you view yourself? Is there someone in your life whom you struggle to love? How does this passage

challenge you? How can we develop confidence in our faith based on what John teaches in this passage? What practical steps can you take this week to grow in love for others?

CHAPTER 11

FATHER AND FAMILY

1 JOHN 5:1-5

Commentary

5:1

Everything begins and ends with Jesus. The most important decision one can make is if they will put their faith and trust in Jesus. Whoever believes that Jesus is who he says he is—the Christ—is born of God because genuine belief in Jesus is the foundational evidence that one has been *“born of God.”*

The work of salvation is a divine work of God. Just like there is nothing an infant child can do to be born, so to the new birth is not a human effort but a work of God. Meaning you cannot save yourself. Salvation is not the result of choosing the right morals, traditions, or political parties to align with, but of God's sovereign grace and

divine choosing. To be born of God is to be spiritually regenerated; to move from spiritual death to life, from darkness to light. It is a fundamental shift in identity, one that changes not only our relationship with God but also our relationship with others. This divine act of God to cause one to be born again ties back to John's Gospel, where Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are "*born again*" (John 3:3).

"Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him." This means that if you are a Christian, born of God, regenerated, saved, you will love other Christians. You will understand that you were not saved by your own strengths and power but by the power of God. You did not deserve this great salvation you enjoy, but have certainly received it. This changes how you see yourself and brings you to a joyous humility. A genuine child of God will naturally love others who are also born of him. Love for fellow Christians is not optional; it is evidence of spiritual rebirth. Just as a newborn instinctively recognizes and bonds with family, so too do those born of God develop a familial connection with other believers.

This type of community stands in stark contrast of a world where relationships are often transactional and self-serving. Therefore, the church is not just a gathering of like-minded people, it is a family bound by the blood of Christ.

Note that John uses the present tense when he says, "*everyone who believes.*" This suggests ongoing belief, not just a one-time decision. True faith perseveres. It is not fleeting; it is continual trust in Jesus as the Christ. Genuine faith is living, active, and evidenced by love for God and love for his people.

John is describing what naturally happens when someone is truly born of God. They believe in Jesus, they love God, and they love others in God's family.

5:2-3

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1ST JOHN THAT WE MAY KNOW

In the previous verse, we saw that everyone who believes in Jesus as the Christ has been born of God and, as a result, will naturally love others who have also been born of God too. Now, John takes this concept a step further, explaining how we can truly know that we are loving our fellow believers when we love God and keep his commandments.

At first glance, this statement may seem a little backward. We might expect John to say that we know we love God when we love his children. Instead, he says we know we love God's children when we love God and obey God. This is a crucial distinction. John makes it clear that true love for others is defined by God himself. Love for others is not merely about kindness or good intentions—it is rooted in loving God first and submitting to his commands. God's commands are the divine acts of God's love for others. The most genuine love we can have for our brothers and sisters in Christ will flow from our love for God.

Loving others is not about approving of everything they do or avoiding difficult conversations or a feeling one gets when they interact with you. Loving others points people toward the God who made them in both word and deed. Loving others helps them see the truth, seeks their ultimate good, and live in a way that reflects God's righteousness. John is reminding us that the love for God is not disconnected from obedience to

God. If we truly love others, we will want what is best for them according to God's Word, will, and ways.

The idea of obedience being the measure of love might be viewed as rigid or legalistic. Assuming those possible objections, John immediately clarifies that “[God’s] *commandments are not burdensome.*” Obedience to Jesus is freedom. The commandments of God are not meant to weigh us down; they are given for our good. When our hearts are transformed by Jesus, obedience ceases to feel like drudgery and instead becomes a natural response of the Christian life.

God's commands are not burdensome because of the power of the Holy Spirit within us. God is renewing our hearts and desires day by day as we walk with him by faith. In our own strength, we could never obey God perfectly, but we don't live by our own strength any longer. Those who are born of God are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who enables and empowers obedience. This is why John connects obedience with new birth in the previous verses. Those who are born of God have been given new hearts that desire to follow him. While the struggle with sin remains, there is a newfound ability and longing to walk in obedience.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites the weary to take his yoke upon them, promising that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Submitting to God's ways may seem counterintuitive to freedom, but it is actually the key to a life of true freedom, peace, and joy. In our sin we often believe the lie that true freedom and joy is found in whatever we want to do rather than what God wants us to do. We rebel against God and reject

his commands. The truth, however, is that true joy is found in aligning our lives with God's commands.

5:4-5

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1ST JOHN THAT WE MAY KNOW

Those who belong to God are not defeated by the world; they overcome it. *"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world."* This is not a suggested ambition or a possible reality, it is certainty. If you have been born of God, then you will overcome. Everyone who has been born of God participates in this victory. There are no exceptions. This is not just for spiritual elites, pastors, or church planters, it is the reality for every true believer.

John is telling us that those who belong to God are conquerors and victors, not victims of this fallen world. "There may be many self-help gurus who write and speak about how to live a better life, and some of what they say may be helpful and worthwhile. But what is of the world cannot give us victory over the world. Without trust in Christ, who come in to the world from God, even the most successful life is swallowed up in the defeat of death" (Jobes 2014, 217).

Therefore, weary Christians can labor with confidence and hope. The world that seeks to pull believers away from Christ, tempting them to compromise, to doubt, to chase after lesser things—those who are born of God have already overcome it. How so? *"And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."* Faith in Jesus is victory because Jesus is the victor. His victory over sin, Satan, and death is our victory too though faith in him. The battle is not won by our effort, but Christ's. We now can confidently trust in the finished work of Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Faith is the hand that receives what Christ has already accomplished. Through Christ’s victory we are free men and women. Free from sin and rebellion against God. No more striving to earn God’s love, we can now rest, trusting in the victory Christ has won for us.

The kind of faith that overcomes the world is the faith that clings to Jesus, that remains close to him in trials, that stands firm against opposition, and that refuses to be swayed by the shifting values of the culture. It is the faith that continues to believe even when life is hard, when prayers seem unanswered, when the world is pressing in from all sides.

When John asks the question, *“Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* he is making it clear that this victory is not for just anyone. It is exclusively for those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The offer is for all to come and believe, but the victory is only for those who do so.

If you are in Christ, you are not fighting for victory, you are fighting from victory. The battle has already been won. The victory is not dependent on your strength but on Christ’s. That means you can stand firm, walk boldly, and trust that no matter what comes your way, you belong to Jesus!

Application of 1 John 5:1-5

John begins the final chapter of his letter by calling us back to the basics of Christianity: faith in Jesus Christ. Once again John

can't help but talk about Jesus and share what he's done. His excitement is contagious. Is there something in your life that you can't stop telling people about? Maybe it's a favorite show you just binge-watched, a restaurant that serves the best tacos in town, or an new hobby you want others to join you in. When we're passionate about something, it naturally spills over into our conversations. John's enthusiasm reminds us that when something truly changes our lives, we can't help but share it.

Only Jesus Saves

Jesus saves sinners. This is the heart of John's message and the heart of the entire Bible. John wants people to experience real salvation: burdens lifted, sin forgiven, freedom, and abundant life—all of it. In 1 John 5:1, we see that belief in Jesus as the Christ is the foundation of salvation. The invitation is for everyone. Anyone who believes can be saved. You don't have to clean yourself up before coming to Jesus, just come as you are.

When we encounter Jesus, everything changes. We go from lost to found, from broken to restored, from sinners to sons and daughters of God. Salvation isn't just a one-time, one moment experience, it's the beginning of forever with Jesus. The beauty of the gospel is that no one is too far gone, too messed up, or too broken to be redeemed. Jesus came to save sinners, to set its captives free. If we truly grasp this truth, it should stir something in us. Just like John, we should long for others to know the hope, freedom, and forgiveness that can only be found in Jesus.

Keeping Christ's Commandments

A natural result of knowing Jesus and experiencing new life in him is a desire to obey him. In 1 John 5:2-3, John teaches that being a child of God means loving our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, and that love is demonstrated in real time by keeping Jesus's

commandments. When we truly understand what Jesus has done for us, obedience stops feeling like a burden and becomes a joy.

Moreover, Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). Obedience is the overflow of a heart that belongs to him. The more we walk with Jesus, the more our desires align with his. We follow Christ’s commands out of love and devotion to Jesus. Keeping his commandments is evidence of a transformed heart.

In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus was asked which commandment in the law was the greatest. He responded, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* Jesus made it clear that loving God is the foundation of God’s law. Loving God with everything we have, and with that same priority, loving others as ourselves, fulfills the purpose of the entire Old Testament law. The Ten Commandments, given in Exodus 20, serve as practical guidelines for how to live out this love in everyday life. The first four focus on loving God, while the last six teach us how to love one another.

All of Life is Worship

The first four commandments—(1) Have no other gods, (2) Do not make idols, (3) Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, and (4) Keep the Sabbath holy—show us how to love God as he has commanded. Loving God means putting him and his ways first in our lives, worshiping him alone, and not allowing anything to take his place. It means not swearing by God’s name falsely and setting aside time to worship, rest and focus on God. When

we obey these commands, we express our devotion and worship for God, acknowledging him as our Lord, savior, and sustainer.

The last six commandments—(5) Honor your father and mother, (6) Do not murder, (7) Do not commit adultery, (8) Do not steal, (9) Do not bear false witness, and (10) Do not covet—teach us how to love one another. Honoring parents fosters respect and unity in families. It reminds children that their parents have a responsibly to raise them according to God's ways, and that they should respect and follow as they do. Loving others means an outright refusal to murder, adultery, and theft. This ensures that we value and protect others' lives, relationships, and property. Speaking the truth builds trust and reflects God, whereas lying reflects Satan. Refusing to envy keeps our hearts pure and being grateful for what we have and what God has blessed others with.

When we obey these commands, we actively choose to honor God and treat others with a true kindness, integrity, and respect that God has called us too. Essentially, what we are called to do is worship God in all our lives, to obey him, honor him, and glorify him in every sphere and domain we occupy. In 1 John 5:3, John emphasizes that God's commandments are not burdensome. Obedience to Jesus is not meant to weigh us down. Instead, they are life-giving, designed for our good and human flourishing.

Overcomers

By the time we get to 1 John 5:4-5, the focus shifts to overcoming; victory through faith in Jesus. Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This victory is not through our strength but through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony (Rev 12:11). Jesus's sacrifice has already won the battle, and as believers, we walk in that victory by trusting in him and his goodness for us and by proclaiming what he

has done in our lives. Our testimony, our personal story of redemption, becomes a powerful weapon against doubt, fear, and opposition. It also becomes a light shining forth that bids others to come experience freedom in Christ themselves.

As those who have been redeemed, we are called to live as ambassadors of Christ, demonstrating to a watching world the great salvation found in him (1 John 5:1). An ambassador represents the interests of their king, and as followers of Jesus, we are to reflect Christ's character, love, and truth in everything we do. Our lives should testify to the transforming power of Jesus. As overcomers, we do not shrink back in fear or compromise with the world. Instead, we boldly proclaim the gospel, showing others that Jesus is the only way to true freedom and victory.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

A New Identity in Christ: What does it mean to be “born of God” according to 1 John 5:1? How does John describe faith in Jesus as the foundation of salvation? Why is being “born of God” not based on human effort but God’s grace?

Loving One Another: How does being born of God affect our love for other believers (1 John 5:1-2)? What does John mean when he explains that love for others is a natural result of salvation? How does the church as a family contrast with the way relationships function in the world?

Loving God Through Obedience: How does John connect love for God with obeying his commandments (1 John 5:2-3)? Why does John say that God’s commandments “are not burdensome”? In what ways do people often view obedience as restrictive rather than freeing?

Faith That Overcomes the World: What does John mean when he says that “everyone born of God overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4)? What are some of the worldly temptations and struggles that believers face? How does faith in Jesus provide victory over the world? How does Ephesians 2:8-9 help us understand that this victory is through grace, not our own effort?

Living as Overcomers: What does it mean to “overcome” according to 1 John 5:4-5? How does Jesus’s victory over sin, Satan, and death impact our daily lives? How does Revelation 12:11 connect the idea of overcoming with the blood of the Lamb and our testimony? What are ways we can live confidently as overcomers in our culture today?

Representing Jesus to the World: Why is proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God essential to living as an overcomer? How does our identity as children of God shape our mission in the world? What practical steps can we take to boldly share the gospel with those around us?

Reflection & Application: What are some areas in your life where obedience to God feels like a burden rather than a joy? How can you shift your perspective? How does knowing that faith in Jesus secures victory over the world change the way you face challenges? What is one practical step you can take this week to live as an overcomer and an ambassador of Christ? How can you share the message of Jesus with someone who has not yet experienced the freedom and victory found in Him?

CHAPTER 12

THE TESTIMONY OF GOD

1 JOHN 5:6-13

137

1ST JOHN THAT WE MAY KNOW

Commentary

5:6-8

To fully grasp the weight of this passage, we must consider both its historical context and its practical implications for us today.

Let's start with this statement, "*This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ.*" The phrase "*came by*" indicates more than just arrival; it speaks to the nature of Christ's mission and identity. Jesus did not merely appear or claim a divine status, he came in a specific manner, confirmed by water and blood.

What do these terms mean? Scholars have debated their significance, but the most widely accepted interpretations point to two pivotal moments in Jesus's earthly ministry:

his baptism (water) and his crucifixion (blood). Others “have suggested that the phrase ‘water and blood’ refers to Jesus’s physical birth and death, respectively, since birth involves water (amniotic fluid) breaking (but also involves blood)” (Jobes 2014, 218). Either way, the emphasis here seems not to be on his humanity and physical being but on why he physically came and what was the eternal significance of his incarnation. That significance being that he came to atone for the sins of mankind, to save sinners. Furthermore with the emphasis on the Spirit’s testimony corroborating the water and blood, it seems most likely that the water and blood would represent Christ’s baptism and crucifixion.

Water represents Jesus’s baptism in which the Father audibly affirmed his Sonship, and we see the Spirit descend like a dove (Matt 3:16-17). This was the moment Jesus publicly marks the beginning of his earthly ministry. The water testifies to Jesus being commissioned by the Father, revealing him as the Messiah sent to fulfill God’s redemptive plan. The Holy Spirit descending testifies that the Godhead is in agreement with the mission. Furthermore, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus fulfills the mission given to him by the Father that he has joyfully embraced.

While his baptism marked the start of his ministry, the shedding of his blood was its fulfillment. The cross was the ultimate confirmation of his mission to atone for sin, satisfy God’s wrath, and bring reconciliation. Jesus did not come by water only but by water and blood. Whereas the Spirit descends at Jesus’s baptism, on the cross Jesus gives up his Spirit (Matt 27:50).

Therefore, the blood referring to Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross, seems to make the most sense.

"And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth" (1 John 5:6). The Holy Spirit is the divine witness, affirming Jesus's identity and work. The Spirit was present at Christ's baptism, descended upon him like a dove, and continues to testify today through the illumination of the Word of God and the transformed lives of believers. The Spirit bears witness through the Scriptures, through conviction in the hearts of believers, and through the ongoing work of Christ in the world. If anyone questions Jesus's identity or mission, the Spirit himself provides confirmation.

"For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree." (1 John 5:7).

The idea of a threefold testimony is deeply rooted in Jewish law, where legal matters required two or three witnesses to establish truth (Deut 19:15). The same principle is applied here to Christ, stating that water (his baptism), blood (his crucifixion), and the Spirit (God's ongoing witness) all point to the same reality—Jesus is the Son of God. These three do not stand in isolation; they agree. There is no contradiction between them. The baptism of Jesus, the crucifixion, and the Spirit's testimony all work together to affirm one truth: Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only source of salvation.

Why does this matter for believers today? John is not just making a theological argument; he is reinforcing the foundation of our faith. We do not believe in Jesus based on emotional experience, cultural

tradition, or philosophical reasoning alone. Our faith is grounded in historical and divine testimony.

The water reminds us that Jesus entered our world, identified with us, and was affirmed by the Father. The blood reminds us that Jesus paid the price for our salvation, securing it through his death. The Spirit continues to testify, giving us confidence that what we believe is true.

5:9

Building on his previous discussion of the threefold testimony of the water, blood, and Spirit, John shifts to the ultimate authority behind all of it—God himself. *“If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater.”* In everyday life, we trust human testimony all the time. We believe what eyewitnesses say in court. We trust historians to accurately record past events. We rely on the credibility of experts in various fields. If we so readily accept human testimonies, why would we hesitate to believe the testimony of God?

God’s testimony is greater. It is pure, unchangeable, and it is absolutely reliable because it originates from the one who cannot lie (Num 23:19; Titus 1:2). God himself has declared Jesus to be the Christ. This declaration was made at his baptism (Matt 3:17), through Christ’s works (John 5:36), at the Transfiguration (Matt 17:5), and at Jesus’s resurrection (Rom 1:4). God has left no room for uncertainty. Jesus is the Son of God, the savior of the world, the Messiah.

5:10

There are only two responses to God’s testimony about Jesus: belief or rejection. To believe in Jesus is

to receive God's testimony by faith. Christians doesn't just accept the testimony of God intellectually but experiences its reality inwardly. The Spirit affirms this truth in the heart of every believer (Rom 8:16).

But the opposite is also true. Rejecting the testimony about Christ is not a neutral stance, it is calling God a liar. When someone refuses to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, they are not simply expressing doubt or skepticism, they are outright rejecting God's own Word. Unbelief is an accusation against God's character, a refusal to accept God's Word as true, and a denial of the only means of salvation.

5:11

God has given eternal life as a gift, not something earned or achieved. Eternal life is only found in Jesus. This eternal life is not just about living forever; it is about knowing God forever (John 17:3). It is the quality of life that comes from being in a relationship with him; life that is full of grace and forgiveness, life that is abundant and without end. Jesus is the only way to receive it.

5:12

To "*have the Son*" means to be united with him by faith, to trust in his finished work, and to live in relationship with him. Those who have Christ have life. But those who do not have Christ—no matter how spiritual, sincere, or religious they may be—do not have life. There is no middle ground. Jesus is not a way to God; he is the only way (John 14:6).

As John begins to bring his letter to a close, he shifts his focus back towards assurance. Specifically, he addresses the assurance of salvation and the confidence we have in prayer. John really wants his readers to believe in Jesus and be certain of their relationship with him. Many in our day live with doubt. John's aim is to remove that by giving believers a firm foundation. Not a wavering hope, not a wishful thought, but a deep, unshakable knowledge that they have eternal life in Christ.

Many Christians wrestle with assurance, constantly questioning, "Am I really saved?" If you find yourself asking that question, John's answer to you is this: If you believe in Christ, you can know with certainty that you have eternal life. As we've discussed before, this assurance is not based on your feelings, performance, or circumstances, but on the sure promise of God himself.

***Application* of 1 John 5:6-13**

Testimonies are powerful because they serve as firsthand accounts of personal experiences, carrying undeniable weight in both spiritual and legal contexts. Just as testimonies are used in a court of law to provide evidence, prove cases, and establish truth, they also play a crucial role in the Christian faith. A Christian's testimony is a declaration of God's work in their life and serves as evidence of God's faithfulness and grace. In 1 John 5:10, John says that those who believe in the Son of God have this testimony within them; it is not just something they hear but something they experience firsthand. Our testimony is predicated on another testimony—the testimony of God. If we readily accept human testimony in daily life, how much more should we trust the testimony of God, who is perfect, unchanging,

and true? God is our divine witness; his testimony confirms that Jesus is the Son of God, our Savior, and the source of eternal life.

The Testimony of God

God has a testimony, and his testimony is about Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world. John wants us to know that the person and work of Jesus has a divine testimony alongside the earthly testimony of various eyewitnesses. God himself testifies to affirm that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the source of eternal life.

John explains that God's testimony comes in three witnesses, the water, the blood, and the Spirit (1 John 5:7-8). The water refers to Jesus's baptism, where God audibly declared, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*" (Matt 3:17). The blood refers to Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, where he completed the work of salvation. The Spirit testifies through divine revelation, confirming Jesus as the Son of God. The Spirit works in the hearts of believers, confirming the truth of the gospel, illuminating the Scriptures, and bearing witness to Jesus as the Son of God. Together, these three bear witness to the truth that Jesus is the Messiah.

Anyone who believes in Jesus has this testimony within them (1 John 5:10), meaning that faith in Christ aligns with what God has declared. The testimony of God resides in us. However, those who reject this testimony make God out to be a liar, because they refuse to believe what he has revealed, essentially saying that God's testimony is a false testimony and Christians bear a false witness. Ultimately, God's testimony is that eternal life is found in Jesus. Whoever has the Son has life, and whoever does not have the Son does not have life (1 John 5:11-12).

Receiving God's Testimony

It's one thing to hear a testimony and intellectually agree with it, but the testimony of Jesus Christ is far more than just news or information, it is a declaration from God that demands a response. Unlike the testimonies that simply relay facts or personal experiences, the testimony concerning Jesus's life, death, and resurrection calls us to respond in light of it. The person and work of Jesus is not just a story about a person to be acknowledged, but a message to be received and trusted. To accept this testimony is to agree that you are a sinner and that Jesus is the only Lord and Savior. The result being that we surrender our lives to him in faith.

When we receive this testimony, we are no longer bound to the chains of sin and separation from God. Instead, we are born again, made new, and given eternal life through faith in Christ (1 John 5:11-12). What Jesus offers not only changes our present life trajectory but alters our eternity. Those who accept God's testimony concerning Jesus move from death into life, from darkness into light, and from condemnation into freedom. However, rejecting this testimony means rejecting the very life that God has offered, remaining in spiritual death and separation from him.

Therefore, this testimony is not merely a historical claim, religious philosophy, or Christian talking point; it is the divine truth of God, revealed for the salvation of all who believe. To hear it and ignore it is to stand at the crossroads of eternity and turn away. To hear it, believe it, and receive it is to know the redemption of Christ in both body and soul and to have the assurance of life in him.

One receives the testimony concerning Jesus Christ through faith. The Scriptures are clear that this faith is a confession and conviction of the heart. Romans 10:9-10 lays out how to receive the testimony concerning Jesus explicitly, *"If you confess with*

your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." So, to receive the testimony of God we must confess and agree that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that he died for our sins and was raised from the dead. The heart believes and is declared righteous, the result of trusting Jesus alone for salvation. The mouth confesses, declaring Jesus as Lord, which is an outward expression of this inner faith. This is not just acknowledging that Jesus exists, died, and rose, but surrendering to his rule and authority over one's life.

Hard Reality for Those Who Reject Jesus

The reality of God's wrath and eternal judgment is not a comfortable topic, but it is unavoidable in the Scriptures (John 3:18, 36; 2 Thess 1:8-9; Heb 10:26-27; Rev 20:15; Matt 10:28; Prov 11:21). The Bible makes it clear that those who reject Jesus Christ will face the full weight of their own sin. Jesus himself warned in Matthew 25:46 that the unrighteous will dwell in eternal punishment, while the righteous will enter eternal life. Unlike what some have suggested, hell is not a metaphor or a mere state of mind, it is described as a place of unquenchable fire, outer darkness, and weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mark 9:43-48; Matt 8:12).

Yes, it is eternal separation from God who is the source of all goodness, joy, and life. It is also the place of conscious divine punishment. Many people wrongly assume that rejecting Jesus is a neutral decision. Rejecting the testimony concerning Jesus Christ is a deliberate choice to stand before a holy and just God on one's own righteousness and merit. This is an impossible and terrifying reality. Sin demands justice, and

the wrath of God is not an arbitrary anger but the righteous and fair judgment upon all who rebel against him.

The testimony of God is that Jesus took this punishment upon himself, offering salvation to all who believe (1 John 5:10-12).

Jesus gave himself for us willingly! He took the wrath for sinners on purpose! Referring to his life, Jesus plainly said, *"No one takes from me, but I lay it down of my own accord"* (John 10:18). In perfect obedience to the Father, Jesus endured the cross, bearing the weight of our sin so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God. On the cross, Jesus bore the full wrath of God, suffering in the place of sinners so that they would not have to endure the wrath themselves. To reject this gift is to choose to bear that punishment personally. It is saying, "I will take the wrath of God upon myself."

No one will be able to stand before God and claim ignorance or injustice; God has made the way of salvation abundantly clear. Romans 2:5 warns that by rejecting Jesus, one is storing up wrath for the day of judgment. Either Jesus takes your punishment, or you will. God offers grace, mercy, and eternal life through Christ. The choice is clear: eternal joy in the presence of God, or eternal separation under his righteous judgment.

STUDY GUIDE

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How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding the Testimony of God: What does it mean that Jesus “*came by water and blood*” (1 John 5:6)? How does Jesus’s baptism (water) and crucifixion (blood) confirm his identity as the Son of God? Why is the Holy Spirit’s testimony important in affirming the truth about Jesus? How do the water, blood, and Spirit “*agree*” in their testimony (1 John 5:7-8)?

The Authority of God’s Testimony: Why does John say that the testimony of God is greater than the testimony of men (1 John 5:9)? In what ways has God testified about Jesus throughout the Scriptures? How does Jesus’s resurrection serve as the ultimate testimony of his divinity? What are some reasons people struggle to accept God’s testimony?

The Impact of Testimony on Believers: How does the testimony of Jesus change a person’s life? In what ways do believers bear witness to Jesus in their own lives? Why is personal testimony important in sharing the gospel with others?

The Consequences of Rejecting God’s Testimony: What does it mean to call God a liar by rejecting his testimony (1 John 5:10)? Why is rejecting Jesus not just a personal decision but a rejection of truth itself? What are the eternal consequences of rejecting the testimony of God?

The Assurance of Eternal Life: According to 1 John 5:11-12, where is eternal life found? How does having Jesus determine whether someone has eternal life? Why does John emphasize that we can know we have eternal life (1 John 5:13)? How can we encourage others to find assurance in Christ?

Responding to God's Testimony: What are some practical ways to grow in confidence in God's testimony? How can we use Scripture to strengthen our assurance of salvation? What steps can a person take if they are struggling with doubts about their faith? How should the truth of this passage shape our daily walk with Christ?

Sharing the Testimony with Others: How can we effectively communicate the testimony of God to nonbelievers? What challenges might we face when sharing our testimony, and how can we overcome them? Why is it important to rely on the Holy Spirit when witnessing to others? How does this passage encourage us to be bold in sharing our faith?

CHAPTER 13

CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

1 JOHN 5:14-21

Commentary

5:14

Assurance of salvation should naturally lead to confidence before God in prayer. When we know we belong to God, we can approach him boldly. Our confidence is not arrogance but a childlike trust, the kind of confidence that a son or daughter has when speaking to a loving father. We do not have to come to God timidly, wondering if he is too busy or disinterested in our needs. We can approach him with the confidence that he hears us. *"If we ask anything ... he hears us."* So, we know God hears the prayers of his children, but what about answering them?

When we approach God in prayer and present our request to him, we can have confidence that we will have what we've asked when *"we ask anything according to his will."* This ought to be the heart of our prayers and the trajectory of our life. We should want to do God's will, and we should want our lives to be in line with his Word, will, and ways.

Thus, when we have needs and requests for God, our hearts desire ought to be to ask for God's desires and not sinful desires. Now, obviously this can be tricky, because our hearts are fickle and we still live in sinful flesh.

This verse does not claim that there is a magical formula one must use to get a prayer answered in the affirmative. John first wants us to know that God hears our prayers. God loves his children and hears us because we are his. So, we can have confidence when we pray that God is listening. Second, John is showing us that the key to effective prayer: not demanding our desires but aligning our prayers with God's purposes. Prayer is not about bending God to our will; it is about bringing our hearts in line with his will. James 4:3 warns that selfish prayers—prayers driven by impure motives—are not answered. True prayer is about seeking what God desires, not just what we desire.

5:15

If we have confidence that God hears our prayers that are aligned with his will, then we can be assured that he answers them. This verse should not be taken to mean “that if a believer is sincere God will answer his prayer. Sometimes our desires are not God's desires for us. Sometimes what we want is not what our heavenly Father wills. Faith trusts that God's will is best, and it will trust his plan and propose, even if it doesn't understand at the time” (Akin 2001, 205).

Some prayers are answered immediately, while others unfold over time. Sometimes the answer is “yes,” sometimes it's “wait,” and sometimes it's “no” because God has something different in store. God is a loving

father and we are his children. The point here is trust, trusting that God is a good Father, that he hears, and responds in the way that is ultimately best for us.

5:16a

First, the encouragement here is for Christians to pray and intercede on behalf of a brother who is struggling in sin: *"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life."* The natural reaction when we witness someone else's sin is often judgment, frustration, or even gossip. The directive here is to pray. Rather than standing in condemnation, we are called to stand in intercession. This is what it means to truly love our brothers and sisters in Christ. James 5:16 commends the same principle, *"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."* Prayer is an active engagement in the spiritual battle for another person's well-being. It is an appeal to God to restore and strengthen them, to draw them back from sin into fellowship with him.

When we intercede for a fellow believer caught in sin we are to pray for them "and almost certainly life will be given to the sinner, since John's point is about the relationship between the sin of believers and the assurance of eternal life" (Jobes 2014, 234). Sin damages our relationship with God, but it doesn't sever it completely. Sin does, however, create distance, dulls our sensitivity to God's voice, and disrupts the life God desires for us. Through prayer, we become agents of God's grace, asking him to renew and restore our brothers and sisters.

"There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that." This phrase has puzzled scholars and theologians for centuries. This is the kind of verse that has everyone running to google what sin this might be and if they have committed it.

Yet one commentator said the words were meant to be encouraging. "It is ironic that the present verse shakes some readers' confidence in their salvation, since John's purpose is to reassure this readers of their eternal life" (Jobes 2014, 233).

So, What exactly is John referring to?

One possible interpretation is that John is speaking of a specific kind of sin that results in physical death as a direct consequence of divine judgment. There are several biblical examples of this:

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and were struck dead immediately (Acts 5:1-11).

In 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul mentions that some in the Corinthian church had died because they were taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

In Numbers 16, Korah and his followers rebelled against Moses, and God brought swift judgment upon them.

These cases suggest that sometimes, in extreme circumstances, God may discipline his people with physical death when sin reaches a point of no return. This is not to say that every sin leads to such

a consequence, but rather that there are times when God's justice demands immediate action.

Another interpretation is that John could be referencing apostasy—a total rejection of Christ after having once professed faith. This is congruent with passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6, which warn that it is impossible to restore someone who has willfully turned away after having once known the truth. The “*sin that leads to death*” could refer to a hardened, unrepentant rejection of the gospel. In this case, John may be saying that there comes a point when prayer is no longer effective because the person has fully rejected God's grace.

John does not say we must not pray for those who commit such sins—only that he is not saying we are commanded to. This suggests that while prayer is always valuable, there are cases where the heart of the sinner has become so hardened that divine judgment is already set in motion. It is not our role to determine who has reached that point; rather, our responsibility is to pray earnestly for repentance and restoration.

5:17

Every sin damages our relationship with God and with others. All wrongdoing is sin. However, the distinction remains: there is sin that does not result in death, meaning that it can be repented of, forgiven, and restored through God's mercy. This should be an encouragement to believers. Even when we stumble, God's grace is available. God is ready to forgive and cleanse us when we confess and turn to him (1 John 1:9).

5:18

John begins this final section by reaffirming a point he's emphatically repeated, "*We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.*" This calls back to what he said earlier in the letter (1 John 3:6, 9). The phrase "*does not keep on sinning*" is key; it does not mean that believers are sinless, but rather that they do not persist in a lifestyle of unrepentant sin. A true child of God will not be characterized by habitual, willful rebellion against God. Sin may still be a reality, but it is no longer the defining mark of their life.

The reason for this perseverance in holiness is not from something within us but from God himself. If left to our own devices, we'd squander and lose our salvation, but because of God's divine protection, "*the evil one does not touch him.*" In other words, while Satan may tempt, accuse, and attack believers, he cannot ultimately claim them as his own or destroy them. This is a direct fulfillment of John 10:28, "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*"

5:19

While believers belong to God, the world—the system of human rebellion against God—is under the influence of Satan. John is not saying that Satan has ultimate authority as God does, or that Satan is God's divine opposite in power (he is not). John is saying that the world is in a state of spiritual blindness, deception, and bondage. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, we see that "*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.*"

This should do two things for the believer. First, it should remind us that we are different. We are not part of this world's system, and we should not live like we are. Our values, priorities, and affections must be shaped by God's kingdom, not the world's temporary pleasures. Second, it should stir up a sense of urgency. If the people living apart from Christ are truly captive and bound by the power of the evil one, then they need to be rescued. This is why we proclaim the gospel, because Jesus is the only one who can break the chains of darkness and bring people into the light.

5:20

We do not figure out God on our own; we do not stumble into truth by accident. It is Jesus who reveals the Father to us. As John wrote in his Gospel, *“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known”* (John 1:18).

John continues here in verse 20, *“And we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”* Jesus is the true God and eternal life, so to know Jesus is to know God himself, and to have Jesus is to have eternal life. There is no other way. Since Jesus is the true God, anything that replaces him—whether a false religion, a false version of Christianity, or a reliance on anything else for salvation—is idolatry. This leads directly to John’s final command in verse 21.

5:21

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” This might seem like an abrupt ending, but it is actually the perfect conclusion to everything John has been saying. An idol

is anything that takes the place of God in our lives. While the original audience may have thought of physical idols—statues of pagan gods—the principle applies just as much today. Idols can be money, success, relationships, personal comfort, entertainment, or even religious rituals that replace a true relationship with Christ.

John's entire letter has been about walking in truth, abiding in Christ, loving one another, and rejecting the deception of the world. Idolatry is the opposite of all these things. It is settling for something less than God. It is trading the eternal for the temporary, the truth for a lie, the light for darkness.

John's final word is a plea: Stay faithful. Don't be deceived. Keep your heart fully devoted to Jesus, because he is the only true God and the source of eternal life.

***Application* of 1 John 5:14-21**

John has become a father in the faith to many, including us as we have studied his letter. His words are the counsel of a spiritual father who deeply cares for his children in the faith. As he nears the end of his message, his tone takes on the urgency and tenderness of a father giving final words of encouragement and warning to his children before they step into the world. John wants to strengthen our resolve, to put steel in our spine, and hope on our horizon, so that we may stand firm against deception, temptation, and doubt.

Confidence To Know God

One of the greatest assurances in the Christian life is the confidence that we can truly know God. Many people go through life with great uncertainty about the things of God and about their eternity. John explicitly states the purpose of this writing in

1 John 5:13, *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."*

Notice the certainty in his words. John does not say that we might know or hope to know, but that we may know we have eternal life. This is not a baseless assumption or wishful thinking, it is a firm assurance based on the testimony of God. Our confidence is rooted in the promises of God, not in our emotions, circumstances, or personal performance. If we believe in Jesus Christ, we can be assured that we belong to God and have eternal life.

Beyond just knowing about God, John reassures us that we can truly know God personally. In 1 John 5:20 he says, *"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."*

Knowing God is a reality made possible through Jesus Christ. Jesus has come to reveal the Father, to give us understanding, and to bring us into a genuine relationship with him. To know God is both a personal and experiential relationship where we walk with him, trust him, and live in communion with him.

Confidence To Speak to God

One of the most remarkable privileges of knowing God is the confidence we have to approach God in prayer. Many struggle with feelings of unworthiness or doubt, wondering if God truly hears their prayer. Yet we are reassured that, as his children, we have direct access to him. In 1 John 5:14 we see one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible, *"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."* God not only allows us to speak to him but that he listens when we pray in alignment with his will. Our confidence is not based on our own merit, but on the faithfulness of God who invites us into relationship with him.

I remember committing 1 John 5:14-15 to memory over 15 years ago, and still to this day it serves as a confident reminder that God hears my prayers. Sometimes in life we have great uncertainties, trials, and moments of weakness, yet no matter what we are going through, if we are children of God, we can approach our heavenly Father confidently. Often prayer can be a type of processing our pain with our Father, asking questions that only he can bear the weight of, and we can be confident he hears us. Just as a child trusts a loving father to listen and respond, we too can bring our needs, desires, and struggles before God with assurance. He is not distant or indifferent, but he is good, near, and attentive to the prayers of his people.

This confidence in prayer transforms how we approach God. Instead of hesitant or fearful prayers, we can pray with boldness, knowing he desires to hear us. Even when answers do not come in the way we expect, we trust that God is working according to his perfect will. The more we exercise this confidence in talking to God in prayer, the more we grow in our relationship with God, and he realigns our hearts with his purposes.

Confidence Against the Enemy

In Christ, we can have confidence against the attacks of the enemy. *“He who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him”* (1 John 5:18). We can have confidence against sin, Satan, and our flesh. Those who are born of God—those who have been transformed by the power of the gospel—are no longer under the dominion of sin and Satan. While believers are not sinless, they are no longer enslaved to habitual, unrepentant sin. This protection does not mean that Satan will not attack, tempt, or oppose us, but it does mean that he cannot claim ultimate victory over us. Jesus promised in John 10:28 that no one can snatch us out of his hands. The enemy seeks to deceive,

discourage, and destroy, but his power is limited. He cannot take away the salvation of those who belong to Christ. Christians ought to walk in confidence, not live in fear of the enemy's schemes.

Confidence to Endure to the End

Like a good father John wants his spiritual children to endure well and finish strong.

He says it this way, *"Little children, keep yourselves from idols"* (1 John 5:21). The battle is real, but we are called to endure. Keep loving Jesus. Keep following Jesus. Keep worshiping Jesus. In short, stay away from idols. Who you worship matters; there is a real enemy. Deception is real; keep in the fight, don't give up. Endure to the end because Jesus wins. This is John's message. This is the confidence he wants us to have. Remain faithful because God is faithful and we are his children. May we trust not in our own strength but in the faithfulness of our God who promises to preserve us to the end. *"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 1:6). The work of salvation is God's work from beginning to end. What he starts, he finishes. Even in trials, temptations, and seasons of weakness, we can be assured that God's grace will sustain us, and his Spirit will guide us. All we need to do is stay near Jesus and his people. May we proceed forward walking in the confidence of Christ, enduring to the end when we will see Jesus face to face.

STUDY GUIDE

Reading and Recording

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

Interpreting and Understanding

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

Applying and Obeying

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Confidence to Know God: In 1 John 5:13, John says he wrote his letter so that believers may “*know*” they have eternal life. How does this assurance impact the way we live out our faith daily? How does 1 John 5:20 deepen our understanding of what it means to “*know*” God? How is this different from simply knowing about God? What are some things that might cause a believer to doubt their salvation? How can we combat those doubts with the truth of God’s Word?

Confidence to Speak to God: Read 1 John 5:14-15. What does it mean to ask according to God’s will? How can we ensure our prayers align with his will? What are some common struggles that keep people from praying with confidence? How can this passage help us overcome them? How has prayer strengthened your relationship with God? Can you share a time when you felt assured that God heard and answered your prayers?

Confidence Against the Enemy: According to 1 John 5:18, what is the evidence that someone is truly born of God? How does this impact our daily battle against sin? How does knowing that “*the evil one does not touch*” those in Christ give us confidence in spiritual warfare? Read John 10:28. How does Jesus’s promise of security help us stand firm against the attacks of the enemy?

Confidence to Endure to the End: In 1 John 5:21, John warns us to “*keep ourselves from idols.*” What are some modern-day idols that can draw our hearts away from Christ? Read Philippians 1:6. What does this verse teach us about God’s role in sustaining us until the end? How does this encourage us to remain faithful? How can the church community help believers endure in their faith and stay confident in their walk with Christ?

Reflection & Application: How does knowing that you can confidently approach God in prayer impact your daily life? Who in your life needs your prayers right now? Take a moment to pray for them. How can you grow in your confidence in Christ this week? What specific steps can you take to deepen your relationship with him?

APPENDIX

Bibliography and Further Reading:

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1ST JOHN THAT WE MAY KNOW

Staying near to Jesus—that's the objective. But how? What does it mean to truly walk with Jesus? How can we know for certain that we have eternal life? Questions like these are at the heart of John's message and are explored throughout this study guide.

Written by an aging apostle with a father's love, 1 John calls believers to a deep, unshakable faith. John's words remind us that abiding in Christ transforms our hearts, shapes our desires, and strengthens our love for God and one another. Through this study, you will be encouraged to center your life on Jesus, walk in obedience to his commands, and experience the fullness of life he promises.

Whether you're studying alone or with a group, this guide is designed to help you slow down, absorb, and apply the truths of Scripture in a meaningful way. As you journey through these pages, may your love for Jesus grow, your confidence in him deepen, and your life be forever changed by abiding in him.

This guide includes:

Verse-by-Verse Commentary with
Application & Study Guide Questions

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