

I John

Finding the True Jesus

First John is perhaps the most complex and difficult of the New Testament books to understand well. While its grammar is simple, John uses words and phrases in ways that look at the issues from many different angles. This short book answers two main questions, “Can a person who consistently lives in sin be a Christian?” And “Does a person cease to be a Christian if he commits sin?”



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Lesson One: 1 John 1:1-4

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

The Apostle John wrote his first letter understanding that if we really understand the nature and the teachings of Jesus then we will be protected from false doctrine and worldly living. First, Second, and Third John work well as a follow-up to John's gospel in that they explain what our response should be to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the book is to affirm the identity of Jesus and explain what we must do to be in fellowship with God and with one another.

First John contains an irony within it. It is written very simply in words and grammar, but its teachings are among the deepest in all of Scripture. According to Burton Coffman, John Wesley called it "The deepest part of Scripture." Martin Luther said, "I have never read a book written in simpler terms than this one, and yet the words are inexpressible." Johnny Ramsey said, "First John is written so simply that we use it to teach first year Greek students yet its contents are so profound as to make it the most difficult book of the New Testament to fully comprehend." As you study through this letter look for words that are repeated and for turn of phrases that explain the subject.

The letter of John opens with a similar phrase as the Gospel of John: "That which was from the beginning." There are three great beginnings referred to in Scripture. "In the beginning" found in Genesis 1:1 refers to the beginning of time. It is when creation happened. "In the beginning" found in John 1:1 refers to the word (or Jesus) in existence before time began. "That which was from the beginning" in 1 John 1:1 is looking to the period that Jesus spent on this earth. In other words, John wrote in his gospel of the pre-incarnate Christ and in his letter of the incarnate Christ. John is telling us of his witness of the fleshly, living man called Jesus who was both God and man. To prove himself as an expert witness, John uses the verbs heard, seen, beheld (looked at closely) and handled to describe his close relationship with the Messiah. He literally listened to the Sermon on the Mount, he saw the blind given sight and dead Lazarus rise from the grave, he saw closely Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as he spoke with Moses and Elijah. The original word here for handled is the same found in Luke 24:39 where Jesus encourages the Apostles to place their hands into his wounds on his hands and in his

side so they can fully know his identity. In the days of this letter and in the centuries afterwards there were those who claimed Jesus was only a ghost or a spirit-only creature. John is presenting first hand personal knowledge of the his objective, historically auditory, visual, and tactile interactions of God who dwelt among them as man.

In verse two we see Jesus' life was manifested to them. The Greek word here for life (ZOE) is more than just evidence of being alive (BIOS), it means the joyful, meaningful, eternal life was shown to them. God dwelt among mankind, Philippians 2:7-8. John says they have seen him, meaning they discerned his purpose, John 14:7. John volunteers as a witness who has seen the Lord and who tells others what he has seen. The three parts of this are "seen, bear witness, and proclaim." He and the apostles are proclaiming the eternal life seen and brought by Jesus.

In verse three we are told the purpose of declaring the Word of life is so that we may have fellowship with one another. The word fellowship means more than a social gathering, it is a partnership or sharing. John experienced Jesus personally and by declaring to us what he has seen and heard he is offering to us a spiritual relationship with Jesus through his testimony. The most important things in life are not things, they are relationships. Our houses, cars, and bank accounts will not be ours after our death, but the memories of relationships as parents, siblings, and friends will still remain. Most importantly, our spiritual relationship with one another and God will last for eternity. This fellowship is seen in our unity of faith, practice, and worship. The only true measure of spiritual fellowship with one another is our relationship to the Father and the Son through our obedience to the teachings of Scripture.

In verse four John quotes his gospel account in John 15:9-17 with a focus on verse 11. The joy that we find as Christians comes from our obedience and our relationships with fellow believers. This joy fills both the believer and the teacher (3 John 1:3-4). It is wonderful to see the journey of Christian growth.

Conclusion: Notice the order of what John writes to us. In verse one we see the message. That message brings a shared life (verse 3) and this fellowship creates joy (verse 4). True joy comes in a shared life with Christians rooted in the shared life of God. The life of faith is the life of joy, and is experienced only by those who respond to the proclamation of the word.

Exploration:

1. What is the great irony of the book concerning the simplicity of its writing?
2. What gave John the credentials to write this book about Jesus?
3. How would you define fellowship?

Key Words in First John

A key to understanding this letter is to notice how John uses certain words in different ways. Be on the lookout for the following words:

Love:

46 times

Know

37 times

World

22 times

Abide

21 times

Children

14 times

Commandment

14 times

Spirit

12 times

True or truth

11 times

Write

11 times

Life (Zoe)

10 times

Believe

9 times

Darkness

7 times

Light

6 times

Fellowship

4 times



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Lesson Two: 1 John 1:5-10

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

first thing God created (Genesis 1:3) and to John this symbolizes both knowledge and purity.

While there are many words that describe God: omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omni-benevolent, John uses three words that define God: God is Spirit (John 4:24), God is light (1 John 1:5), and God is love (1 John 4:8). Each one of these words balance our view of God's nature. Some see him as love alone. In doing so, they forget to recognize that God is light as well which includes his attributes of righteousness, holiness, and justice. God is not just a light among many lights. Light is more than just one of his characteristics. Even though he created light (Genesis 1:3) He himself is uncreated light. The light of God is visible in Jesus who said, "I am the light of the world," John 8:12. This light is pure and in God there is no darkness at all.

This passage covers three claims that some people were making that John refutes: some said they could have fellowship with God and still live like a pagan, some said they no longer struggle with sin and temptations, and some said that Christians never sin. These people had views of Christian living that gave license to sin and selfishness.

As Christians desire to be like Christ in our actions, John gives us a series of tests to see if our profession matches our practice. In other words, Christians have a responsibility to live up to what they claim to be as Christ followers. The Apostle gives us five tests to see if we are truly in the light of God. Each of these tests begins with the word "if." The test of verse six is the lifestyle of the Christian. "If we say we have fellowship with God but walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." John says our practice must match our profession. This concept is found throughout the book (1:6 Some say they have fellowship with God but walk in darkness), (2:4 Some say they know Jesus but do not keep his commandments), (2:6 Some say they abide in Jesus but they must walk like Jesus), (2:9 Some say they are in the light but they hate their brother), and (4:20 some say I love God but hate

their brother). The word “walk” here means the pattern of our ordinary course of life. It is not just our action, but our habitual action. Those who walk in spiritual or moral darkness live according to themselves and not according to God. It means to reject God’s standards and pursue our own direction toward selfish and immoral pleasure.

The second “if” or test in verse seven is closely related to verse six. In verse six, we see those who walk in darkness but in verse seven we see that those who walk in the light (have habit of godliness) receive the fellowship of fellow Christians and the cleansing of the blood of Jesus. The light we walk in is provided by the God of light mentioned in verse five. We are children of God, therefore we walk in the light, Ephesians 5:1-2. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses (present tense which means continual action, not a one time action) us from all sin. The third test is found in verse eight: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” We must remember that the recognition of sin in our lives is the first step to our salvation. There are some people who say they do not sin and they are never tempted. Yet the more one learns about God’s light, the more we see the darkness in ourselves. Sin is composed of what we do against the will of God (1 John 3:4) and what we neglect to do that is good (James 4:17). Even after our sins are washed away through baptism, our lives will continue to be a journey against our selfishness and the will of God. The fourth test is found in verse nine, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us.” This confession does not refer to the good confession we made before we first obeyed the gospel through baptism, it speaks to our Christian journey after we are saved. It takes a measure of humility to confess sin to God and to trust him to forgive us for the evil we have done. Confession literally means to say the same thing about our sin that God says about it. When our tongue matches God, he cleanses us and forgives us.

The fifth test is “If we say we have not sinned.” Those who claim the knowledge of practice of being sin free make God to be a liar. Being a liar is among the most serious charges one can make against another spiritually, John 8:44. If we never deal with sin in our lives, then God is a murderer because he sent Jesus to die for us, God is a liar because the Bible teaches that all have sinned, and God is a fool because he is mistaken about our needs. Surely anyone can see the danger of anyone of these statements against almighty God. Some people think the only way to make the gospel really good news is to deny that changes are necessary in our lives. But a powerless gospel is not good news. A gospel that only has lip service is no different than all the other philosophies of the world. This false gospel creates Luke warm church-goers that think they are safe from God’s wrath because they mentally know of Jesus. This is why today there is so much corruption among those who claim to follow God.

Exploration:

1. What three words does John use to describe God? John 4:24, 1 John 1:5, 1 John 4:8
2. What are three claims that John refutes that some people still say they have today?
3. What are some of the tests of fellowship that John presents? There are five total.



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Lesson Three: 1 John 2:1-6

1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. 3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

As the Apostle John finishes the first chapter of his letter, he finishes the thought of what he has said in the second chapter. For those who read 1 John 1:9 and thought, "If I am always going to deal with sin why even bother to be holy?" Or those who looked at 1 John 1:8-10 and say, "If forgiveness is so easy to obtain, why not continue in sin?" John now begins with encouragement to stay away from breaking God's law.

Jesus, Friend of Sinners, v. 1-2

Many people think that John was an older man by the time he wrote this book. The elderly Apostle thought of his readers as his precious children. Just as a parent wants what is best for his children, so the writer tenderly encourages his disciples to grow in Jesus. His goal for them is that they leave the life of sin and walk in the commandments of God. The hallmark of a Christian is the absence of sin in their life.

When a Christian does sin, Jesus works as an advocate with God. An advocate is someone who stands by your side when you need help in a situation. Christ is our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) and High Priest (Hebrews 8:1) who bears our sins on himself and speaks to God on our behalf. In the Bible we see the word mediator speaks of someone with eloquence and authority who would argue in the place of a person to a judge or king (an example of such would be Tertullus in Acts 24 speaking against Paul on the behalf of the Jews). The point John is making here is that Jesus is on our side, John 3:17.

Three Key Words In This Passage

ADVOCATE

Legal term for someone who acts on another's behalf

PROPIATION

Religious term for bearing the wrath of deity for someone else

PERFECTED

Financial or educational term for completing a task or transaction

John tells us that Jesus acts as the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2 and 1 John 4:10). The word propitiation means the fulfilling of a punishment, the Greek word used here is defined as “the removal of wrath. It is something that bears God’s wrath and changes it to God’s favor. The punishment for our sins is death but Jesus, by his perfect sacrifice (John 1:29) has received what we deserved and has given us a place in the heavenly kingdom, Ephesians 2:5-6. This sacrifice is not only for John and his readers but is all of humanity. This does not mean that all people will be saved, rather it means the promise of eternal life has been extended to all who will obey. Anyone living today has opportunity for salvation in Christ.

Keeping His Commandments, v. 3-4

John uses the phrase “By this we know” as a test of validity of our faith four times (1 John 2:3, 1 John 2:5 and 29, 1 John 3:19 and 24, and 1 John 4:2, 6, and 13). John wanted people to be certain of their salvation by the way that they lived.

If you expect Christians to suffer for their faith they must be confident in their salvation. Here we see the second diagnosis for the Christian to have certainty in their salvation (others are 1 John 1:7, 2:5, 3:14, 4:13, and 5:2). Here the test is ethical. Has their relationship with Jesus changed their lives and caused them to obey the Savior’s commandments? Obedience to the gospel adds us to the Lord’s Church, Acts 2:47. Our obedience is proof that we know Jesus well. The modern religious world bases their confidence in feelings but John encourages us to base our spirit identity on our actions, John 14:15.

Completeness in Christ, v. 5-6

When people keep the Word of God, God’s love is perfected in them. This is not speaking of God’s love for mankind (which is universal), Romans 5:8, John 3:16, but is speaking about a person’s love for God. This word perfect does not mean that we are without mistakes, rather means our love for God is whole, complete, or fulfilled through our obedience. God’s love is perfected (mission accomplished) by our living for him, Matthew 5:48. Our love for God is fully shown when we are “in him.” This is accomplished when we obey God’s plan of salvation. At the point of baptism we are found in Christ, Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3-4. As we abide “in him,” John 15, we are sustained and helped to thrive spiritually. As we are encouraged to walk as Christ walked, we remember that we can never do what Christ did on the cross. But we can mirror his faith, love, and devotion. Imitating Jesus in these ways gives us greater assurance that we are in him. Claiming to be in Christ carries the great responsibility to walk (live) as Christ walked. Obedience, not feelings, is the true test of our faithfulness for God.

Exploration:

1. What two words does John use to describe Jesus’s actions for us? 1 John 2:1-2
2. Christians have confidence in their salvation not by their feelings but from what?
3. How is our love for God perfected, or shown to be complete? 1 John 2:5-6



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Lesson Four: I John 2:7-11

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. 9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

The Apostle John emphasized the need to keep the commandments of God, I John 2:3-5. But another major characteristic of Christians is love. There are many examples of people who allowed hatred to destroy their relationship with God (Cain, King Saul, and the Pharisees). For Christians to walk rightly they must love God and love their neighbor. In this section of the letter John emphasizes the love commandment and then describes the challenge of living as a loving Christian in a dark world.

While earlier putting emphasis on his maturity (little children) John in verse seven now also calls his readers “beloved brethren” (3:2, 3:21, 4:1, 4:7, and 4:11). This is a strong term for godly affection that also shows equality of all people who follow Jesus. John calls his encouragement to love an old commandment and later a new commandment. This is because the command to love God and neighbor is found in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus confirmed (Matthew 22:34-40) and renewed these commands as well. This command had been given to these Christians since the beginning, likely in this case pointing to the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus. In verse eight this is now called the new commandment. The reason it is new is the extent that this love is to be shown. Jesus says in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Even as I have loved you, you also love one another.” A Christian’s love must reflect the sacrificial love shown by Christ. This new commandment is to be followed because the darkness of ignorance, bitterness, and hate is passing away, and the true light of Jesus Christ is shining on the world. This light dispels the gloom and darkness of unbelief. And while the darkness is not fully passed, for there is still much evil and error in the world, it is fading before the marching orders of the

church. As the truth is preached, the light is extended and the darkness fades away, John 3:19-21. The church does not need a new doctrine or philosophy to make it more relevant. Rather there is a need for renewal in people's hearts of the teachings received from the very beginning of the church. And the great basics of the Christian gospel are always new, exciting, and glorious in the hearts of those joyfully receiving them; and yet they are also ancient. What activities are older than birth or marriage? Yet those activities are always so new and exciting to those experiencing them in their lives.

From verses nine to eleven John builds his arguments by stacking together three antitheses. Verse nine shows that hating our brother brings darkness. Then verse ten informs us that true love for our brother brings in light. Verse eleven has a three fold warning that hatred will leave us in darkness, make us to walk in darkness, and make it where we don't know where we are going. John likes to use contrast in his writings, for example light and darkness or truth and lies. Darkness or blindness in the Bible often symbolize rejecting God's truth and continuing in sin (John 3:19, John 12:39-40, 2 Corinthians 4:4). Christians are children of light but the wicked are children of darkness who also walk in darkness. Verse nine opens up with the phrase, "He who says..." This is found five times in the letter (1 John 1:6, 8, 10, 2:4, and 4:20). When John uses this phrase he is pointing to someone who says he is living right but is not. If you are troubled by hypocrisy among church people, rest assured that this has been a problem throughout the church's history. In verse ten John now approaches the issue from the positive direction. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling him. The original word used here for love is *AGAPE* that is defined as a serving love. This love we have for our brother is not a self seeking love filled with passion and self seeking, but it is the pure desire for helping another's welfare, of which Christ is the great example. Jesus commanded us to love one another, John 15:17, and made love the badge of discipleship. Jesus' love for us is so great that he gave up his own innocent life for sinners that did not deserve it, Romans 5:8. The phrase abiding in the light in verse ten looks back to John 8:12 where Jesus calls himself the light of the world. When we bear fruit, especially the fruit of love, it shows that we are abiding in Christ, John 15:1-10. When our lives are motivated and controlled by pure love we will not only walk in light ourselves, our actions will not be the cause of stumbling or failures in others. In verse eleven, John emphasizes the results of hatred by using the term darkness three times. Hatred deadens and destroys the soul itself, blinds the eyes, hardens the heart, and petrifies the mind. Those who allow hatred to consume them will receive the payment for their error, Romans 1:27.

Exploration:

1. What are biblical examples of people who allowed hatred for others to consume them?
2. What is the Greek word for the type of love that serves sometimes even to the detriment of self?
3. What is the true identifier or badge of a Christian?



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Lesson Five: 1 John 2:12-17

¹²I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. ¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one. ¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

John now transitions from discussing the necessity of loving God and our neighbors, to the importance of spiritual growth and defense against worldliness and false doctrine. Many Christians tend to focus on love to the detriment of doctrine or doctrine to the detriment of love: John shows that our emphasis must be on both. In 1 John 2:1 the phrase “little children” referred to all of John’s readers. However, in this section, it appears that John is dividing up the congregation into three parts. Little children looks to new converts to Christ, young men refers to Christians who obeyed a while ago and are continuing to mature, and fathers refer to those who have been in Christ for a good while and serve as examples to the church.

What Keeps Us Living In Christ? 1 John 2:12-14

In verse twelve John writes to “little children” or newborn Christians to remind them their sins are forgiven. All of the wonderful social and environmental benefits of Christianity are tangential and not fundamental. Man’s great problem is sin. With our experiences in guilt in our own feeling and lack of forgiveness towards others, it is necessary for Christians to fully believe that God forgives sin. We are not forgiven because we deserve it on our own value or merit but when we obey, God forgives us for his own glory. Too many people are hampered in their personal spiritual growth because they struggle with whether or not God truly can and will forgive them. In verse thirteen John reminds the fathers (older and more mature Christians) that they have know Jesus from the beginning. This could refer to the time when the gospel was first preached to the congregation there. As this church faced instability from false doctrine, John reminded the mature members to remember what they had learned and

endured since the very beginning of the church. Their experience provides stability to the church. John writes to the young men, those who are neither newborn Christians nor older very experienced Christians to let them know they have a role in the church as well. In their faith journey they have overcome obstacles and temptations. Satan tries to trick and discourage all Christians, especially young or struggling ones. Each temptation we overcome through God makes us stronger for the next one. John encourages the little children (young Christians) to remain faithful because of the knowledge they have of God. To look at this list backwards we see that very young Christians base their faithfulness on knowledge of doctrine and as we mature in Christ we begin to supplement that knowledge we have with our experiences as well. The babes in Christ remain faithful because they know God, the younger Christians are strong because the Word of God (knowledge) abides in them and they have experienced the grace of God in their life's journey. Mature Christians remain faithful as they look over the years of experience and see God's work in their lives.

The Christian in the World, 1 John 2:15-17

John is not talking here about the physical creation that God created as good (Genesis 1:31) and that shows God's majesty (Psalm 19:1-6). Nor is it talking about the people of the world for God certainly loves them, John 3:16. He is discussing the world system that is opposed to God (John 12:31, James 4:4, 1 John 5:19). The word here used for love is not the self sacrificing (agape) love, it is the acquisitive and selfish form of love. No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24) meaning we cannot love the world and love God. In John 17 Jesus prayed not that God would take us out of the world but that God would support us through our journey through the world. In verse sixteen John writes that all that is in the world is not of the father. The parts of the world that should be avoided by Christians are the human desires that are contrary to holiness. While God created us with desire in our hearts, these desires can be abused in a way that lead us to sin. The listing of sins here: sensuality, materialism, and pridefulness can be considered a summary of every category of sin. The list is also in view in the temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:1-6) and the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). Sensuality or lust of the flesh refer to any appetite of the body that is groomed beyond or differently than how God intended. A lack of self control in any area of life leads to sin. Lust of the eyes or materialism reminds us that our eyes are the gateway to the soul. We run into great danger when we allow our sight to focus on things that do not lead to spiritual growth. The third sin listed is the pride of life. There is a desire in many people for complete fulfillment and freedom in doing anything they want. We may find ourselves desiring to please self rather than to please God. In verse seventeen we see that the world is passing away. The things that many people think are very important are really only temporary. God and his will are the most important thing in our lives because they affect our eternal destiny. All the vain things that care, seduce, and dominate our time and minds are nothing more than a mirage. That is why we must seek God above all the distractions of life.

Exploration:

1. What some differences in the spiritual foundation of those John calls fathers and children?
2. What is the meaning of the "world" that John condemns in this passage? Is it the creation?
3. What three avenues of sin does John identify in 1 John 2:15-17?



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Lesson Six: I John 2:18-29

18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. 20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. 24 Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. 26 These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. 27 But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. 28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

John began his letter talking about walking in the light, then about loving our brethren in Christ, and then worldliness. Now he moves to the dangers of false teachers. Here John focuses on the antichrist and those who are trying to deceive Christians. But John is confident these brethren have the resources to continue to abide in Christ.

Deceptions of the Last Hour, v. 18-23

Returning to the tender term “little children” used in 2:1, John reminds these Christians that it is the last hour. The word for hour (hora) here means a fixed date or period. It is a reference to the Christian dispensation, the last of the three great periods of mankind (Isaiah 2:2-4, Acts 2:17, Hebrews 1:2). During this period, John has preached about antichrists. The term is found only here, in 1 John 2:22, 4:2, and 2 John 7. According to those verses he is (1) a liar, (2) a deceiver, (3) a denier that Jesus is the Christ, (4) one who refuses to concede that Jesus came in the flesh. In addition to the character who was the Antichrist coming, there were some who fit that description presently even in the time of John, showing that they were in the last days. The term “they” in verse 19 refers to the many antichrists who had been present among the church. This verse is sometimes used in defense of the “once saved, always saved” doctrine. However it does not really teach this apostasy. For example, you cannot

come out of a place you never were. These people had been faithful Christians, but they left the Lord. Verse 20 gives us a play on words not easily seen in our English translations. The title given to Jesus is “Christ” Mark 1:1, Matthew 16:16. The word Christ literally means anointed and is usually used in reference to kingship. So when our translation says we have an anointing that means we have Christ’s kingship as opposed to those who are anti-Christ or anti-anointed. Some hold to the belief that this anointing is a special measure of the spiritual gift of discernment (1 John 4:1, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10). Whether it is from this or from the collection of John’s teachings, these Christians were certainly able to discern who these false teachers were. These teachers were most easily identified by what they said about the Jesus.

Let Truth Abide in You, v. 24-27

John tells his readers to allow the truth they have known since the beginning to abide in them. This word abide means to make a home or to create a foundation. The exhortation is towards steadfastness in the doctrine they were taught in the very beginning from John himself. As they continue to abide in Jesus, they have the promise of eternal life.

There was great danger in false teachers in this area of the world during the time of the Apostles (Acts 20:29, 1 Timothy 4:1-3) and John encouraged the brethren to guard themselves in the faith, 1 John 4:1. Their walk in Christ and continued spiritual growth should protect them from false doctrine just as our continued walk and growth protects us today.

The Children of God, v. 28-29

John once again uses the phrase little children as he has several times in this chapter to show his concern for these Christians. He encourages them to continue to abide in Jesus so that they can be sure of their salvation. The word for confidence used by John originally was a word referencing freedom of speech and pointed to the freedoms that citizens of the city states of Rome had to speak up in political matters. The word for ashamed has reference to someone who grows pale due to shame and is used to indicate the physical reaction people will have when they see Jesus on the Last Day in judgment, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.

Verse twenty-nine tells us that when we recognize the righteousness of God fully then we will understand that all people who practice righteousness are born of God. Righteousness means doing right in all actions regarding relationships with people and obedience to God.

Exploration: The Antichrist

The word is found specifically only in the writings of John in 1 John 2:18, 22, 4:3, and 2 John 7. His characteristics are (1) he is a liar, (2) a deceiver, (3) a denier that Jesus is the Christ, and (4) he refuses to acknowledge Jesus came in the flesh.

Other passages in the New Testament show his identity more fully. Matthew 24:5, 24 speak of those who will arise, claiming to be the Christ, and lead Christians astray. In fact some will even do so with signs and wonders.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 tells us that after the falling away a “Man of Sin” will arise who (1) opposes the will of God, (2) exalts himself against God, (3) sets himself in the temple of God, and (4) sets himself up as God.

Who could this person be? Some point to the High Priesthood of the Jews until the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, others to the Caesars of Rome, some to a supposed figurehead of the pre-millennial doctrine, and some to the pope of Rome who rose in AD 600.



I John

Finding the True Jesus

Lesson Seven: 1 John 3:1-9

1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

God's Children, 1 John 3:1-3

Finishing up from the last chapter and its discussion of our confidence in our salvation, John takes a step back and speaks of the amazing blessing we have in being called God's children. Our relationship with God makes us different than the world in origin, lifestyle, and in future prospects. If the world cannot recognize the Father it will not recognize his children either, John 15:18-19. It is controversial among many Christians what we will look like and what we will do in heaven. Some have a picture of us as being winged angels playing harps while reclining on the clouds. Others see us living on earth in close to our present circumstances. These theories arise because we are not plainly told what heaven will be like for us. But the assurance that John gives to us is that our body will be just like Jesus. After the long journey of our faithful lives we will receive the greatest blessing of seeing Jesus fully in all of his majesty. Philippians 3:20 reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven and that God will fashion our bodies to conform to the beautiful body of Jesus. Verse three reminds us that our knowledge of soon having a heavenly body causes us to purify ourselves, 1 Corinthians 15:58. The tense of the word in verse three "purifies" is present active indicative, meaning it is a continuous action. In simple language, John is telling us that the act of purification for the Christian must be an ongoing process. Each and every day we must strive to be more like Jesus in everything we do and say.

Sin and the Child of God, 1 John 4:4-9

After spending time reminding his readers of what a Christian

truly is, now John turns in 1 John 3:4 and following to show us what a Christian certainly is not. He makes it plain that sin is breaking the laws of God. The original word for sin means to “miss the mark.” So any movement away from obedience to God is to miss the mark for the Christian. Verse five tells us two reasons why Christians do not continue in a sinful lifestyle. First, they remember the price that has been paid for their redemption from sin. Jesus was brought to this world to die for our sins (Matthew 1:21), therefore, we remain pure because we feel sorrow for what he had to do for us. The phrase “take away” means in the original language to take away a burden. Jesus died on the cross to remove the burden of sin we were carrying. Secondly, they remember that to remain in Jesus we must keep sin from our lives. For those in Jesus do not live a sinful lifestyle, 1 Peter 2:21-23. In verse six we see the word abide (used in 1 John over twenty times). The word goes back to Jesus in John 15 speaking of the vine and the branches. Abide means to settle down and to make a home. Hence we live in Christ, we stay away from a sinful lifestyle. John does not mean that the Christian lives a sinless life, rather that he makes it a practice as much as possible to stay away from sin.

Verb Tense in Greek

The Present Tense: (-----)

The Aorist Tense (*)

In verse six, the phrase “sinneth not” or “keeps on sinning” shows a continual habit of sinning rather than a single act.

In verse seven John tells his ‘little children’ that to identify as Christians, we should look at the fruit or manner of their lives, John 15, Galatians 5. It is not enough to say we are Christians if we are not willing to live a life for Christ, Matthew 15:8-9. In verse eight, John repeats what he said in verse five but now connects the practice of sin with the devil. Knowing Christ means becoming involved in an all-out war against the works of the devil, that is, the practice of sinning. According to verse nine, the Word of God helps us to remain free from sin, Psalm 119:11. When we obey the gospel, the Word of God helps us to remain faithful to God. We will still fall short occasionally (1 John 1:8-10) but the habitual practice of sin will be removed from our life. Being born of God is a life long journey of faithfulness to him in every situation.

Exploration:

1. What are some blessings we receive as children of God? 1 John 3:1-3
2. Why do you think some many people today are consumed in lawlessness and sin?
3. What is the importance of living the faith we speak of in life? Why does God want our actions to match our confession?



I John Finding the True Jesus

Lesson Eight: 1 John 3:10-15

10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

The Need For Love, 3:10

As John continues from the earlier passage showing Christians do not abide or continue in sin, he now turns to the aspect of Christian living. In verse ten John tells his readers that the way children of God and children of the devil are shown to be different is the way they practice righteousness and the way they show love to one another. Just as in our physical lives our children have similar attributes to their parents, so also spiritually we develop the attributes of our spiritual fathers, whether they be Satan or God. The practice of righteousness is explained more fully by Jesus as he tells the apostles in Matthew 7:16 that the way to identify true and false teachers is by examining their fruit. It is not enough for us to say the right thing rather we must do the right thing. While our lives may not always be perfect, the summation of our choices will show proper results. The second part of true Christian living is how we treat one another. It is not enough to believe the right way and worship the right way if we treat people the wrong way. This emphasis on treating one another well is the focus of this lesson.

The Example of Cain, 3:11-13

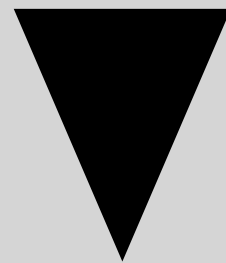
Verse eleven reminds us that the message all the way back to the ministry of Jesus said "a new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By

The Inverted Pyramids of 1 John

Level Three: If God has loved you, you must love one another
1 John 4:7-21 If you say I love God but hate a brother you're a liar

Level Two: Not loving your brother makes you like Cain
1 John 3:10b-24 Love for our brethren is assurance of salvation

Level One: Hating your brother places you in darkness
1 John 2:9-11 Hatred blinds your eyes



this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another” John 13:34-35. While the command to love one another dates all the way back to the Old Testament, Leviticus 19:18, what makes it a new command from Jesus is the extent—as I have loved you. Verse twelve introduces Cain, the prime example of what John is discussing in this section. In Genesis 4 Cain the farmer brought an offering of grain to God while his brother Abel the shepherd brought a sacrifice of blood. Abel’s sacrifice was accepted by God while Abel’s was not. The reason for this is not made clear. There are three strong possibilities. A first view is that God had required a blood sacrifice which Abel did but Cain did not. Perhaps a blood sacrifice would have pointed to the coming Messiah who died for our sins, John 1:29, Hebrews 11:4. A second possibility is that Abel’s sacrifice was of a greater quality than Cain’s. The Scripture says Cain brought “an” offering while Abel brought the first fruits of what he had. A third possibility is that the judgment of sacrifice had to do with attitude. God not only requires right action but also correct attitude, Proverbs 21:27. When Cain’s sacrifice was rejected by God, Cain became angry. Instead of repenting he doubled down and allowed jealousy to grow in his heart, Genesis 4:7. Finally Cain went and killed Abel (Genesis 4:8) and brought down a curse on himself and his offspring. Here we see that the sin we leave in our lives is never satisfied, it will always grow and lead us to even more evil. Even though Abel was murdered, his faithfulness to God still speaks to us today, Hebrews 11:4, Matthew 23:35. In this letter John summarizes the story by saying Cain’s works were evil and his brother’s righteous. Abel did the right thing but was bitterly opposed. This has been happening to godly people ever since. Jesus warns his followers that there will be people who throw Christians out of the synagogues and even kill thinking these actions are being done to serve God, John 16:2-3, 33. Since the beginning the followers of God have been shocked that people are angry at them because of their faith. The world is opposed to Jesus and will therefore persecute Christians even when they don’t deserve the anger or the pain, John 15:17-19. John uses the term brethren only here in his letters as he is letting his readers know that he is experiencing and has experienced the same things they are enduring.

Examining Our Heart, v. 14-15

According to verse fourteen we can be confident in our salvation when we truly love the brethren. The word for “passed” in verse fourteen is speaking of a geographical movement (John 7:3 Jesus passed or departed Jerusalem for Galilee or John 13:1 Jesus speaks of passing from this world to go to heaven). The point here is that when we obeyed the gospel we passed from living like the world to living for Christ and love for our brethren. When we lose that love for fellow Christians we abide or remain in death. If we hate our brother we follow the example of Cain. Just about any conflict among the brethren has some aspect of a lack of love among one another. Our jealousy of brethren will oftentimes grow into a more significant sin and bring greater consequences. This is one of the reasons Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that hatred could be equivalent to murder, Matthew 5:22.

Exploration:

1. What are the two evidences that we are children of God? 1 John 3:10
2. Why do you think Cain sinned? 1 John 3:11-12
3. Why does Jesus think of murder and anger as similar sins? Matthew 5:22



I John

Finding the True Jesus

Lesson Nine: 1 John 3:16-24

16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. 20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. 22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. 24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

This section of the letter looks closely at the answer to the question, "What does Christian love look like?" As Cain is the supreme example of hate, Christ is the perfect picture of love. Cain took a life while Christ gave up his life so that others might live. As we follow Christ, this attitude of giving and sacrifice will be evident in our lives as well.

The Outworking of Love, v. 16-18

Many religious people who claim that Jesus speaks to them directly say that God tells them to marry someone, or get a promotion at a job, or to purchase something like a house or car. Few of these people hear the Lord tell them about sacrifice, death, or enduring persecution. Yet when we read our Bibles we see that Christianity is a life of sacrifice and giving. 1 John 3:16 gives us an impossible command in some ways. The Lord is not telling us to die for our brethren unless it be in very specific circumstances where it is needed. Verse 16 focuses on the attitude that each of us should have towards God and our brethren. Love is expressed more than in just words, it is more fully expressed in our actions to others. The example of Jesus shows us that the path to the cross marks the selfless, self-giving way of life to which his followers are called. The highest form of Christianity is not the speaking of some profound truth, or the accomplishment of some wonderful deed, but the quiet, simple help of a needy brother that beyond everything else demonstrates our possession of the love of God. Three words in verse seventeen demonstrates that someone does not have the love of God in their hearts: has, see, and shuts. If you have something and see someone in need and then shut your heart, you have

shown that you lack the love God has for you. Helping your brother out is modeled to us in Acts 2 and in the relief efforts for Jerusalem that Paul brought from Antioch (Acts 11:27-30) and from Asia Minor. Jesus warned us in Matthew 15:8-9 of those who followed Jesus with their lips and not their actions. This habit exists even among Christians today who claim to follow Jesus but don't show it by their actions towards others.

Our Confidence, v. 19-23

Verse nineteen makes it clear that our actions towards the brethren works as an assurance that we can be confident before God. As we keep the commandments and love the brethren we can know that we are saved. This assurance is vital for the Christian to have if they are to remain faithful to God. If our conscience condemns us even when we have been faithful, God and his word is powerful enough to reassure us of God's grace and forgiveness. God is greater than our guilt. We can be sure we have been forgiven through the atoning work of Christ. Our confidence is not a result of our feelings but of our knowledge of Christ and his character, Acts 24:16. This clear conscience before God leads to boldness and confidence before God in prayer. The statement in verse 22 "because we keep his commandments" implies that there is a direct connection between obeying God and receiving answers to our prayers. John tells us that when we obeying it pleases God. God loves it when his children are obedient and do good works. Jesus gave us the greatest example of this (John 8:29) when he spoke of God the father being with him always because he did the things that pleased him. The works expected from us by the Father are to have faith in Jesus and to love our brethren, Galatians 5:6.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error, v. 24

John has already spoken about our abiding in Christ, but this is the first time he has mentioned God's abiding in us (John 15:4). As John 15:10 says, obedience is the condition of this abiding relationship. The way we can be certain of this dwelling together is by seeing that we are keeping his commandments and treating others well. The greatest evidence of the indwelling Spirit is the fruit our lives display.

Marks of a True Christian in 1 John

Walks in the light, 1:6
Has fellowship with other Christians, 1:7
Occasionally sins, 1:10
Continually keeps his commandments, 2:3, 3:24
Continually keeps his word, 2:5
Walks as Jesus walked, 2:6
Does not hate his brother, 2:9
Loves his brother, 2:10, 3:10
Does not love the world, 2:15
Does not love the things in the world, 2:15
Does the will of God, 2:17
Stays in the body of Christ, 2:19
Understands the truth of the gospel, 2:20-21
Believes that Jesus is the Christ, 2:22, 5:1
Abides in Christ, 2:27-28
Practices righteousness, 2:29, 3:10
Purifies himself, 3:3
Does not continually practice sin, 3:6, 5:18
Practices righteousness, 3:7
Loves the brethren, 3:14
Loves in word and truth, 3:18-19
Confesses Jesus has come in the flesh, 4:2
Has overcome false teachers, 4:4
Listens to the Apostles and Scripture, 4:6
Truly loves, 4:7-8
Overcomes the world, 5:4
Believes Jesus is the Son of God, 5:10

Exploration:

1. What do our actions say about our faith if we don't help needy brethren?
2. Can we really be confident of our salvation in Christ if we are faithful?
3. What actions must we take to be confident in our salvation?



I John

Finding the True Jesus

Lesson Ten: 1 John 4:1-6

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. 4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

It is not only Cain's example of a lack of love that makes John fear for his readers, it is also the forces of spiritual deception. In this passage, John provides a litmus test to expose them. We have been warned about believing everything we hear. The same caution applies to everything we see as well. Lies and deception were used to tempt Adam and Eve and Satan has not changed his tactics much since that day. Even in the New Testament we see the danger of those who deceive and pull people away from God, Acts 5:36-37. There is no shortage of false prophets today and that will continue until the Lord returns.

Test The Spirits, v. 1

Christian faith is not spiritual gullibility. Many people in today's world offer a philosophy or doctrine that is contrary to Scripture. Society and culture have adopted their own set of rules. When we are offered a philosophy, or a doctrine of others, we should always approach it from a biblical perspective. Is it consistent with the Word of God? Does the Bible say anything about this thought process or doctrine? As a metallurgist tests gold or copper to find its purity, so we must examine closely to see how teachings we hear compare to the Word of God.

The unseen spiritual influences that guide people's words and actions can be tested by observing their doctrine and conduct. There is a danger in false prophets coming into the world who claim to speak for God but are actually speaking by demonic influence, 2 Peter 2:1. This influence does not come as we expect from a figure that looks like Satan with red skin, horns, and a forked tail. Rather, it comes from people with smooth words, offering a better or easier way. In today's age of "tolerance" discriminating discernment will be seen by some as judgmental, Matthew 7:1. But Jesus taught, "Do not judge by appearances,

but judge with righteous judgment,” John 7:24. We must constantly be on guard to see if those things we have heard are true and faithful, Acts 17:11.

Jesus in the Flesh, v. 2-3

In the days of John, working in Asia Minor, a doctrine that would eventually grow into what was called Gnosticism was developing. While very complicated, this doctrine basically said that all flesh was evil but all things of the Spirit were good. In short, one could sin in the body all that he wanted, as long as he believed the right way. In order to hold this doctrine to be logical, something had to be done about the belief of Jesus living in the flesh. Many of these false teachers held that in bodily form, Jesus was no more than a man. The Spirit of God only came upon Jesus when he was baptized in Matthew 3 and left him when he was on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17. To combat this specific doctrine, John tells his readers that true believers believe that Jesus truly came to this world in the flesh, that he was both God and man. Anyone who denies the bodily birth, life, and resurrection of Jesus is not truly a follower of Christ.

There are many today who deny parts of the doctrine of Christ yet claim to still be followers of him. Some want him as a savior, but deny him as Lord. Some desire to wear his name, but neglect his teachings concerning how to be saved. Some deny the teachings of those whom he empowered to spread his message. Jesus said, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” Luke 6:46. In order for us to be faithful Christians we must give ourselves fully and completely to all of the teachings of Christ and his Apostles.

Overcoming The World, 4-6

It is often pointed out that this section of 1 John (1 John 4:4-6) has each verse begin with an emphatic personal pronoun (You in v. 4, They in v. 5, and We in v. 6). This is referring in verse four to the readers, in verse five to the false teachers, and in verse six to John and the teachers. In verse four John reminds the readers of their success in that they have overcome false teachers in the past because God’s power is greater than man’s power, Romans 1:16. Besides the book of Revelation (17 times) the book of 1 John contains the verb overcome more than any other book (6 times). In verse five we see the false teachers speak in worldly terms (the philosophy, authority, and current opinions of worldly people). People who are captivated by the world love to hear worldly teaching. But we see in verse five that godly people base their teaching on the Scriptures. The tests given to Christians to identify false teachers according to this passage are: (1) Confessing that Jesus is the Christ who has come in the flesh, v. 2, (2) do they have the indwelling of God in them, v. 4, and (3) the test of their lifestyle, v. 5.

Exploration:

1. Why is it important for us to “test” teachers of God’s Word? 1 John 4:1
2. What does the statement, “People want Jesus as a Savior but not as Lord” mean?
3. What are three tests to identify false teachers according to 1 John 4:1-6?



I John

Finding the True Jesus

Lesson Eleven: 1 John 4:7-21

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Knowing God Through Love, v. 7-11

Many years ago, a theologian named C.S. Lewis wrote a book entitled 'The Four Loves.' He compared the four types of love: Affection (Storge), Friendship (Philia), Romantic (Eros), and Charity (Agape). In this passage John is defining Christian love, here known as Agape or serving love. People in the world have varying degrees of love, but only Christians can comprehend the highest form of love. That's because we've experienced it from God. John tells us that everyone who loves is born of God. He does not mean that we don't have to obey the Gospel plan of Salvation or don't have to do good works. What he means is that love completes the picture of a life in fellowship with God. Love is a consequence of, not a precondition for, being born of God. An unbeliever can love to a degree, but not in the way the indwelling of Christ leads Christians to love God and one another. God is love and if we are to be God's children, we must resemble our father in the way we treat one another. The person who lacks love shows himself to be unchanged at the core of his being by the gospel message. When John says God is love, he does not mean that is God's only attribute (he is just, holy, perfect) or that love is God. "God is love" means that God continually gives of himself to others and seeks their benefit. There was eternal love between the members of the godhead even before the world was created (John 17:24), and God's love is the ultimate source of any love

that Christians are able to display. This love is not an abstract symbol or sentiment but was clearly displayed in the sending of God's only son into the world so that sinful humanity might receive eternal life. If we understand the love God has for us, then we will show that understanding in our love for one another.

Seeing God Through Love, v. 12-16

John tells us that no one has seen God at any time, meaning seeing God in a full and complete way, John 1:18, John 6:46. There were people who saw glimpses of God in the Old Testament but they did not fully comprehend God in the way John is writing about here. Examples of those who saw God are Jacob (Genesis 32:30), Moses (Genesis 33:11), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1). In these examples, each one of these men saw a glimpse of God but did not view him or comprehend him fully. John is speaking of seeing God's love in its full extent. When we love one another, that shows that God's love in us is completed fully. We know that we abide in God when we have the spirit of love for one another. In verse fourteen, John could speak with a specific authority in that he had personally seen Jesus, 1 John 1:1-4. He knew for certain that God had sent his only Son to be the savior of the world. When we recognize the authority of Jesus and confess him we abide in Jesus. This is not a "sinner's prayer" form of salvation, rather it is a humble obedience to the Son of God.

Trusting God Through Love, v. 17-19

When we understand the love that is given to us by God, then we return that love to the Lord and to our brethren. An understanding of God's love gives us confidence in this world. The fear John is referring to is not the respect of God that is sometimes called fear in Scripture, Proverbs 1:7. It is the fear of final judgment. It is the fear we have of ourselves when we feel that God couldn't love us or that we are not good enough in our works to earn God's love. This fear that the world offers is cast out by the completed love that has been shown to us. The confidence in this love is that it is not earned. We learn to love, not by our goodness or work (Romans 5:6-8), but by his love for us. The life, death, and resurrection is proof that we can be confident in God's love of us.

Obeying God Through Our Love, v. 20-21

John is emphatic that our love for God is seen clearly in how we treat fellow Christians. Regardless of their conduct, every person is made in the image of God. Even if they have no other redeeming qualities, every individual is made by God and has been loved by God enough to have Jesus die on the cross for him. If we say we love God but hate our brother, we are a liar and not really a Christian. Love for our brethren, our neighbor, and even our enemies is evidence of our understanding of the depth of God's love for us.

Exploration:

1. What does the statement "God is love" mean?
2. If people in the Old Testament are said to have seen God, why does John say no one has seen God? 1 John 4:12
3. Why should Christian love their brethren?



I John

Finding the True Jesus

Lesson Twelve: 1 John 5:1-12

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7 For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. 8 And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. 9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. 10 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So far John's letter has focused primarily on obedience and love. In this passage John begins to discuss the additional aspect of faith. Of John's ten references to believing in this letter, seven are found in chapter five.

Obedience by Faith, v. 1-5

Verse five uses the word "that" to show it is important what you believe. You're not saved just by believing something, rather, you must have correct belief in order to be saved. John insists that Christians must believe in the true identity of Jesus (coming from God) and that anyone who loves God must also so Jesus. The Bible teaches that belief is more than just mental acknowledgement, it includes the action that this knowledge leads to in life, James 2:20-26, 1 John 1:7. It is necessary for us to love the children of God and to keep the Lord's commandments, Matthew 22:37-39. 1 John 5:1 tells us that we must have faith in God and 5:2 tells us that we must obey and love our brethren as well. Obeying God's commandments in Scripture is the way to love the children of God because God's commandments show believers the true way to do good for others (Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14). Love and law are complimentary, they are not at odds with one another. God's love in his people gives them the desire to love and please him. So his children are eager to keep his commandments. When we truly understand God's commandments, we will find joy and peace in

following the law. Proper understanding helps us to see obedience as an opportunity and not as oppression, Matthew 11:28-30. According to verse four, those who are born of God overcome the world. They are not overwhelmed by unbeliever's hostility but are instead continuously faithful. The faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob kept them through many tribulations, and God will keep us safe as well. Our faith in God helps us to overcome the world. What we see here is the conquering power of faith. It is faith that enables us to resist temptations, avoid entanglements of the world, and resist false teachers who try to lead us astray.

The Certainty of God's Witness, v. 6-12

This passage is considered by some to be among the most difficult of the New Testament to understand. Some see this reference to water and blood as referring to what came from the side of the our Savior when he was crucified, John 19:34. What John is probably looking to is the beginning of the ministry of Jesus (his baptism in Matthew 3:15) and the end of his earthly ministry (his crucifixion in John 19:34). Jesus is declared to be the Son of God by the actions of his entire ministry here on this earth. In addition to these proofs, the Spirit also testifies to the identity and work of Jesus. Under the Old Law, it was required to have two or three witnesses to establish something as legally true. John looks at these three things in the life of Jesus to show the authority of the teachings and work of Jesus. Verse nine discounts the witnesses of men who deny Jesus because the witness of God of the water, blood, and Spirit are greater than them. When people deny Jesus today, they act as if God is a liar and has misled them—this is a sure path to judgment. The conclusion of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is this: that God has given us eternal life through his son. Those who are in Christ (Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:27) have life, those who are not in Christ do not have eternal blessings. The Christ denier may have fame, money and good circumstances, but without Jesus he is lost.

Exploration:

1. What is the relationship of belief and obedience for the Christian?
2. What are the three witnesses that tell us about Jesus' authority?
3. What is the most important decision a person will ever make?

Additional note: In the King James Version of 1611 the order of 1 John 5:7 is different as well as an addition of "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." This statement is not included in the American Standard, English Standard, New International, and most other newer translations. The source of this addition is a sermon from Pirscillian (Spanish cleric in 385 AD) and was included in the materials that would be later used for the King James Version by the scholar Erasmus 1516 AD. This statement that the Father, Word, and Holy Spirit are one is true (Matthew 3:16-17, John 14:26, and 1 Peter 1:2), but it is not found in the original text of 1 John 5:7.



I John

Finding the True Jesus

Lesson Thirteen: 1 John 5:13-21

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. 14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death. 18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

For the conclusion of this letter, John summarizes and reenforces much of what he has already covered. Wanting to confirm the reader's confidence in their salvation, John uses the word "know" seven times in these verses. In spite of false teachers and persecution, he wants them to be settled in their faith.

Sustained Faith, v. 13

Belief can be shaky, and John writes to believers who have seen members of the church fall away (2:19). John tells them "that you may know" to assure them that it is possible for Christians to be confident in their salvation (2:13, 3:14). This confidence should not lead to lethargy, but should instead inspire a continued belief and labor for the Lord.

Confidence and Compassion in Prayer, v. 14-15

Prayer is central to a living faith for the Christian. The question here is how do we know the will of God concerning the situations we face in life? To ask God according to his will does not mean that, before Christians can pray effectively, they need somehow to discover God's secret plans for the future (sometimes called 'hidden will' Deuteronomy 29:29). Rather it means they should ask according to what the Bible teaches about God's will of this people (sometimes called 'revealed will'). If Christians are praying in accordance to what pleases God as found in the teaching of Scripture, then they are praying according to his will (Matthew 6:10, Ephesians 5:17). To know that he hears us in whatever we ask is enough for us, because communion with God is the goal of prayer. Human experience shows us that Christians do not always receive all the things they ask from God, even things

seemingly in agreement with God's revealed will. Verse fifteen must be understood in light of other passages that remind us that we need to pray in faith (Matthew 21:22, James 1:6), with patience (Luke 18:1-8), in obedience (Psalm 66:18, 1 Peter 3:12), and in submission to God's greater wisdom (Luke 22:42, Romans 8:28).

Sin Leading To Death, v. 16-17

Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) and causes us to be spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). But John here tells us of sin that does not lead to death. Some people incorrectly take from this passage the idea there are some sins that lead to spiritual death (mortal sin) and some sins that do not lead to spiritual death (venial sin). A better interpretation is the sin not leading to death is sin for which forgiveness is possible because (1) forgiveness is sought and (2) God is willing to grant it. The sin that leads to death is probably sin that is (1) un-repented from and (2) of the kind or nature that John has warned about throughout the letter: absolute rejection of the true doctrine of Christ, chronic disobedience to God's commandments, or persistent lack of love for fellow believers. John tells us that when we see someone in sin we are not to pray for that person's salvation, instead it would be better to pray for that person's repentance that leads to their salvation. All wrongdoing is a matter of grave concern given God's complete perfection and zealous love. However, not all sin leads to death, so Christians should be proactive in praying for their own and others' actions leading to forgiveness.

Knowing the True—Rejecting the False, v. 18-20

This letter ends on a note of high confidence and great spiritual insight. Those who are born of God do not keep sinning (1 John 3:6-7). And when we remain faithful, the wicked one cannot touch us because we remain in the grace and blood of Christ. In verse twenty John repeats that Jesus has been born of flesh and that the Spirit gives an understanding (today through the Scriptures) that Jesus is true and we are in him by our faithful obedience. This gospel comes from the true God who gives eternal life. Most letters in the New Testament contain final warnings in their closing statements. John tells his readers to keep themselves from idols, meaning to keep themselves from trusting, obeying, and following anyone or anything other than God himself, and his Son, Jesus.

Exploration:

1. Why do you think John emphasizes the word "know" so much in this section of Scripture?
2. What is the sin that leads to death?
3. What are some idols that people deal with today?

Theme Verse of 1 John

"And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment."
1 John 3:23

Key Thoughts In 1 John

1. **The children of God believe in Jesus Christ.**
2. **The children of God keep his commandments.**
3. **The children of God love one another.**
4. **The children of God are certain(know) of their relationship with God.**