

1 John Devotionals

Today in the Word
1 John Commentaries
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1 JOHN 1

1 John 1:1-4

We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Dialog in the Dark is not a typical exhibition. All the tour guides are visually impaired. All the visitors are in the dark—literally. Instead of relying on sight, visitors must use other senses as they navigate darkened galleries that replicate familiar environments like a grocery store. Wind, temperature, sounds, smells, and texture have increased importance for determining one's environment when sight can no longer be utilized.

Similarly, John awakens our senses and nudges our curiosity in the opening lines of his letter. He emphasizes his eyewitness testimony: he has heard, seen, and even touched the Word of Life “from the beginning” of Jesus’ earthly ministry (v. 1). We reflect on another “beginning” when God spoke and it was; His word brought forth life; it was the word of life (Gen. 1:1ff). It is shocking to hear that this eternal Word of Life has appeared (v. 2); “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

Notice John mentions “seen,” “looked at,” and “appeared” five times in the first two verses. He is astonished that the Life is no longer simply a word to be heard, but now someone to be seen. Jesus Himself is the “Word of life” about which John writes. In his Gospel, John refers to Jesus as “the Word” (cf. John 1:1-2, 14), and Jesus Himself claims to be “the life” (John 14:6).

John’s purpose for writing is to invite his readers into fellowship with the Word of life, with the Father and the Son whom He sent (v. 3). Like Paul, John connects his readers’ well-being with his personal joy (v. 4; cf. Phil. 2:2). Both John and Paul know that relationships are three-way: you, the other, and God, and that joy cannot be complete if those “under your care” (cf. I Peter 5:2) are stagnant in fellowship with Christ. The “fellowship” mentioned in verse 3 is the intimate relationship among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which is shared by believers in Jesus.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Did you notice that John’s own experience hearing, seeing, and touching Life in Jesus compels this letter? Consider how many times John uses words like “proclaim” and “testify.” In other words, John’s mission is a natural and vibrant outflow of his personal encounter with Jesus. He is not merely proclaiming a message, but a person. Today, reflect on your personal relationship with Jesus and the joy it brings you to invite others into intimate fellowship with the Word of Life, Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:1-3

That which was from the beginning ... which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim. - 1 John 1:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

René Descartes was a 17th century French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician. Preoccupied with the problem of how philosophical knowledge could be as certain as mathematical knowledge, he began by doubting everything, especially his senses. What, then, did he truly know?

He decided that the surest fact was his own conscious existence, which he expressed in the famous statement, “I think, therefore I am.” From this, he also argued for the existence of God and other truths.

Those living in biblical times, however, had a different way of thinking about the certainty of knowledge. To them, other senses might possibly deceive a person, but the sense of touch could give sure and definite knowledge. In other words, you could be certain about things you yourself had handled. That’s the background for John’s assertions in today’s verses.

John introduced his epistle by summarizing what he and the other apostles were all about: Christ. “That which was from the beginning” refers to His eternity, and echoes the start of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word” (1:1).

The next items on John’s list are apostolic credentials, or evidence for the truthfulness of their testimony about Jesus. The three are all related to senses, and are listed in order of increasing importance. First, hearing--the apostles had heard Jesus teach. Second, sight--they were eyewitnesses to and participants in His life. Third, touch--they had hands-on experience with the physical reality of

His life.

Though hearing and seeing are repeated in verses 2-3, touch was the most important sense because it provided the most certain knowledge. Jesus invited the disciples to touch Him (Luke 24:39)--He was not afraid of concrete examination--and He ate food as the proof of His Resurrection (see April 15).

Christ, the "Word of life," was the message preached by the apostles. They had both the privilege and responsibility to proclaim His name. To believe their message is to fellowship with them and with God. We are part of that continuing community, and we still believe in historicity of the humanity of Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we bring this month's study to a close, we hope that you will not stop here, but go on to read and explore much more about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:1-4

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

It's not uncommon for people nearing death to write letters to their loved ones recounting significant life events, sharing hopes and dreams for the letter's recipient, perhaps even urging a specific course of action.

Toward the end of his life, the apostle John wrote a series of letters (1, 2, and 3 John) that similarly encouraged believers to remain faithful. Tradition maintains that the author of the Gospel of John and the epistles bearing his name are the same person, and there's no compelling reason to doubt this. In fact, there are many parallels between the gospel and the epistles of John. As you read through today's passage, you may have thought of John 1:1-18. Yet the purposes of the two writings are different. The Gospel of John was written so that nonbelievers might believe (John 20:31), whereas the first epistle of John was written to assure believers of their salvation (1 John 5:13). In fact, 1 John is like a refresher course in the basics of Christianity.

That's a pretty good description of our study this month—a "back to the basics" course through 1, 2, and 3 John, and the letter of Jude.

We begin with 1 John, which was likely written between 85 and 95 a.d. to believers in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Some type of false teaching was creeping into this area, and John was fearful that these believers might be led astray. So 1 John begins by reminding us that our faith is rooted in the historical, physical person of Jesus. He did not just appear to be human, as some of these false teachers claimed. He was in fact fully human and fully God. That is the main point of the message proclaimed (v. 3): the gospel is about the real-life person of Jesus Christ, the very life and person whom John witnessed personally (v. 1).

APPLY THE WORD

As we noted above, 1 John encourages believers to know that they have eternal life. This month's study will provide a good opportunity to reflect on eternal life. You can begin by noting your initial reflections on the everlasting life that you have received by faith in Jesus Christ. Then look at each of the following verses: 1 John 5:11-12; John 10:10, 17:3; Psalm 121:8. How does each of these verses add to your understanding of eternal life? Consider memorizing one or more of these verses throughout this month.

1 John 1:5-7

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. - John 1:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares seemingly unrelated subjects, drawing attention to the likeness or analogy between them. For example, Shakespeare said: "All the world's a stage." Scripture also employs metaphor. For instance, God is our husband (Hosea 2:16), and Jesus declared that He is the "bread of life" (John 6:35).

John utilizes metaphor in today's text: "God is light." John restates the theme from his Gospel, recounting that this metaphor comes from Jesus. This is not an assertion that God is electromagnetic radiation visible to the human eye; to say "God is light" is not to speak literally of God's physical makeup, but rather to describe God symbolically. The metaphor of light and darkness is used throughout the Bible in various ways (cf. Ps. 27:1; 36:9; John 1:4-5; 8:12; 12:46). In our passage today, it communicates that God is completely pure and holy, without sin or defect.

Three sentences beginning with "if we claim" follow verse 5 (vv. 6, 8, 10). The first clarifies how we have the fellowship with God

mentioned in yesterday's passage. We cannot have fellowship with God and continue walking in darkness, the realm in which sinful behavior and attitudes prevail, the realm contrary to His holiness (v. 6). Verse 7 explodes in contrast to verse 6. John teaches that walking in the light not only confirms our fellowship with God but also our fellowship with one another. Implicitly, John pleads that if we claim to have fellowship with God, we will be reconciled to one another.

"How can unholy, sinful people walk in the light of God's presence?" John anticipates this question and points to Jesus' saving and transforming work on the cross (v. 7). Through the blood of Jesus we are purified and set free from the realm of darkness and welcomed into fellowship with God to walk in His glorious light.

APPLY THE WORD

In today's passage, claims to know God are examined against one's lifestyle. The problem of sin is more fundamental than a violation of any particular rule. Sin affects our entire nature and only through Jesus do we find spiritual health and life. Through Christ His Spirit lives in us. Therefore, let us rejoice and turn to the Spirit when we find ourselves tempted to walk in darkness. Through the Spirit's power we are transformed to be like Christ and to walk in His light.

1 John 1:5-7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is the story of a stranded sailor who lives for more than two decades on an island alone. One day he rescues from execution (by neighboring cannibals) a young native whom he calls "Friday." Friday proves to be a good student, helper and companion. Through Crusoe's witness, he even comes to faith in Christ.

After so many years without fellowship, Robinson Crusoe at last had a Christian brother! Although it may sometimes feel as though we are as stranded as Crusoe, God intends fellowship to be an important part of the body of Christ.

Today's "one another" text is similar to the passage we will study tomorrow from 1 Corinthians 12. That is, the phrase "have fellowship with one another" is not a command, but a simple declarative. That means our fellowship as believers is a product of something else--our fellowship with God (vv. 6-7).

The progression of thought in 1 John 1 is this. Since God is pure light, meaning He is utterly apart from all sin and darkness, we must live in the light if we are to know Him. Obviously, we are not without sin, but God has made provision for our sin in the blood of His Son (vv. 7, 9).

Therefore, even though we are sinful we can enjoy intimate fellowship with God by believing His Word, taking His Son as our Savior, and living in obedience to Him. When we do this, we will find ourselves in company with others who have also found forgiveness and new life in Christ.

John's point is that our fellowship as Christians is founded on the truth of the gospel. A person cannot claim to know God and yet knowingly live in sin. His life makes his witness a lie (v. 6). John wanted true believers to have fellowship, but only in the truth (v. 3).

APPLY THE WORD

What does today's study have to do with doughnuts and coffee before Sunday School or a potluck supper in the church dining hall? Not much, really, although there is nothing wrong with the get-togethers we often label "fellowship." But John is talking about something much deeper--the unique union between God and His children and among His children.

1 John 1:5-2:6

God ... has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. - 1 Corinthians 1:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

David Shannon began his career at the age of 5, writing and illustrating a book about a naughty boy with the same two-word phrase on each page: "No, David!" He's since remade the book, No, David!, which won the Caldecott Honor Award (given to children's picture books) in 1999. "I thought it would be fun to do a remake celebrating those familiar variations of the universal 'no' that we all hear while growing up."

Some Christians think that the Bible is a sophisticated version of No, David! But God cares about the list of "dos" and "don'ts," not for His heavenly bookkeeping but because of His love for us. His call to holiness is a call to friendship. Yesterday, we saw it begin before Adam and Eve. Since then, it has continued without change. In Leviticus 11:45, God tells Moses that He wants to be Israel's God. "Therefore, be holy, because I am holy."

John makes it plain and simple why every Christian must be holy: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1:5). Light stands for all righteousness, purity, and truth. Darkness is sin, deception and impurity. If Christians want to know God and walk with God, they must not deliberately choose sin over obedience. This is why the prayer of every Christian should come from Psalm 19:12-13: “Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.”

Lest we become paralyzed by fear of falling short of this call, today’s passage makes clear that “walking in the light” does not equal perfection. Christians should strive to learn the commands of God and obey them (2:1), yet when they fail, they should turn to confession, not cover-up. We can confess to God our failures, asking for His forgiveness. We can know He grants His forgiveness through Christ (vv. 7, 8). We should also confess to one another where we have failed. The pretense of “having it all together” isn’t fooling God or others. We only deceive ourselves when we pretend we’re self-reliant (1:7).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This emphasis of consistent obedience in today’s passage doesn’t neglect the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The themes that we’ve already explored in our study of sanctification emerge again here. Because we sin, we need the grace of God through Christ. No fellowship with God is possible apart from Christ (2:1-2). But holiness is an unmistakable by-product of that grace. 1 John 2:6 is the marching order of every Christian.

1 John 1:9 Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

John Steinbeck once observed that failure is often a catalyst for spiritual growth. “If everything is coming your way,” he wrote, “you are probably in the wrong lane. Adversity and defeat are more conducive to spiritual growth than prosperity and victory.” But what if the defeat we experience involves more than a setback in our circumstances? What if we have experienced defeat because of our own sin?

As Israel prepared to take possession of the land God had promised them, it was vital that they keep in mind their defeats as well as their victories. The Lord commanded, “Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord” (Deut. 9:7). A healthy awareness of their past failures was intended to be a remedy against spiritual presumption. More importantly, it would bring to mind how God had been faithful to discipline and forgive them.

The Bible is filled with stories of people whose mistakes and failures were redeemed by God. Some—like Jacob the deceiver, Judah the father of an illegitimate child, David the adulterer, and Rahab the prostitute—even appear in the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:2–5). Peter denied Jesus three times, and Thomas questioned whether Jesus had truly risen from the dead. Paul persecuted the church. All of these were used by God despite their past failings.

APPLY THE WORD

Why not take Paul’s advice and do some “spiritual calculating?” Think of three or four instances where you acted contrary to God’s commands. What were some of the consequences you suffered as a result? How did your sin affect those around you? Think also about the lessons God taught you as a result of these experiences. Conclude by reading 1 John 1:9. If you have never claimed God’s promise of forgiveness through Christ, do so today. Thank Him for His promise to cleanse you from “all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9 Psalm 32

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

When we imagine “confession,” many think of a movie scene where a man mutters to a priest behind a screen. In other words, personal confession may be a foreign concept. Confession was not unfamiliar to the psalmists. It was a regular practice of both individuals and the community in ancient Israel and early Christianity. Psalm 32 was included among seven “Penitential Psalms” or songs of confession (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143).

“Blessed is the one” who lives life according to God’s design and is forgiven before the Lord (vv. 1-2). Psalm 32 does not presuppose a sinless person, but rather one whose sins are forgiven. This psalm employs three key words: sin, transgression, and iniquity (vv. 1-2, 5). The psalmist does not intend for each word to convey a precise distinction from the two other words, but instead for the group of words to be parallel in meaning, reflecting different aspects of the same idea. Sin is an offense, a turning from God’s way. Transgression is willful defiance against God by crossing the boundaries He sets for us. Iniquity is a distortion or gross injustice, an

absence of respect for God's will. The psalmist declares that blessed is the one who experiences God's forgiveness of sin in all its manifestations.

Verses 3 through 5 are the psalmist's personal testimony of confession. Prior to confession, his spiritual life was weakened. He groaned, bearing the guilt. Though he had an awareness of his need to repent, he was stubborn, and God's hand was heavy upon him. "Then" marks the contrast of life before confession and after. The psalmist acknowledged his sin to the Lord, and immediately God "forgave the guilt" of his sin (v. 5).

After reflecting on his deliverance, the psalmist calls others to the same course of action (v. 6). Do not be stubborn and resist confession, he pleads (v. 9). Psalm 32 ends with the chasm between the wicked and the righteous (vv. 10-11). The Lord's unfailing love surrounds those who trust in God's deliverance and choose to walk on His path.

APPLY THE WORD

Our sin creates barriers between us and God and between us and others. Genuine confession accepts God's righteous judgment and His power to forgive and restore. It takes honesty, vulnerability, and courage to confront our sin and bring it to God, but we approach God confidently because of His promise of forgiveness and restoration in Jesus (Rom. 8:1-4). Make it a practice to confess your sin before God and others, perhaps with a spouse, friend, or pastor.

1 John 1

Afraid of the Light - We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark, the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.
- Plato

Christian Medical Society Journal, Fall 1975, V. VI #4, P. 30

1 John 1:1-10 Rationalizing Sin

The well-loved author Corrie Ten Boom, in her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*, made a keen observation about the futility of rationalizing our sins. She said, "The blood of Jesus never cleansed an excuse." Although we are fully justified as Christians, we must honestly acknowledge wrongdoing for what it is—sin against a holy God. If we hide behind excuses, we will neither sense His forgiveness nor gain the victory over evil habits.

A woman said to her pastor, "I'm deeply troubled about a problem I know is hurting my testimony: I exaggerate. I always seem to enlarge a story until it's all distorted. People know they can't trust me. Can you help me?"

The minister said, "Let's talk to the Lord about it." She began to pray, "O God, Thou knowest I have a tendency to exaggerate." At this point the preacher interrupted, "Call it lying, ma'am, and you may get over it!" The woman began to weep, because she knew he was right. She had been trying to make "lying" acceptable, and her excuse-making had made praying about it nearly impossible.

All of us are prone to cover up our sins by giving them polite names. Bad temper is said to be "nerves" or "righteous indignation," untruthfulness is labeled "harmless exaggeration," and dishonesty is dignified by calling it "good business." To grow in grace, we must put aside all rationalizing and get to the heart of the problem. The blood of Jesus does not apply to excuses, but it has the power to cleanse any sin. - H.G.B.

Our Daily Bread, November 7

1 John 1:7 Making Decisions in the Dark

Making decisions in the dark can lead to some regrettable consequences. Let me illustrate. Back in the days before electricity, a tightfisted old farmer was taking his hired man to task for carrying a lighted lantern when he went to call on his best girl. "Why," he exclaimed, "when I went a-courtin' I never carried one of them things. I always went in the dark." "Yes," the hired man said wryly, "and look what you got!" - D.J.D.

Our Daily Bread, May 5

1 John 1:7 The Robber

When evangelist John Wesley (1703–1791) was returning home from a service one night, he was robbed. The thief, however, found his victim to have only a little money and some Christian literature.

As the bandit was leaving, Wesley called out, "Stop! I have something more to give you." The surprised robber paused. "My friend," said Wesley, "you may live to regret this sort of life. If you ever do, here's something to remember: 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin!'" The thief hurried away, and Wesley prayed that his words might bear fruit.

Years later, Wesley was greeting people after a Sunday service when he was approached by a stranger. What a surprise to learn that this visitor, now a believer in Christ as a successful businessman, was the one who had robbed him years before! "I owe it all to you," said the transformed man. "Oh no, my friend," Wesley exclaimed, "not to me, but to the precious blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin!"

Our Daily Bread, October 1, 1994

1 John 1:7 Havergal, Hymn Writer

The hymns of Frances Ridley Havergal have greatly blessed the church. She wrote such songs as "Who is on the Lord's Side?" "Like a River Glorious," "I Gave My Life for Thee," and "Take My Life and Let It Be." She was not always a happy Christian, however. As F. J. Huegel pointed out in his book *Forever Triumphant*, she was plagued by depression. Perhaps overly sensitive to faults in her life, she was a defeated believer who lacked the joy that should characterize every forgiven child of God. Huegel says, "She walked with bowed head. Romans 7 seemed to be her lot."

One day she had a life-transforming experience, however. Huegel says that the Lord led her into the joy and blessing described in Romans 8. A great crisis marked her entrance into "the promised land of a life of fullness and victory." She was reading her New Testament in the Greek, as she often did. When she came to 1 John 1:7, she discovered from the tense of the verb that the blood of Christ keeps on cleansing the believer who walks in the light.

Says Huegel, "The result for Frances Havergal was a mighty revolution. A new day dawned. She would no longer be sad because of her faults and blemishes. She would rejoice because of the infinite efficacy of the Savior's atoning death."

Source unknown

1 John 1:9 Tell It to the Church

I would let no man take confession away from me, and I would not give it up for all the treasures of the world, since I know what comfort and strength it has given me.

Martin Luther, Eighth sermon of the series preached at Wittenberg after returning from Wartburg, 1522; in John T. McNeill, *A History Of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 168

Honest Prisoner

Prussian King Frederick the Great was once touring a Berlin prison. The prisoners fell on their knees before him to proclaim their innocence—except for one man, who remained silent. Frederick called to him, "Why are you here?" "Armed robbery, Your Majesty," was the reply. "And are you guilty?" "Yes indeed, Your Majesty, I deserve my punishment."

Frederick then summoned the jailer and ordered him, "Release this guilty wretch at once. I will not have him kept in this prison where he will corrupt all the fine innocent people who occupy it."

Today in the Word, December 4, 1992

1 John 1 – A Clear Conscience

January 8, 2011 — by Dennis Fisher

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. —Acts 24:16

After Ffyona Campbell became famous as the first woman to walk around the world, her joy was short-lived. Despite the adulation she received, something troubled her. Guilt overtook her and pushed her to the brink of a nervous breakdown.

What was bothering her? "I shouldn't be remembered as the first woman to walk around the world," she finally admitted. "I cheated." During her worldwide trek, she broke the guidelines of the Guinness Book of World Records by riding in a truck part of the way. To clear her conscience, she called her sponsor and confessed her deception.

God has given each of us a conscience that brings guilt when we do wrong. In Romans, Paul describes our conscience as "accusing or else excusing [us]" (2:15). For the obedient follower of Christ, care of the conscience is an important way of maintaining a moral compass despite moral imperfection. Confessing sin, turning from it, and making restitution should be a way of life (1 John 1:9; Lev. 6:2-5).

Paul modeled a well-maintained conscience, saying, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts 24:16 NIV). Through confession and repentance, he kept short accounts with God. Is sin bothering you? Follow Paul's example. Strive for

a clear conscience.

There is a treasure you can own

That's greater than a crown or throne:

This treasure is a conscience clear

That brings the sweetest peace and cheer. —Isenhour

If God's Word guides your conscience, let your conscience be your guide.

1 John 1 An Insult To God

He who does not believe God has made Him a liar. --1 John 5:10

A woman who was extremely upset phoned me several years ago. She said she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Apparently she had strayed far from the Lord, but now had returned to Him and truly wanted to do His will. The memories of her days of spiritual wandering, however, kept haunting her. She somehow couldn't accept the fact that God had forgiven her sins, and she had no peace or joy. But worse than that, by her attitude she was saying to God, "I don't believe You. You don't mean what You say!"

I said to her, "Suppose that one of your dearest friends was careless and broke a piece of your best china. Feeling very sorry, she sincerely apologized for not being more careful. You assured her that you would not hold it against her. Now, what would you think if every time you saw that person, she recalled how foolish she had been and again asked for forgiveness? After a while you would probably become exasperated and say, 'Listen, put the matter out of your mind. I have sincerely forgiven you, and I don't want you to mention it again!'"

God is also true to His Word, for He promises to cleanse us when we acknowledge our failures. So confess your sins to the Lord. Then believe that you're forgiven. --RWD

In the deep, silent depths, far away from the shore

Where they never may rise to trouble me more--

God has buried my sins where no mortal may see;

He has cast all of them in the depths of the sea. --Anon.

Having given your sins to God,

don't try to take them back. Our Daily Bread},

1 John 1 – Genuine Salvation - Adrian Rogers

A New Testament Christian is not supposed to be a question mark, going around with his head all hung over, he's supposed to be an exclamation point. He's supposed to say, "I know that I'm saved." I was in a hospital one time, led a woman to Jesus Christ who we believed was on her deathbed, and I prayed with her and she asked Christ into her heart, and asked Christ to save her. And, then I turned to one of her children, a grown man was in that room. I said, "Isn't that wonderful that your mother has been saved?" He said, "Nobody can know she's saved. Nobody can know he's saved in this life." He was a member of a particular church, we have a lot of them around here but I'm not going to call the name, and he said, "Nobody can know that they're saved." He said, "The best you can do is you can just simply hope that you're saved." I said, "Friend, have you ever heard 1 John 5:13: 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.' Friend, if you can have it and not know it, you can lose it and not miss it." Amen. But, I want to tell you something friend, if you have it, you ought to know it, and if you do have it you can never lose it.

1 John 1:1 – I Saw His Person

A Sunday school teacher said that he once saw a reproduction the Constitution of the United States which had been skillfully engraved on a copper plate. At first glance it seemed to be nothing more than a piece of noble writing. When he looked at it from the proper perspective, however, he could discern the portrait of America's renowned President George Washington artistically etched in minute detail. Simpson adds, "His face was revealed in the shadowing of the letters and I saw his person, not just a flow of words or lofty principles. Then I thought: that's the way we should look at the Bible if we are to understand its deeper meaning. We must see in it a 'Face of love shining through,' not merely ideas, not just doctrines, but Jesus himself—sufficient for all our needs."

The scriptures become exciting and thrilling to read when you have the right spiritual perspective and therefore can observe the One whose spirit constantly energizes its pages with life and beauty! Can you recognize Jesus when you study the Bible?

6000 Plus Illustrations for Communicating Biblical Truths

1 John 1:1 Not a Mirage!

In 1849 a wagon train was traveling through Death Valley to follow the gold rush into California. As this particular wagon train trudged through Death Valley, the hottest place in California, they looked ahead and saw a sheet of water they all believed was Owen's Lake. But it was just a mirage created by the intense heat, and the harder they pressed on to make it to the water, the more frustrated they became. The foundation for many people's spiritual journey is no more real than that mirage. People base their entire spiritual lives on illusions whether it's the psychic friends network or astrology, whether it's some strange teacher like David Koresh or some new claim to have special insight into the future. In contrast to that, God invites us to base our spiritual journey on the Incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:1-2 God's Word – Jim Wilson

The motion picture, *City of Ember*, provides an interesting look at the end of the world. With civilization on the brink of destruction, scientists construct an underground city named Ember to ensure the survival of the human race. To make the citizens of the city safer, they decide the residents must not be told about the outside world. The secret of the builders is placed inside a box designed to remain locked for 200 years. The box is entrusted to Ember's mayor with instructions to pass it on to the next person. The hope was that when it was safe to return to the surface, the people of Ember would have the instructions they needed.

With years remaining before the secret was to be revealed, the connection to the builder's plans was lost. The instructions were stuffed in a closet and forgotten. When the builder's instructions disappeared, the truth about Ember was also lost. The people of the city grew complacent. As a result many people stopped caring. They saw their city wearing out, but took it in stride. Political corruption, and a "who cares" attitude became the rule. Though people tried to find an escape, most people agreed with the vegetable vendor who said why worry about the outside world, there was plenty to do in Ember.

Two young residents of Ember become the impetus for changing the city's troubled future. Lina May Fleet discovers the box with the Builder's Instructions, and shares the information with her, Doon Harrow. Though the city officials try to arrest them, Lina and Doon become the only hope for a dying city.

OPTION 1: Play scene from *City of Ember*, Scene 39:41 to 41:57, and make application.

OPTION 2: Describe scene and make application.

Lina is sitting down to dinner with her mother and sister. Lina's mother asks if she knows her part for the upcoming holiday called the Great Day of Singing. Enthusiastically, Lina's mother says, "Oh, it lifts all of our hearts. How lucky we are."

Unmoved by her mother's platitudes, Lina responds, "I don't feel very lucky lately."

Her mother tries to reassure her, adding, "There's nothing to worry about." Lina responds, "The blackouts worry everybody." Her mother responds with another platitude. "Help is coming."

Lina looks up and asks, "Help?" Her mother nods, "Who built our city dear?" Unsure of what to answer Lina stammers, "The Builders?"

"That's right," her mother assures her. "And the builders will come again and show us the way." As if timed with those words, the lights flash and a strange metallic groan is heard in the distance. Lina nods, but says nothing. After dinner, she goes to her room, and gets the box containing the words of the builders. Remembering her grandmother who helped find the chest, Lina whispers. "Whatever it is Granny. I'll figure it out. I promise." She opens the box and begins to piece together the fragments of paper containing the instructions. Looking over the paper, Lina decides to show it to her friend Doon, because he is also concerned about Ember and works in the city's piping. Doon says, "It says pipeworks." Lina agrees, "That's why I brought it to you." Doon looks at the paper and says, "This printing, you know what it reminds me of..." His voice trails off, then grabbing his jacket he says, "Come on, I want to show you something."

Doon takes Lina to the Mayor's office. Though they are not allowed, Doon is starting to see a connection. While he picks the lock, Lina asks, "What are we doing here?" Doon says, "The builders left us this book. I read about it in history." He takes out the sacred book and urges Lina, "Come on, open it up." She hesitates, "No one but the mayor is supposed to." Doon flips the book around and opens it, revealing a typeset page. Doon and Lina bend over for a good look as Lina takes a scrap of paper from her pocket, then exclaims, "The builders wrote these instructions! It's exactly the same." The sound of keys in the lock startles them and they quickly

leave before they are discovered.

Once out of danger, Lina says, "Come on there's something I have to show you." She shows Doon the papers from the box. "What do you think?" she asks. "I think it's instructions." Doon starts reading while Lina continues. "What I don't understand is why would they have it in a circle? I mean I know it..." Doon interrupts her with his own observation. "Add a 't.'" Lina looks at him and asks, "What?" Doon points at the last line of the instructions. Though faded, you can see the letters, "Exi." "E X I T, Exit," he says. Looking at Lina, Doon asks the question no one has asked in years.

"What if there's an exit from Ember?" Though many years later, these young people have discovered the builder's purpose for their lives and everyone living in Ember.

--City of Ember, 2008 Walden Media LLC, Chapter 12, Help will come, 39:47 to 41:58. Illustration by Jim L. Wilson and Jim Sandell

APPLICATION: There is an interesting parallel to the City of Ember and our world. God's plan and purpose for our lives is often overlooked and forgotten. We see our world falling apart at every turn. Apathy, corruption, and distrust are everywhere. God's Word offers the only hope for the people in this world. Living by God's plan and discovering His purpose for our lives is the only way to overcome and change the world.

The first step is choosing to accept the Lord Jesus, the Word of the Master made flesh.

1 John 1:1-4 We Touched Him –David Roper – Our Daily Bread

That which ... our hands have handled, ... we declare to you. —1 John 1:1,3

Mythology is filled with legends of ancient gods who descended from heaven and took human form, but no one ever heard or saw them, and no one ever touched them. These were dreams born of human desire for God and the hope that someday He would draw near. The incarnation of Jesus—God who came in the flesh—is how those dreams came true.

Author Dorothy Sayers put it this way: "[God] can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When He was a man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile."

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the irrefutable proof that God will do anything to draw near to us.

Augustine said, "[God] gave Himself for a time to be handled by the hands of men." And we have the written record of John, a man who actually did touch Him. We can trust his account—and we can trust that God wants to be near to you and me.

Absolutely tender! Absolutely true!

Understanding all things; understanding you;

Infinitely loving, good and kind and near—

That is Christ our Savior. What have we to fear? —Anon.

Love was when God became a man. —Walvoord

1 John 1:1-4 New Beginnings

Nourish beginnings, let us nourish beginnings. Not all things are blest, but the seeds of all things are blest. The blessing is in the seed. —Rukeyser, Muriel. *Elegy of Joy*, quoted in *Christianity Today* magazine, "Reflections," March 6, 2000, Vol. 44, No. 3, p. 84.

1 John 1:1-3 The Gospel Is to be Revealed

Albert Einstein's scientific theories and investigations were an impenetrable mystery to his second wife, Elsa. "Couldn't you tell me a little about your work?" she complained one day. "People talk a lot about it, and I appear so stupid when I say I know nothing."

Einstein thought for a minute or two, frowning deeply as he searched for an answer to his wife's plea. Suddenly, his face brightened. "If people ask," he said, "tell them you know all about it, but can't tell them, as it is a great secret."

Einstein's clever idea may be a good one for deflecting questions about complicated scientific theories, but it's a poor model for evangelism! The gospel is not a "great secret" revealed only to the initiated. We're free to shout it from the rooftops!

1 John 1:1-4 Dialog in the Dark

Dialog in the Dark is not a typical exhibition. All the tour guides are visually impaired. All the visitors are in the dark—literally. Instead of relying on sight, visitors must use other senses as they navigate darkened galleries that replicate familiar environments like a grocery store. Wind, temperature, sounds, smells, and texture have increased importance for determining one's environment when sight can no longer be utilized.

Similarly, John awakens our senses and nudges our curiosity in the opening lines of his letter. He emphasizes his eyewitness testimony: he has heard, seen, and even touched the Word of Life “from the beginning” of Jesus' earthly ministry (v. 1). We reflect on another “beginning” when God spoke and it was; His word brought forth life; it was the word of life (Gen. 1:1ff). It is shocking to hear that this eternal Word of Life has appeared (v. 2); “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

Notice John mentions “seen,” “looked at,” and “appeared” five times in the first two verses. He is astonished that the Life is no longer simply a word to be heard, but now someone to be seen. Jesus Himself is the “Word of life” about which John writes. In his Gospel, John refers to Jesus as “the Word” (cf. John 1:1-2, 14), and Jesus Himself claims to be “the life” (John 14:6).

Ray Stedman

1 John 1:2 The Needed Antenna

January 26, 1997 — by Vernon C. Grounds

Our Daily Bread 1 John 1:1-4

The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life. —1 John 1:2

How would you answer the question, “What is the meaning of life?” Jonathan Gabay of England has published a book containing the answers of well-known individuals to that query. One of them, a church leader, gave an arresting testimony. As a child, he says, he watched his family's black and white TV, wishing that he could get a clearer picture. But he was glad they had even that unsatisfactory set.

Then his family learned that an outside antenna was needed. “Suddenly,” he said, “we found that we could get clear and distinct pictures. Our enjoyment was transformed.” Then he draws this comparison: “Life without a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is like the television without the antenna.”

Without a knowledge of God and His purposes revealed in Scripture and in Jesus Christ, we finite humans with our sin-darkened minds have at best a blurred picture of the invisible, holy Creator. But when we pick up the Bible and encounter Jesus, the Man who was God-in-the-flesh, the fuzziness vanishes. As the Savior Himself declared, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

Have you seen Jesus clearly in God's Word? Are you helping others to see Him too? (1 Jn. 1:1-3; Acts 1:8).

O send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,

That He may touch my eyes and make me see;

Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word,

And in Thy book revealed I see Thee, Lord. —Lathbury

You can't get a clear picture of Christ unless you see Him in the Bible.

1 John 1:2 – Celebrate The Man

December 2, 2002 — by David C. McCasland

Our Daily Bread 1 John 1:1-10

We ... declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. —1 John 1:2

A survey of visitors at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, revealed that many of the park's guests under the age of 15 didn't know that Walt Disney was a real person. They thought that “Disney” was just a company name. When corporate officials planned the celebrations commemorating the 100th anniversary of Walt Disney's birth, they made a special effort to highlight the life and impact of the real man.

With Christmas still a few weeks away, it's not too early to ponder how we can celebrate the Savior's birth in a way that helps others know that Jesus lived on this earth as a real man. What can we do to communicate that a baby born in Bethlehem was the one and only Son of God who gave His life to save us from sin?

The apostle John, a companion of Jesus, taught that to live as a forgiven, transformed person is the best testimony we can give that Jesus was truly the Son of God, a real person. He wrote, "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" (1 John 1:7). And "He who loves his brother abides in the light" (2:10).

More than the gifts we give, it is how we live that will point to the reality of Christ this Christmas.

Putting It Into Practice

What does it mean to "walk in the light"?

Review these verses for insight: Ephesians 5:8-10;

Colossians 3:12-15; James 3:17; 1 Peter 1:15-16.

Does your life shed light or cast shadows?

1 John 1:2 Contact! We Can Come Because He Came!

When Apollo 11 neared the moon in July 1969, the editors of The New York Times felt their coverage of the first step on lunar soil should go beyond headlines and photos to embrace an achievement shared by all humanity. So they asked Pulitzer Prize-winner Archibald MacLeish to write a poem. The day after Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin Jr. walked on the moon, the front page contained these words: You were a wonder to us, ... a light beyond our light, our lives—perhaps a meaning to us ... our hands have touched you in your depth of night.

That day, through the hands of others, we touched the moon. The apostle John wrote some memorable words about an even more significant historical event—the visit of God's Son to this planet. He wrote, "That which was from the beginning, ... which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (1 John 1:1, 3). As surely as John held Him in the flesh, we can grasp the Son of God through faith. —D. C. McCasland

WE CAN COME TO JESUS BECAUSE JESUS CAME TO US.

Our Daily Bread

1 John 1:1-4 What Really Counts

What really counts in life is that at some time you have seen something, felt something, which is so great, so matchless, that everything else is nothing by comparison, that even if you forgot everything, you would never forget this.

Søren Kierkegaard, Journals and Papers

1 John 1:1-4 TRUE CHRISTIANITY – Steven Cole

If you were to go into the streets and ask, "What is Christianity?" you'd probably get a wide range of answers. Some might say that it is a system of thought or morality. Others might call it a religious organization. Those who are bitter against the church may say that it's an evil system of repression. Even if you were to limit your question to those who make a claim to be some sort of Christian, I'd guess that you would get a wide range of answers.

The same would be true if you asked, "Who do you think Jesus Christ is?" Many would say that He was a great religious teacher or a good man. Some may identify Him as the founder of Christianity. Some may even say, correctly, that He is the Son of God, but they would be hard pressed to explain what that means.

It's no accident that there is such confusion on the essence of true Christianity and the person of Jesus Christ. These are foundational issues. If you have a shaky foundation, it does not matter if the rest of the building is impressive—you've got a shaky building! And so Satan has tried to confuse people about true Christianity.

He's been at it for centuries. Before the first century church was sixty years old, Satan had moved in to cause confusion. As we saw last week, many false teachers had arisen in the churches of Asia Minor, where the aged apostle John labored. They had left the churches and taken followers with them (1 John 2:19). They claimed to have the real truth about Christ and Christianity. So the apostle John wrote to his little children in the faith, to make sure that they were clear on the essence of true Christianity. He wanted

them to spot and resist error and to grow in true fellowship with Jesus Christ.

The enemy is no less active today in stirring up such confusion. There are the cults, of course, with their blatant deviations from the faith. But, also, there are many errors that keep worming their way into Christian circles. Currently, the “new perspective on Paul” seeks to redefine the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The unity movement sets aside the gospel for the sake of unity between Roman Catholics and Protestants. “Open Theism” challenges God’s omniscience and absolute sovereignty. Arminianism in effect makes man sovereign over God in the matter of salvation. “Christian” psychology has introduced many errors, including the concept of self-esteem. The list could go on!

John begins his letter by getting right down to business. Except for Hebrews, John’s letters are the only New Testament epistles that begin without an opening salutation. Instead, John begins with a section that is similar to the prologue of his Gospel. Here he begins to counter the false teachers. He shows that...

True Christianity is Jesus Christ— revealed, experienced, and proclaimed with joy.

1 John 1:3 Fellowship

In 1858, David Livingstone, already world famous, returned to Africa to find the source of the Nile. He reached the southern end of Lake Tanganyika in 1867 and moved on toward the interior of central Africa, then dropped out of sight. In 1869 the New York Herald sent Henry Morton Stanley on an expedition to find him. After many hardships, Stanley found Livingstone on October 28, 1871, and remained with the famous missionary-explorer until March 1872. These months made a profound impact on Stanley. He said,

In 1871 I went to him as prejudiced as the biggest atheist in London. To a reporter and correspondent such as I, who had only to deal with wars, mass meetings, and political gatherings, sentimental matters were entirely out of my province. But there came for me a long time of reflection. I was out there away from a worldly world. I saw this solitary old man there, and asked myself, "How on earth does he stop here—is he cracked, or what? What is it that inspires him?" For months after we met I simply found myself listening to him, wondering at the old man carrying out all that was said in the Bible—"Leave all things and follow Me!" But little by little his sympathy for others became contagious; my sympathy was aroused, seeing his piety, his gentleness, his zeal, his earnestness, and how he went quietly about his business. I was converted by him, although he had not tried to do it.

What H. M. Stanley had seen was the life of God in one of God’s own.

1 John 1:3 Time Off

March 2, 2001 — by Dave Branon

Our Daily Bread

1 John 1:1-7

Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. —1 John 1:3

Is there such a thing as a superstar Christian who is so close to God or so godly that he can take time off in his relationship with God?

The idea sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? It’s absurd to think that our walk with God is anything but continual, everyday, all-the-time. But in reality, don’t we sometimes go our own way and neglect our fellowship with Him?

This principle has a parallel in the world of sports. Grant Hill, a superstar professional basketball player, made this comment about his off-season practice schedule: “I just didn’t feel that I could take a week off. When I take one day off, I feel like I’m lacking a bit.”

If we as Christians “take time off” from our relationship with God, we too will be “lacking a bit.” We will miss the guidance of His Word and the fellowship we experience in prayer. We will be more likely to forget our priorities and drift into forbidden areas that could lead to our downfall.

No matter how long you’ve been a child of God through faith in Christ, you need to guard your relationship with Him. It’s not just about going to church or having daily devotions. It’s a continual relationship. Taking time off will seriously weaken your walk.

The time we spend in fellowship

With God each day in prayer

Will strengthen us to stand against

Temptation's evil snare. —Sper

To keep spiritually fit, walk daily...and do it with Christ.

1 John 1:3 Why We Need Others

October 4, 2000 — by Joanie Yoder

Our Daily Bread

1 John 1:1-10

Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. —1 John 1:3

Although Christians look forward to having joyful fellowship with each other one day in heaven, our relationships here on earth can often be anything but joyful. Someone has described it this way: "To live above with those we love—that will be grace and glory. To live below with those we know—now, that's a different story!"

Isolating ourselves from others doesn't resolve this problem. The one thing we all need, particularly when life is difficult, is fellowship with other believers. First John 1:3 says that Christian fellowship is "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ," but it's also with each other.

We need more than our private "Jesus and me" fellowship, as fundamental as that is. God also made us for a "Jesus and we" fellowship. Reuben Welch wrote, "Christians are not brought together because they like each other, but because they share a common life in Jesus and are ... learning how to love each other as members of the family."

How can this deeper love become a reality? We must walk in God's light (v.7), be honest about our sins (v.8), and confess them to God for forgiveness and cleansing (v.9).

If we are to grow more Christlike and learn to love, we need one another.

Christian fellowship provides us

With encouragement and love;

It will help us in our journey

Till we reach our home above. —Sper

No Christian is meant to be an island.

1 John 1:3 Fellowship

Jacques-Yves Cousteau reported the strange behavior of a dolphin he sighted near Corsica. The great animal was not swimming, it was just watching the boat draw nearer and nearer. They decided that the dolphin was sick, so they netted it and examined it. There was neither resistance nor fear on the part of the dolphin. There was no sign of any wound or illness. Yet an hour later, the animal was dead. The conclusion Cousteau reached was that the dolphin may have been ostracized by other dolphins. When they are excluded in this way, they become desperate, attach themselves to anyone or anything, and sometimes will themselves to die. Like the dolphin, we need fellowship. We need companionship. We need each other.

Christian fellowship is so unique, the first believers searched for a word to describe it. They found the solution in an old word no longer in use. They dusted off that word and used it: koinonia. They knew no ordinary word could describe the relationship that existed among believers.

1000 Windows

Alan Carr - "Fellowship", we like that word. It has a nice ring to it. It is Baptist for food!

1 John 1:3 – Fellowship –

Somebody said fellowship means two fellows in one ship. Let me explain what fellowship is. Some of you guys like to fish. I had a man say to me one time, "Preacher, did you realize that two-thirds of the earth's surface is water?" He said, "What do you think that means." I said, "I'm not sure exactly what it means." He said, "the surface of the earth is two thirds water because a man ought to spend at least two-thirds of his time fishing."

Now that's a fisherman for you. I'm not a fisherman. Every time I've ever been fishing, the fish get lockjaw, go on strike, and refuse to bite. But some of you men like fishing. So you see, if a couple of you men who like fishing got together and the subject of fishing came up you would immediately have something in common and you could talk together about fishing because you are both interested in fishing.

That's what the word fellowship means. But it is a Christian word. It means to have the things of Jesus Christ in common. It means to enjoy Jesus Christ together. It means to be one in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Christ of relationship.

1 John 1:3 – Fellowship – Donald Barnhouse

Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote: "Someone has said that our great matters are little to God's power and that our little matters are great to his love. As soon as we have this conception of God, we shall see that he invites us to come at every moment, and that he is really longing for fellowship with his children. Sometimes he brings us to the end of our resources so that we shall ask him for what we need."

1 John 1:3 Fellowship Out of Tune

Ted Malone, whose radio show came on early in the morning, told of the Idaho shepherd who wrote: "Will you, on your broadcast, strike the note 'A'? I'm a shepherder way out here on a ranch, far away from a piano. The only comfort I have is my old violin. It's all out of tune. Would you strike 'A' so that I might get in tune?"

Malone honored the request. Later he received a "thank you" note from the distant shepherd saying, "Now I'm in tune."

One of the purposes and responsibilities of personal and public worship is to enable the aspirant to keep tuned to the Great Shepherd. One of the joys of the Christian life is to help others recapture the missing note!

6000 Plus Illustrations for Communicating Biblical Truths

1 John 1:3 Fellowship with the Father

A happy Christian met an Irish peddler one day and said to him, "It's a grand thing to be saved." "Aye," said the peddler, "It is. But I think something is equally as good as that." "What can you possibly think is equal to salvation?" "The companionship of the Man who has saved me," was the reply. When we know that, we can rejoice with John and say "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1Jn 1:3) - AMG Bible Illustrations

1 John 1:3 Christian Fellowship – from Your Father Loves You by James Packer

What is meant by fellowship in this verse? Gossip? Cups of tea? Tours? No. What is being referred to is something of a quite different order and on a quite different level. "They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, and break bread and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, and, breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy as they praised God" (Acts 2:42–47, New English Bible). That is fellowship as the new Testament understands it, and there is clearly a world of difference between that and mere social activities.

The Greek word for fellowship comes from a root meaning common or shared. So fellowship means common participation in something either by giving what you have to the other person or receiving what he or she has. Give and take is the essence of fellowship, and give and take must be the way of fellowship in the common life of the body of Christ.

Christian fellowship is two-dimensional, and it has to be vertical before it can be horizontal. We must know the reality of fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ before we can know the reality of fellowship with each other in our common relationship to God (1 John 1:3). The person who is not in fellowship with the Father and the Son is no Christian at all, and so cannot share with Christians the realities of their fellowship.

Christianity is a kind of love affair with our loving Lord and Savior, and the more days we turn into spiritual Valentine's Days...the richer and more joyful the relationship itself will become.—J.I. Packer

1 John 1:3 - THE FOUR FS OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

The Christian experience may be set forth in four Fs: Faith in Christ, Fellowship with Christ, Faithfulness to Christ, and Fruitfulness for Christ. - Vance Havner

1 John 1:3 Quotes on Fellowship - John Blanchard Complete Gathered Gold

Keep such company as God keeps.

Anon.

There is danger of losing the spiritual fellowship by thinking that our social fellowship is the climax of all fellowship.

Donald Grey Barnhouse

Keep company with the soundest Christians that have most experience of Christ.

John Bunyan

Man is made for society and Christians for the communion of saints.

Matthew Henry

We ought not to make any conditions of our brethren's acceptance with us but such as God has made the conditions of their acceptance with him.

Matthew Henry

Fellowship with Christians is for the sake of fellowship with God.

J. I. Packer

The fact that we share social activities with other Christians does not of itself imply that we have fellowship with them.

J. I. Packer

For the early Christians koinonia was not the frilly 'fellowship' of church-sponsored bi-weekly outings. It was not tea, biscuits and sophisticated small talk in the Fellowship Hall after the sermon. It was an unconditional sharing of their lives with the other members of Christ's body.

Ronald J. Sider

Genuine fellowship comes when Christians stop relating to one another as righteous saints and accept one another as unrighteous sinners.

David Watson

As the communion of saints is in our creed, so it should be in our company.

Thomas Watson

1 John 1:3 Fellowship – Sequoia Trees - Illustration of our Need for Fellowship

Fellowship is like the sequoia trees of California which tower as high as 300 feet above the ground. You might be surprised to discover that these giant trees have unusually shallow root systems that reach out in all directions to capture the greatest amount of surface moisture. Their intertwining roots also provide support for each other against the storms. That's why the giant Sequoia trees usually grow in clusters. Seldom will you see a redwood standing alone, because high winds would quickly uproot it! Now think of yourself as a "spiritual sequoia tree!" Are you growing in fellowship with other "spiritual sequoia trees?"

1 John 1:3 Spokes of a Wheel –

Believers are to be like spokes in a wheel that converge at the hub - the closer we are to God the closer we come to one another.

1 John 1:3 Our Need – Brian Harbour

One young cynic said to a visitor from the local church: "Why do I need religion? I've got a mother who preaches at me, a father who lays down the law, a sister who is trying to reform me, a kid brother who lifts a weekly collection out of my pocket? Why do I need Jesus?"

We need Jesus because only through Him can we once more have fellowship with our heavenly father.

This fellowship of which John speaks also means to share in something with each other. John wrote, still in verse 3, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us."

Most commentators of our time agree that the major social ill of our day is loneliness.

Nearly 50% of Senior Adults say loneliness is their major problem.

Loneliness has been cited as the number one problem for women in fast-paced suburban America.

A study by the University of Nebraska revealed that the loneliest people in American society are college students.

One man advertised in a paper he would talk to lonely people for \$5 an hour. He received fifty responses the first day.

Loneliness is one of the major social problems of our day.

Through Jesus Christ we can become a part of the greatest fellowship on earth. We can become a part of God's forever family.

Fellowship is the answer to the loneliness of life.

Joy is the answer to the emptiness of life.

Both are available through Jesus Christ.

Lessons for Life

1. Jesus is a person to be experienced.

The Christian faith is not primarily about rules to follow or rituals to observe or propositions to accept. The Christian faith is about a Person with whom to relate. The primary Christian testimony is not, "I know it" or "I know them" but "I know Him."

2. Jesus is a gift to be received.

The implication of our text (for example, in phrases like "The life appeared") is the truth declared in the entire New Testament. We neither earn nor deserve the life Jesus makes available to us. It is a gift to be received.

3. Jesus is a treasure to be shared.

If we really believe what we claim to believe about Jesus—that He is the word of life, that He reveals God to us, that He reconciles us to God, that He brings eternal life, that He is the source of joy—then we must tell others about Him.

1 John 1:4 He Put It In Writing

June 9, 1997 — by Dennis J. De Haan

Our Daily Bread

1 John 1:1-10

These things we write to you that your joy may be full. —1 John 1:4

Bible in a Year:

2 Chronicles 32-33; John 18:19-40

Two days after the April 27, 1996, cease-fire in Lebanon, a TV interviewer asked Israel's prime minister how the new agreement differed from one a few years earlier. He replied, "This one is in writing, whereas the former one was verbal over the telephone. Print has a different value."

Spoken words can be forgotten, or they can be changed when they are repeated. Written words, though, aren't dependent on memory, and they can't be easily ignored or changed.

In the Old Testament, when God spoke to the people of Israel, He told His prophets to write down what He said (Dt. 5:22; Jer. 36:2; Hab. 2:2). He didn't want His words to be forgotten or misrepresented.

Likewise, when Jesus lived on earth, God gave audible approval of His Son (Mt. 17:5). John, who saw the transfiguration and heard God's voice from heaven, did not merely tell others. Under the guidance of God's Spirit, he wrote a book (the Gospel of John) and three letters (1,2,3 John) so that all his readers would know truth from error, believe on Christ, and be filled with joy (1 Jn. 1:4).

When we read God's Word, we too can "hear" God speak. We can begin to learn of His greatness, glory, and goodness. Are you finding that true?

God, who formed worlds by the power of His word,
Speaks through the Scriptures His truth to be heard;
And if we read with the will to obey,
He by His Spirit will show us His way. —DJD

When you open your Bible, ask the Author to open your heart.

1 John 1:4 The Smile Of Joy

September 16, 2002 — by Richard De Haan

Our Daily Bread

Habakkuk 3:17-19

These things we write to you that your joy may be full. —1 John 1:4

Remember those round, yellow, happy-face stickers that showed up frequently on stationery and postcards? They were often accompanied by the one-word message, "Smile." They implied that you can put a smile on your face as easily as you can put a hat on your head. In a sense, that is true. A good actor can look happy even when his heart is breaking.

Favorable circumstances can also produce smiles. A person with good health, an adequate income, and a nice house finds it easy to look happy. The best smile, though, comes naturally from within. It reflects a joy that remains even when a person has few of life's material blessings. It comes from knowing God, believing and obeying His Word, being assured of sins forgiven, possessing eternal life, and anticipating the glories of heaven. The believer who depends on God for these blessings can smile despite adversity.

In today's Scripture reading, the prophet Habakkuk declared triumphantly, "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:18). Even if everything were taken from him, the Lord would be his strength. He didn't need to "put on" a smile, because the joy in his heart would do it for him. —Richard De Haan

A smile can conceal our pain

And lighten our despair,

But trust in God gives inner peace

And joy beyond compare. —Sper

Happiness depends on happenings, but joy depends on Jesus.

1 John 1:4 Are You Happy?

June 19, 1996 — by Richard De Haan

Our Daily Bread

1 John 1:1-10

These things we write to you that your joy may be full. —1 John 1:4

An elderly woman was once asked by a friend about the spiritual welfare of a mutual acquaintance. She replied, "Well, she's in a very bad state of mind. She's got just enough Christianity to make her miserable when she's doing wrong, but not enough to make her happy in a prayer meeting."

The most unhappy people, it seems to me, are not the unsaved but Christians who are disobedient to Christ. When they continue to sin, they are inviting God's loving chastening and are asking for much sorrow and loss. Because they have the benefit of the indwelling Holy Spirit and a knowledge of God's will through the Scriptures, they feel more wretched in their backslidden state than those who have not accepted the Savior. Every Christian who has lived for a time with unconfessed sin knows what I'm talking about.

To avoid such heartache and to be a happy Christian, we must seek to know God's will through Bible study and prayer. Then in the power of the Holy Spirit we must strive to do God's will, walking in the light as He is in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). We are not without sin (v.8), but we must be honest and open with God about our sin (v.9) and strive to overcome it.

Trust and obey—

For there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus

But to trust and obey. —Sammis

Sin causes the cup of joy to spring a leak.

1 John 1:4 TODAY IN THE WORD

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. - John 1:4

A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares seemingly unrelated subjects, drawing attention to the likeness or analogy between them. For example, Shakespeare said: "All the world's a stage." Scripture also employs metaphor. For instance, God is our husband (Hosea 2:16), and Jesus declared that He is the "bread of life" (John 6:35).

John utilizes metaphor in today's text: "God is light." John restates the theme from his Gospel, recounting that this metaphor comes from Jesus. This is not an assertion that God is electromagnetic radiation visible to the human eye; to say "God is light" is not to speak literally of God's physical makeup, but rather to describe God symbolically. The metaphor of light and darkness is used throughout the Bible in various ways (cf. Ps. 27:1; 36:9; John 1:4-5; 8:12; 12:46). In our passage today, it communicates that God is completely pure and holy, without sin or defect.

Three sentences beginning with "if we claim" follow verse 5 (vv. 6, 8, 10). The first clarifies how we have the fellowship with God mentioned in yesterday's passage. We cannot have fellowship with God and continue walking in darkness, the realm in which sinful behavior and attitudes prevail, the realm contrary to His holiness (v. 6). Verse 7 explodes in contrast to verse 6. John teaches that walking in the light not only confirms our fellowship with God but also our fellowship with one another. Implicitly, John pleads that if we claim to have fellowship with God, we will be reconciled to one another.

"How can unholy, sinful people walk in the light of God's presence?" John anticipates this question and points to Jesus' saving and transforming work on the cross (v. 7). Through the blood of Jesus we are purified and set free from the realm of darkness and welcomed into fellowship with God to walk in His glorious light.

APPLY THE WORD

In today's passage, claims to know God are examined against one's lifestyle. The problem of sin is more fundamental than a violation of any particular rule. Sin affects our entire nature and only through Jesus do we find spiritual health and life. Through Christ His Spirit lives in us. Therefore, let us rejoice and turn to the Spirit when we find ourselves tempted to walk in darkness. Through the Spirit's power we are transformed to be like Christ and to walk in His light.

1 John 1:1-4 Personal Experience – Brian Harbour

Donald McCullough, in his outstanding book *The Trivialization of God*, suggests that "the worst sin of the church at the end of the twentieth century has been the trivialization of God." He then considers a pantheon of deities we have created for ourselves in our day. Each of these gods we have created is a parody of the real God and therefore trivializes Him.

Two of these self-created gods are

the god of my understanding and

the god of my experience.

In the section on the god of my understanding, McCullough suggests that many well-meaning Christians, in seeking to bear accurate witness to God, often become so attached to their formulations they forget the discontinuity between God and their understanding of God. Whenever we capture God in the box of our own understanding we have trivialized God.

In the section on the god of my experience, McCullough explains that we tend to make our experience of God—the subjective—more important than the One from whom the experience comes—the objective. We are so moved and helped by our particular experience that we not only want others to share in that experience. We insist they duplicate that experience. Whenever we demand everyone experience exactly what we experience in the same way we have experienced it, we have trivialized God.

McCullough's cautions are well stated, and need to be heeded. And yet, can we actually share with someone else about a God we do not understand or tell others about a God we have not experienced?

Our understanding and our experience are not the end of our witness about God but they must be the beginning of our witness about God. We cannot share what we do not understand or have not experienced.

John knew that. Consequently, as he began the book we know as 1 John, he rooted his opening words in the experience he had shared with Jesus and the understanding which had developed from that experience.

1 John 1:1-5 The Human Camera – Dennis Fisher – Our Daily Bread

Steven Wiltshire, who has been called “the human camera,” has the amazing ability to recall tiny details about anything he has seen and then reproduce them in drawings. For example, after Steven was flown over the city of Rome, he was asked to draw the city center on blank paper. Astonishingly, he accurately reproduced from memory the winding streets, the buildings, the windows, and other details.

Wiltshire’s memory is remarkable. Yet there’s another kind of memory that’s even more amazing—and much more vital. Before Jesus’ return to heaven, He promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to give them supernatural memory of what they had experienced: “The Helper, the Holy Spirit ... will ... bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

The disciples heard Christ’s marvelous teachings. They heard Him command the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dead to be raised. Yet when the Gospel writers recorded these events, their words were not the product of a gifted human memory. Their recollections came from a divine Helper who made sure they compiled a trustworthy record of Christ’s life.

Trust the Bible with confidence. It was written with guidance from the “divine camera,” the Holy Spirit.

The stories in the Word of God

Are there for us to see

How God has worked in people’s lives

Throughout all history. —Sper

The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to teach the people of God.

1 John 1:1-7 Eyewitness – D C McCasland – Our Daily Bread

“You don’t want to interview me for your television program,” the man told me. “You need someone who is young and photogenic, and I’m neither.” I replied that we indeed wanted him because he had known C. S. Lewis, the noted author and the subject of our documentary.

“Sir,” I said, “when it comes to telling the story of a person’s life, there is no substitute for an eyewitness.”

As Christians, we often refer to sharing our faith in Christ as “witnessing” or “giving our testimony.” It’s an accurate concept taken directly from the Bible. John, a companion and disciple of Jesus, wrote: “We have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you” (1 John 1:2-3).

If you know Jesus as your Savior and have experienced His love, grace, and forgiveness, you can tell someone else about Him. Youth, beauty, and theological training are not required. Reality and enthusiasm are more valuable than a training course in how to share your faith.

When it comes to telling someone the wonderful story of how Jesus Christ can transform a person’s life, there is no substitute for a firsthand witness like you.

Let us go forth, as called of God,

Redeemed by Jesus’ precious blood,

His love to show, His life to live,

His message speak, His mercy give. —Whittle

Jesus doesn’t need lawyers, He needs witnesses.

1 John 1:1-7 The Right Light – M De Haan – Our Daily Bread

Eating in the dark is no fun. Low light in a restaurant is one thing; eating in a room with no light at all is another. The same is true in

our walk with God. Unless we take advantage of the light He gives, we will miss seeing what He is doing for us.

We have an Old Testament picture of this—the tabernacle. As the priest entered a room called the Holy Place, he could see only by the light of a golden lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40). Like everything else in the room, it had been carefully fashioned according to the pattern God gave Moses (v.40).

The lampstand is a picture of spiritual light. The gold speaks of value. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The six branches coming out from the center shaft portray unity in plurality. The symbol of the almond blossom is linked to God's anointed priesthood (Numbers 17:1-8). When all this is combined with a New Testament reference that uses a golden lampstand to represent the church (Revelation 1:20), we have the complete picture. God gives light through the Spirit, who works through His congregation of anointed people (1 Peter 2:9).

Yes, the Holy Spirit provides us with the light we need. Are we daily spending time in prayer and reading God's Word so that we can take advantage of it?

Holy Ghost, with light divine,

Shine upon this heart of mine;

Chase the shades of night away,

Turn my darkness into day. —Reed

The light of God's holiness convicts the sinner and guides the saint.

1 John 1:5 Andrew Murray

Father, cleanse me through Your Word. Let it search out and bring to light all that is of self and the flesh in my faith. Let it cut away every root of self-confidence, that the Vine may find me wholly free to receive His life and spirit... Only You are my hope. Amen.— Andrew Murray, The True Vine

1 John 1:5-9 Transformation – Jim Wilson

Scientists claim they have a new state of matter by creating a form of aluminum that is transparent to extreme ultraviolet radiation. The study detailed in the journal, Nature Physics, sound like something from science fiction lore. To create the new state of matter, a short pulse of high intensity laser light "knocked out" a core electron from every aluminum atom in a sample without destroying the metal's crystalline structure.

Professor Justin Wark of Oxford University's Department of Physics says the new form of transparent aluminum only existed for a short time, but could lead to new insight into the nature of matter, and harnessing the power of nuclear fusion. Wark said, "What is particularly remarkable about our experiment is that we have turned ordinary aluminum into this exotic new material in a single step by using this very powerful laser. For a brief period, the sample looks and behaves in every way like a new form of matter." Wark added, "What we created is a completely new state of matter nobody has seen before. ...it's almost as surprising as finding that you can turn lead into gold with light."

Scientists Claim New State of Matter Created, <http://www.livescience.com/technology/090728-new-state-matter.html>, July 28, 2009, Illustration by Jim L. Wilson and Jim Sandell

Exposure to the Light transforms lives too!

1 John 1:6 C H Spurgeon Morning Devotional - November 23

"Fellowship with him." - 1 John 1:6

When we were united by faith to Christ, we were brought into such complete fellowship with him, that we were made one with him, and his interests and ours became mutual and identical. We have fellowship with Christ in his love. What he loves we love. He loves the saints-so do we. He loves sinners-so do we. He loves the poor perishing race of man, and pants to see earth's deserts transformed into the garden of the Lord-so do we. We have fellowship with him in his desires. He desires the glory of God-we also labour for the same. He desires that the saints may be with him where he is-we desire to be with him there too. He desires to drive out sin-behold we fight under his banner. He desires that his Father's name may be loved and adored by all his creatures-we pray daily, "Let thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, even as it is in heaven." We have fellowship with Christ in his sufferings. We are not nailed to the cross, nor do we die a cruel death, but when he is reproached, we are reproached; and a very sweet thing it is to be blamed for his sake, to be despised for following the Master, to have the world against us. The disciple should not be above his Lord. In our measure we commune with him in his labours, ministering to men by the word of truth and by deeds of love. Our

meat and our drink, like his, is to do the will of him who hath sent us and to finish his work. We have also fellowship with Christ in his joys. We are happy in his happiness, we rejoice in his exaltation. Have you ever tasted that joy, believer? There is no purer or more thrilling delight to be known this side heaven than that of having Christ's joy fulfilled in us, that our joy may be full. His glory awaits us to complete our fellowship, for his Church shall sit with him upon his throne, as his well-beloved bride and queen.

1 John 1:7 LIGHT – Jim Wilson

The medical profession has a name for the "blues" some people experience during the winter months. It's called "seasonal affective disorder." When daylight hours grow shorter in winter, so do the hours of joy and happiness. In fact, studies show that many people have seasonal affective disorder—or, SAD—and don't realize it. One of the treatments is for the subject to spend 20 to 30 minutes a day seated under or near a bright light. Keeping one's house well lit is said to reduce the effects of SAD.

One of the reasons the world is in "sad" shape is because so many people don't know the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. The remedy for a sad soul darkened by sin is to spend as much time as possible with Him who lights the path of life: "In Him is life, and He is the Light of Men." And the light Jesus offers is not seasonal, it's eternal.

—<http://www.ncpamd.com/seasonal.htm>, submitted by Norm Miller

1 John 1:7 Light – Jim Wilson

When the sun rose Tuesday, May 10, 2005 it began a three-month stay in the sky over Barrow, Alaska, the northernmost community in the United States. When the sun went down at 1:50 am that morning, it returned at 2:56 am for an extended period. Gina Sturm, of the Nation Weather Service's local office says the next sunset will occur on August 2, 2005.

Many residents of Barrow say they welcome the transition to midnight sunshine each summer. Resident Diane Martin said, "It's almost like coming out of hibernation. It brings us back to getting out and about." Another resident Ron Boynton says the hardest thing for him is figuring out how to sleep during the unrelenting daylight. Boynton, who has lived in Barrow for twenty-three years, says, "We all learn to adapt during the years, and each develop our own little tricks." He added, "Put foil on your bedroom window, etcetera, but then if you have to get up during the night... you get the full sunlight coming in, and it can be hard to get back to sleep."

Barrow is located 330 miles north of the Arctic Circle and has the opposite problem each winter. The sun sets in mid-November and doesn't return until late January.

—www.cnn.com, Sun is up in Barrow Alaska—until August, May 10, 2005. Submitted by Jim Sandell.

1 John 1:7 - Fulfillment Lies in Walk, Not Work

God didn't call me to find fulfillment in the quantity of my work for him but in the quality of my walk with him. —Robert J. Morgan, Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 1.

Denial Perpetuates Sin - My denial of my sin protects, preserves, perpetuates that sin! Ugliness in me, while I live in illusions, can only grow the uglier. —Walter Wangerin Jr., quoted in "Reflections," Christianity Today, Vol. 45, no. 4.

Fellowship Is a Double-Edged Sword - People in the church are like porcupines in a snowstorm. We need each other to keep warm, but we prick each other if we get too close. —Ben Patterson, Leadership, Vol. 1, no. 2.

1 John 1:7-9 Andrew Murray. The New Life THE CLEANSING OF SIN

'If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' -- 1 John 1:7-9.

The same God that forgives sin also cleanses from it. Not less than forgiveness is cleansing a promise of God, and therefore a matter of faith. As it is indispensable, as it is impossible for man, so is cleansing as well as forgiveness certain to be obtained from God.

And what now is this cleansing? The word comes from the Old Testament. While forgiveness was a sentence of acquittal passed on the sinner, cleansing was something that happened to him and in him. Forgiveness came to him through the word: in the case of cleansing, something was done to him that he could experience. (Lev. 8:13; 14:7-8; Num. 19:12, 31:23, 24; 2 Sam. 22:21, 25; 2 Chron. 5:10; Neh. 13:30; Ps. 21:4; Mal. 3:3) Consequently with us also cleansing is the inner revelation of the power of God whereby we are liberated from unrighteousness, from the pollution and the working of sin. Through cleansing we obtain the blessing of a pure heart; a heart in which the Spirit can complete His operations with a view to sanctifying us, and revealing God within us. (Ps 51:12; 73:1; Matt. 5:8; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 1:22)

Cleansing is through the blood. Forgiveness and cleansing are both through the blood. The blood breaks the power that sin has in

heaven to condemn us. The blood thereby also breaks the power of sin in the heart to hold us captive. The blood has a ceaseless operation in heaven from moment to moment. The blood has likewise a ceaseless operation in our heart, to purify, to keep pure the heart into which sin always seeks to penetrate from the flesh. The blood cleanses the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God. The marvelous power that the blood has in heaven, it has also in the heart. (John 13:10-11; Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 1 John 1:7)

Cleansing is also through the word, for the word testifies of the blood and of the power of God. (John 14:3) Hence also cleansing is through faith. It is a divine and effectual cleansing, but it must also be received in faith ere it can be experienced and felt. I believe that I am cleansed with a divine cleansing, even while I still perceive sin in the flesh; through faith in this blessing, cleansing itself shall be my daily experience.

Cleansing is ascribed sometimes to God or the Lord Jesus; sometimes to man. (Ps. 51:3; Ezek 30:25; John 13:2; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1Ti 5:22; 2Ti 2:21; James. 4:8; 1John 3:3) That is because God cleanses us by making us active in our own cleansing. Through the blood the lust that leads to sin is mortified, the certitude of power against it is awakened, and the desire and the will are thus made alive. Happy is he that understands this. He is protected against useless endeavours after self-purification in his own strength, for he knows God alone can do it. He is protected against discouragement, for he knows God will certainly do it.

What we have now accordingly to lay the chief stress upon is found in two things, the desire and the reception of cleansing. The desire must be strong for a real purification. Forgiveness must be only the gateway or beginning of a holy life. I have several times remarked that the secret of progress in the service of God is a strong yearning to become free from every sin, a hunger and thirst after righteousness. (Ps. 19:13; Matt. 5:6) Blessed are such as thus yearn. They shall understand and receive the promise of a cleansing through God.

They learn also what it is to do this in faith. Through faith they know that an unseen, spiritual, heavenly, but very real cleansing through the blood is wrought in them by God Himself.

Beloved child of God, you remember how we have seen that it was to cleanse us that Jesus gave Himself. (Eph. 5:26; Titus 2:14) Let Him, let God the Lord, cleanse you. Having these promises of a divine cleansing, cleanse yourselves. Believe that every sin, when it is forgiven you, is also cleansed away. It shall be to you according to your faith. Let your faith in God, in the word, in the blood, in your Jesus increase continually: 'God is faithful and righteous to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

Lord Go, I thank Thee for these promises. Thou givest not only forgiveness, but also cleansing. As surely as forgiveness comes first, does cleansing follow for every one that desires it and believes. Lord, let Thy word penetrate my heart, and let a divine cleansing from every sin that is forgiven me be the stable expectation of my soul. Beloved Saviour, let the glorious, ceaseless cleansing of Thy blood through Thy Spirit in me be made known to me and shared by me every moment. Amen.

1. What is the connection between cleansing by God and cleansing by man himself?
2. What, according to 1 John 1:9, are the two things that must precede cleansing?
3. Is cleansing, as well as forgiveness, the work of God in us? If this is the case, of what inexpressible importance is it to trust God for it. To believe that God gives me a divine cleansing in the blood when He forgives me, is the way to become partaker of it.
4. What, according to Scripture, are the evidence of a pure heart?
5. What are 'clean hands'? (Ps. 24)

1 John 1:7 – Today in the Word

1 John 1:1-10

But if we walk in the light ... the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. - 1 John 1:7

In the movie Saving Private Ryan, the military discovered that Private Ryan's mother had already lost three of her four sons in combat during World War II. Captain John Miller was ordered to go behind enemy lines to find her fourth son, Private Ryan, and bring him home. The mission was accomplished, but it cost many lives, including the captain's. In the closing scenes, many years later, Ryan took his entire family to France where Captain Miller was buried. Standing over his grave, Ryan said, "I tried to live my life the best I could. I hope that in your eyes I've earned what all of you sacrificed for me."

Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice for us by dying on the cross. It is a free gift. However, if we confess our sins and acknowledge Jesus as our personal Savior, we will want to live our lives in a manner that makes His sacrifice worthwhile. The book of 1 John gives us practical instruction on living lives that please God and give evidence of our salvation.

The opening verses of this chapter echo the beginning of Genesis 1 and John 1. Again Jesus is identified as the Word (1 John 1:1). And He is said to be from the beginning—referencing His deity—and also someone who can be heard, seen, and touched—referencing His humanity.

John is concerned with the fellowship of believers, both with each other and with God (v. 3). The way we can achieve fellowship with God is by walking in the light, and “God is light” (v. 5). There is no darkness in Him. His light reveals our flaws, so that we are made aware of them and may ask for forgiveness. He is a guiding light for the road we travel.

John specifically stated, “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth” (v. 6). Here is one evidence of a life redeemed by Christ: we do not stay in the darkness of sin.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Think of someone who has been a friend or mentor to you. Although that person probably didn’t sacrifice his or her life for you, that individual did sacrifice precious time, energy, and care.

1 John 1:7 A Great Truth – Rob Morgan

Now, let me show you another of the Bible’s great promises in which this word “all” crops up. In 1 John 1:7 we read: “If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from ALL sin.”

And it’s repeated in verse 9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from ALL unrighteousness.”

There is a story that one night Martin Luther went to sleep troubled about his sin. In a dream he saw an angel standing by a blackboard. At the top of the board was Luther’s name. The angel, chalk in hand, was listing all of Luther’s sins, and the list filled the blackboard. Luther shuddered in despair, feeling that his sins were so many that he could never be forgiven. But suddenly in his dream he saw a pierced hand writing above the list these words: “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” As Luther gazed in amazement, the blood flowed from the wounded hand and washed the record clean.

Do you feel that God cannot forgive that particular sin that you’d give anything to un-do? Do you feel He can forgive some of our sins, but not all of them? Do you sometimes feel there are too many sins for God to forgive? He cleanses us from all sin

1 John 1:7d Evening Devotional for July 23 - C H Spurgeon

The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. - 1 John 1:7

"Cleanseth," says the text-not "shall cleanse." There are multitudes who think that as a dying hope they may look forward to pardon. Oh! how infinitely better to have cleansing now than to depend on the bare possibility of forgiveness when I come to die. Some imagine that a sense of pardon is an attainment only obtainable after many years of Christian experience. But forgiveness of sin is a present thing-a privilege for this day, a joy for this very hour. The moment a sinner trusts Jesus he is fully forgiven. The text, being written in the present tense, also indicates continuance; it was "cleanseth" yesterday, it is "cleanseth" to-day, it will be "cleanseth" tomorrow: it will be always so with you, Christian, until you cross the river; every hour you may come to this fountain, for it cleanseth still. Notice, likewise, the completeness of the cleansing, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"-not only from sin, but "from all sin." Reader, I cannot tell you the exceeding sweetness of this word, but I pray God the Holy Ghost to give you a taste of it. Manifold are our sins against God. Whether the bill be little or great, the same receipt can discharge one as the other. The blood of Jesus Christ is as blessed and divine a payment for the transgressions of blaspheming Peter as for the shortcomings of loving John; our iniquity is gone, all gone at once, and all gone for ever. Blessed completeness! What a sweet theme to dwell upon as one gives himself to sleep.

"Sins against a holy God;

Sins against his righteous laws;

Sins against his love, his blood;

Sins against his name and cause;

Sins immense as is the sea-

From them all he cleanseth me."

1 John 1:7e Spurgeon, C. H. Daily Help

"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), not only from sin but "from all sin." Reader, I cannot tell you the exceeding sweetness of this word, but I pray that God the Holy Spirit will give you a taste of it. Manifold are our sins against God. Whether the bill is little or great, the same receipt can discharge one as well as the other. The blood of Jesus Christ is as blessed and divine a payment for the transgressions of blaspheming Peter as for the shortcomings of loving John. Our iniquity is gone, all gone at once, and all gone forever. Blessed completeness! What a sweet theme to dwell upon as one begins another day.

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light... —1 John 1:7

As He is in the light! Can we ever attain to this? Will we ever be able to walk as clearly in the light as He whom we call "Our Father" is, of whom it is written, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5)? Certainly, this is the model which is set before us, for the Savior Himself said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Although we may feel that we can never rival the perfection of God, we are yet to seek after it and never be satisfied until we attain to it. - Spurgeon, C. H. Daily Help

1 John 1:8-10 Two Kinds of People

Pascal once observed, "In all the world there are only two kinds of people. The vast majority, sinners, who believe themselves saints, and the rest, saints, who believe themselves sinners."

Sin Is Sin - People in general, Christian people in particular, tend to divide sins into two categories: their sins and our sins. The Bible, of course, knows no such distinction. Sin is sin, without partiality shown to the sins of God's people—our sins. —Joe Bayly in *Out of My Mind: The Best of Joe Bayly*.

1 John 1:8 The Biggest Lie

September 6, 2002 — by Herbert Vander Lugt

Our Daily Bread

1 John 1:1-10

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. —1 John 1:8

A minister was walking down a street when he noticed a group of boys standing around a dog. Concerned for the dog's safety, he walked over and asked what they were doing. A boy replied, "This is an old stray, and all of us want it. We decided that whoever told the biggest lie would get it."

"You boys shouldn't have a contest telling lies," said the minister. "Don't you know that lying is a sin? Why, when I was your age I never told a lie!" There was silence for about a minute. Then, just as the minister thought he had gotten through to them, one boy gave a deep sigh and said, "All right, he wins. Give him the dog."

We smile, but the fact is, we've all told some whoppers. Oh, we tolerate some lies, calling them exaggerations—like when we add a few inches to the big fish we caught. We aren't that tolerant, however, when lied to and cheated in a business deal or when an untruth threatens our reputation. Yet, anyone who says he's without sin is telling the biggest lie of all.

So where does that leave us? Guilty, according to 1 John 1:8. But notice the good news that follows in verse 9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's a truth we all need to hear. And that's no lie! —HVL

Deceit lies hidden in our hearts—

We all have told a lie;

Yet Jesus can forgive and cleanse—

That's why He came to die. —D. De Haan

A lie may cover your tracks, but it cannot hide the truth.

According to a 2006 survey conducted in the United Kingdom, over 80 percent of people lie at least once a day—and who knows how many people lied on the survey! The study revealed that people tell little white lies to get out of work, to get out of trouble, to spare someone's feelings, and to save their own reputations. Respondents also said that technology such as e-mail, voice mail, and cell phones make it easier to get away with long-distance fibs.

1 John 1:8 Multiple Illustrations/Quotes

Sin 1 - There used to be a popular song entitled, "Doin' What Comes Naturally." Probably no one thought of virtue. No doubt many thought of some sin. We tend to think that sin is doing what comes naturally. But sin is unnatural. It is something foreign to us that infects us. Instead of looking for excuses for sin, we must look for forgiveness for sin and the strength to resist temptation.

Sin 2 - Everyone is familiar with that wonderful organization Alcoholics Anonymous. The idea has worked so well it has inspired similar organizations like Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, and Sexaholics Anonymous. There is even an Anonymous for people who don't want anyone to know what their problems are.

Sin 3 - Some cynic said that doctors and preachers are alike. Whatever is wrong with you, the doctor says it's a virus. Whatever your problem, the preacher says it's sin.

Sin 4 - There is a village in Austria called Sinnersdorf. Obviously, the German word sinn doesn't mean the same thing as the English word sin. The German word dorf means village; and if we put the English meaning to the first half and the German meaning to the second half, it comes out Sinner's Village. Who would want to live there? If all the sinners in the world were gathered into one place, no village would hold them. No city would be big enough to hold them.

Sin 5 - In Chicago's Field Museum are skulls from ancient Indians. Some are called trepanned skulls because they have holes bored in them. Primitive people used to cut holes in the skulls of living people to let the demons out. We know now that evil cannot be evicted from us quite that easily.

Sin 6 - Clarence Jordan made a fascinating paraphrase of Paul's letters called The Cotton Patch Version. His rendering of Romans 12:2 is this: "And don't let the present age keep you in its cocoon. Instead metamorphose into the new mind." That's exactly what Paul was saying, and the implied illustration of the lowly caterpillar turning into the lovely butterfly fits perfectly.

Sin 7 - Recently, French writer Georges Simenon died at the age of 86. He had written 73 murder mysteries, 117 other novels, and his works had been translated into 55 languages. He claimed to have slept with 10,000 women during his lifetime. How far removed such a boast is from the attitudes reflected in Hawthorne's story of The Scarlet Letter. Once people were ashamed of their sins. Now they boast of them.

Sin 8 - Among the creative new greeting cards is one that has a mock newspaper headline on the front: "MIRACULOUS CURE DISCOVERED THAT CURES NO KNOWN DISEASES." Someone remarked that he knew someone who caught the cure and died! We know the disease of sin. We know that it has become an epidemic. We know the cure.

Sin 9 - Stonehenge in England is well known. Less well known are two other stone circles erected by prehistoric people. One is called The Hurlers. According to local legend, impious men were turned to stone for hurling the ball on the Sabbath. Another is called the Merry Maidens. They were turned to stone for breaking the Sabbath by dancing to music. Today we have a different view of sin and a different view of punishment; but we still believe in the reality of sin, and we still believe in the judgment of God.

Sin 10 - In Parker and Hart's "The Wizard Of Id" comic strip, the jester, obviously intoxicated, says to the bartender, "Gimme one more for the road." The bartender says, "That will be two bucks." The jester says, "I will pay for it tomorrow;" and the bartender says, "You certainly will!"

Sin 11 - It has been said that ninety-nine percent of all species that ever lived are now extinct! In the next twenty-five years, it is estimated that a million species will be lost. Does mankind face such a danger? Who can say? But there are spiritual dangers that must be faced every day. "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Sin 12 - William Hazlitt said, "There is a division of labour even in vice. Some persons addict themselves to the speculation, others to the practice."

Sin 13 - "O sin, what hast thou done to this fair earth!" cried R. H. Sana, American author and lawyer (1815-1882).

"The mind is like a sheet of white paper in this," said Julius Hare, "that the impressions it receives oftenest and retains longest are the black ones."

Sin 14 - Rudyard Kipling wrote, "The sin ye do by two and two ye must pay for one by one." But E. M. Potteat wrote, "Then there is forgiveness with God. 'None with nature,' say the scientists; 'None with law,' say the jurists; 'None with society,' say the Pharisees; 'None with anybody,' say the cynics. 'But,' says our Lord, 'God forgives and we must forgive.'"

Sin 15 - Two men escaped from the Guelph Correctional Center in England in February of 1981. They climbed over the fence, raced down the road, and ran inside a hall where more than a hundred correctional officers were attending a seminar. Not recognizing the nature of the meeting, the two men asked the staff training officer to call them a taxi and were promptly arrested simultaneously by

thirty-seven familiar jailers.

Sin 16 - In Alice In Wonderland, Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The Cat answered, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." Our moral decisions depend on where we want to get to.

Sin 17 - When Lot escaped from Sodom, he was permitted to take refuge in the little village of Zoar. In commemoration of that event, one supposes, there is a place named Zoar in the state of Ohio. But none named Sodom!

Sin 18 - Samuel Butler wrote of those who "compound for sins they are inclined to by damning those they have no mind to." It is a fact that we often take very lightly our own sins but take very seriously the sins of others. The sins which we are never tempted to commit, we take very seriously.

Sin 19 - A man once dropped two pennies on the floor of a department store. Stooping to hunt for the two cents, he left his wallet on the counter. When he arose, the wallet and a far larger amount of money was gone. When we fall into sin, we are equally thoughtless and equally foolish.

Sin 20 - Saint Augustine said that we make a ladder of our vices if we trample those same vices underfoot.

Sin 21 - Donald Robert Perry Marquis wrote a poem based on an imaginary conversation between a rat and a moth. The rat asked some hard questions. Why did moths fly into candles and other bright lights and risk getting themselves fried to death? The answer, written in the poet's unpunctuated style, is very instructive:

we get bored with routine

and crave beauty

and excitement

fire is beautiful

and we know that if we get

too close it will kill us

and what does that matter

it is better to be happy

for a moment

and be burned up with beauty

than to live a long time

and be bored all the while

Surely that must also be the insane logic of drug addicts and alcoholics and all others who deliberately kill themselves for a few minutes of excitement.

Sin 22 - Whittier's lines are very familiar:

For of all sad words of tongue or pen,

The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

Bret Harte picked up on the line and turned it in a different direction:

If, of all words of tongue or pen

The saddest are these, "It might have been."

More sad are these we daily see;

"It is, but hadn't ought to be."

Sin 23 - Christopher Marlowe wrote, "I count religion but a childish toy, and hold there is no sin but ignorance." Surely anyone knows that the spectrum of sin is much, much wider than that: brutality, selfishness, greed, dishonesty—the list is very long.

Sin 24 - In Bulgaria, the head movements for yes and no are just the opposite of those with which we are familiar. A nod of the head means no. Shaking the head from side to side means yes. Sometimes when we are tempted we say no but mean yes. We say no with our lips but say yes in our hearts.

Sin 25 - For thirty years Mrs. Doreen Burley of Rawstentall, England, polished her strange and lovely ornament. She let her grandchildren play with it, always returning it to its prominent place on the mantel. In March of 1988 she learned something about her ornament. It was a live bomb!

Sin 26 - In 1938, Douglas Corrigan left Floyd Bennet Field in New York to fly to Los Angeles. It was foggy when he took off, and he turned east. Twenty-eight hours later he landed in Dublin, Ireland. Corrigan had made the journey alone with only a pressure gauge, a compass, and a map of the United States. Ever afterward he was known as Wrong Way Corrigan. When we think of the moral direction of life, is it possible you or I should be called Wrong Way Smith, or Jones, or whatever our family name might be? (From Shannon, Robert, 1000 Windows)

1 John 1:8-9 Ray Stedman The Person Who Denies Sin

8If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

New International Version - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

The word confess does not mean to ask for forgiveness. Christ's work for us upon the cross has already done all that is necessary to forgive us. What God wants us to do is to look at the sin before us and call it what He calls it. That means to agree with God about it, and that is what the word confess means: Fess comes from a root which means "to say," and con means "with." "To say with" God what He says about something is confessing sin. There is a popular song that you sometimes hear in Christian circles: "If I have wounded any soul today, If I have caused one foot to go astray, If I have lived in my own selfish way, Dear Lord, forgive." That is not a confession at all. Do not say "if," say, "Lord, I have caused some foot to go astray, I have lived in my own selfish way." That is confession, agreeing with God.

The cleansing is not based upon God's mercy or His kindness or His love or, least of all, His caprice; it is based on the work of Jesus Christ. On that basis God is faithful and just to forgive, and He would be utterly unjust if He refused to forgive a penitent sinner. God Himself would be wicked if He refused, on the basis of the work of Christ, to forgive a penitent sinner. That is how certain we can be of the cleansing that comes when we agree with God about these things.

Whenever we are aware of having fallen into a fleshly reaction, into sins, then let us stop right there, and in our hearts agree with God about it and experience anew this wonderful cleansing, this faithful and righteous cleansing of our lives, "[purifying] from all unrighteousness."

Do you know what happens when you do not confess? You become very unpleasant to live with. As a schoolboy in Montana I endured many bitter winters when the temperature would sometimes go down to sixty degrees below zero for a week at a time. In our homes, where we had no running water, no indoor plumbing, and no electricity, taking a bath was relatively akin to major surgery. In that painful setting, we performed our ablutions. It was difficult enough that some people did not think it necessary to bathe at all during the winter months. If you went into the heat of a one-room schoolhouse on a cold winter's day, with about fifty or sixty sweating bodies there, you became very much aware of this fact.

Now I do not mind living with someone who knows he or she is dirty and therefore frequently washes, but it is terribly distressing to live with someone who thinks he or she never gets dirty. That is what John is saying. If we say we cannot get dirty, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we face up to it and confess it, then the cleansing that the Lord Jesus has fully and abundantly provided for on the cross is immediately ours, and we are as though we had never sinned.

Father, in such practical terms does this reveal the tendency of my own heart to deceive myself and also the readiness of Your heart to cleanse me? May I learn to walk in agreement with You.

Life Application: Even though we can be freed from sin, we cannot claim to be without sin. What is the difference between asking forgiveness and confessing our sin?

1 John 1:8-9 CONSISTENCY

Two French government ministers traveling to the unveiling of a new radar speed trap outside Paris were caught exceeding the speed limit as they went to the event. Reporters using handheld radar guns recorded Transport Minister Gilles de Robien's car traveling through Paris at 62 mph in a 43 mph zone. Meanwhile the Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who is in charge of the current

law and order drive in France, was clocked at 64 mph in the same zone.

Sarkozy's office later issued a statement pleading special circumstances, but not admitting the car's speed. The statement said, "The minister's vehicle was traveling in a secured environment behind two police motorcycles who fixed the speed."

Excuses and explanations aside, it is poor leadership to break the very laws you are charged with enforcing. None of us, not even government officials are above the law.

—Reuters, Ministers Fall to Own Road Safety Push, November 11, 2003. Submitted by Jim Sandell

Jim Wilson – Fresh Illustrations

1 John 1:8-10 BLAME/GUILT/RESPONSIBILITY

What does a bagel, or even broken teeth, for that matter, have to do with losing the care, comfort, consortium and society of a spouse? Frankly, I don't have a clue, but John and Cecelia O'Hare filed suit against a McDonald's restaurant claiming that a bagel broke John's teeth and damaged their marriage. "They alleged the McDonald's, owned by Johnstone Foods Inc., was negligent and violated an 'implied warranty that the food sold was reasonably fit for human consumption.'" Further, "the suit alleges the wife 'lost the care, comfort, consortium and society of her husband.'"

—Couple Sues McDonald's Over Tough Bagel ". © The Associated Press, 2/4/03 AOLNews, Submitted by Michael Scott

I don't know the details of this lawsuit or of this couple's marriage, but it appears to be yet another example of a people in a sue-happy subculture that is quick to blame others for their own problems. Whatever happened to "for better or worse?" The problems in the O'Hare marriage seem to have less to do with bagels or broken teeth and more to do with shifting blame and avoiding responsibility.

Blaming others for my own problems may alleviate my feelings of guilt, but it does nothing to help me overcome those problems. That can only be done when I face my sins head on, and confess them.

1 John 1:8-10 - Wilson, Jim -Fresh Illustrations

1 John 1:8-9 Mistakes – Jim Wilson

Automobile manufacturer Toyota has recently taken a big hit after recalling millions of cars worldwide over concerns of faulty accelerators. After months of investigation safety officials say they have not found any problems other than concerns the manufacturer expressed. Their research found that in more than half of the crashes blamed on sudden acceleration, data from the "black boxes" in the vehicle showed the driver was not stepping on the brake at the time of the accident, indicating the problem might have been driver error.

Though officials stress the investigation is continuing, they say the data supports Toyota's assertion that electronic defects were not to blame for the incidents. The report does not specify driver error as a cause of unintended acceleration, but officials familiar with the research say the findings point to pedal misapplication, mistakenly hitting the gas instead of the brakes. In other words, the data suggests the biggest problem with the cars was the driver, not the equipment.

http://online.wsj.com/articleNA_WSJ_PUB:SB10001424052748704164904575421603167046966.html Illustration by Jim L. Wilson and Jim Sandell.

We all make mistakes.

1 John 1:8-9 Forgiveness – Jim Wilson

A 19-year-old Ohio woman was sorry for cheating on her boyfriend, and decided to ask for support from her community to get a second chance. Jess Dutry's boyfriend took back their engagement ring and ended the relationship on their one year anniversary after Dutry confessed to cheating on him earlier in the summer. She regretted her mistake so much that she desperately searched for a way to repent of her misdeeds.

After reading a news story online, Dutry decided to stand on a street corner holding a sign which read, "I cheated. Honk if I deserve a second chance." Passing drivers beeped their support for the woman. Dutry said, "I've gotten 57 honks in the last hour and a half. I've had people come out of their cars and hug me, tell me 'Good luck.'" Dutry hopes the public support may convince her fiancée to give her a second chance. She added, "I just want a chance to redeem myself. I honestly feel bad, if I have to stand out here in the rain for him to take me back, I will."

'Cheater' wants to reunite with boyfriend, <http://www.sanduskyregister.com/articles20090918front1619893.txt>; September 20, 2009;

Illustration by Jim L. Wilson and Jim Sandell.

What would you do in this situation?

1 John 1:9 Confession of sin

Dr. Mark Laaser, a former pornography addict, sees the Internet as a key factor in America's moral decline. It has made pornography more widely, easily, and privately available, pulling many into a "downward spiral" and hooking "a lot of people who might not otherwise have degenerated so rapidly." Through workshops, books like *Faithful and True*, and the ministry he leads, the Christian Alliance for Sexual Recovery, Laaser now helps individuals and churches deal in biblical ways with issues of sexual immorality.

1 John 1:9 - A Sign of Forgiveness

Sin forsaken is one of the best evidences of sin forgiven. —John Charles Ryle,

1 John 1:9 Totally Clean

August 5, 2012 — by Bill Crowder

Our Daily Bread

1 John 1:1-10

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. —1 John 1:9

A friend was updating me on his past year—a year in which he had been receiving ongoing medical treatment for cancer. The smile on his face was a powerful testimony to the good news he had just received. He said that at his one-year checkup the doctor announced that the test results all pointed to one thing: "You are totally clean!" What a difference two words can make! To my friend, totally clean meant every trace of the disease that had threatened his life only months before had been wiped from his body. We rejoiced to hear that he was totally clean!

King David, after his moral failure with Bathsheba, longed for a similar thing to happen in his heart. Hoping for the stains of his sin to be washed away, he cried out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). The good news for him and for us is that our sins can be taken care of. When we need cleansing, John's familiar words bring hope: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

We can't cleanse our own hearts; only God can do that. If we confess our sins to Him, He promises to make us totally clean!

Search me, O God, and know my heart today

Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. —Orr

Confession to God always brings cleansing from God.

1 John 1:9 FORGIVENESS – Jim Wilson

Actor John Voight has taken his private family feud with actress-daughter Angelina Jolie public. In an interview with a syndicated TV show, Voight said he is "broken hearted" that Jolie will not talk to him. He says when he tried to approach his daughter at a recent party; a security guard turned him away.

Voight said, "I've been trying to reach my daughter and get her help, and I have failed, and I'm sorry." Voight believes he is to blame for much of the problem, acknowledging that when she was young, he had an affair and subsequently left his wife and family.

Jolie refused to respond to her father's remarks. In a statement, she said, "I don't want to make public the reasons for my bad relationship with my father." She said she has determined that it is not healthy for her to be around her father, especially since she was now responsible for her own child.

Father and daughter did manage to put aside their differences when they worked on a film last year, but apparently the rift has widened again.

—Associated Press, August 2, 2002, Submitted by Jim Sandell

Seeking the forgiveness of people we have wronged is risky. There is no guarantee they will respond. The good news is God's forgiveness is unconditional. He forgives anyone who comes to Him asking for forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS – Jim Wilson

The United States Postal Service hopes to save millions of dollars by offering amnesty on its white plastic tubs used to deliver bulk mail to businesses. Over the last two years the "flat tubs" have disappeared from Postal Service Centers. Originally there were 20 million tubs, but last fall only 20,000 could be located. The replacement cost of the tubs would be almost \$65 million.

USPS spokesman, Mark Saunders says, "We need those tubs back—can you help us out?" He adds, " Please bring these back in—no questions asked. You'll probably get a big thank you." Saunders says the Postal Service has faith in their customers that they will do the right thing and turn the tubs in.

As an added incentive, The Postal Service points out that the tubs are federal property, with each one carrying a warning that there is a maximum fine of \$1,000 and three years imprisonment for misuse or theft.

—<http://washingtonpost.com>, Cost-Conscious Postal Service Wants Its missing Tub back, January 20, 2003.

In effect, the government is saying, "We can do this the easy way or the hard way...we'd prefer you do it the easy way." Which is a similar choice we have. We can pay for our own sins, or accept the forgiveness God offers. Yes, the penalty for sin is harsh, but the Lord offers forgiveness to anyone who will come to Him.

1 John 1:9 For the Coach

Until the time of my conversion, I was totally involved with sports. But as I attended church and followed my spiritual coaches, God purified my mind and ego in a process called sanctification.

In 1 John 1:9-10, the Bible says that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us from unrighteousness—the habits of sin.

Many Christians are forgiven but don't get cleansed, so they stay in old habit patterns. My mind had to be renewed by daily Bible reading and attending church. My ego had to be humbled. I couldn't go out on the court using God's power, then take the credit for myself.

I began to see victory not as a stroke to my own ego but as a witness for God, something that proved how great He was within me.

A new, purer desire for winning branched out in other areas as well. I wanted to win academically not just for myself, but also to show people what the power of God could do inside a person. After all He was doing for me, I wanted to do all I could for Him. I had the feeling players have when playing for a great coach.

I didn't want to disappoint God. I wanted to achieve all that He had created me to achieve.

True mercy is, so to speak, the most profound source of justice.

1 John 1:9 CONFESSION

Traveling from Europe to other parts of the country isn't as easy as it used to be. Because of the spread of Foot and Mouth disease throughout the UK, the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) is disinfecting traveler's footwear as they pass through point-of-entry airports in the United States. The disease can easily spread onto people's clothing and be transmitted by the wind to other animals.

—<http://www.cnn.com/2001/HEALTH/03/05/usda.foot/index.html>

It is nearly impossible for a Christian not to come into contact with sin and become infected with it. Confession is the way God disinfects our souls, and makes us pure again.

1 John 1:9 KJV "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Jim Wilson – Fresh Illustrations

O merciful heart of God, grant me yet again thy forgiveness. Hear my sorrowful tale and in thy great mercy blot it out from the book of thy remembrance. Give me faith so to lay hold of thine own holiness and so to rejoice in the righteousness of Christ my savior ... Amen.—John Baillie, A Diary of Private Prayer

1 John 1:9 – For Giving us Our Sins!

In the Moody Press book *Little Minds With Big Hearts*, editor Ramona Cramer Tucker collects amusing stories submitted by Christian moms to the 'Heart to Heart' page of *Today's Christian Woman* magazine. One child asked his mother if he could stop at the library to borrow the Lamb's Book of Life. Another prayed, 'Dear God, thank you for giving us our sins.' Still another sang, 'Goats tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!' And one little girl told a friend, 'Only God has crayons big enough to make rainbows.'

1 John 1:9 TODAY IN THE WORD

When we imagine "confession," many think of a movie scene where a man mutters to a priest behind a screen. In other words, personal confession may be a foreign concept. Confession was not unfamiliar to the psalmists. It was a regular practice of both individuals and the community in ancient Israel and early Christianity. Psalm 32 was included among seven "Penitential Psalms" or songs of confession (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143).

1 John 1:9 SIN/CONFESSION – Jim Wilson

Mina, a 36-year old Iranian woman is seeking a divorce from her husband of eight years because, "nobody, including me, my children and his colleagues, can stand him," she said. "My husband says he does not like water and does not want to take a shower—he doesn't even wash his face when he wakes up in the morning."

When they were first married, he was obsessively clean, taking up to three showers a day, but now he is obnoxiously filthy.

—<http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=609&id=233822005>

I can only imagine what it would be like to live with someone who never bathes, it must be unbearable. The only thing I can think of that would be worse, would be to live with someone who never confesses their sins, and allows the gunk of their sin to build up until they emit a spiritual stench from their souls.

1 John 1:9 CONFESSION

Estelle Fusco couldn't believe what her cousin was saying. Her cousin's husband is a Naval officer with a new duty station in Italy. When the movers delivered their belongings to their new quarters they smelled a terrible odor. Finally, after opening several boxes they found the source of the odor. The movers had packed up their garbage into a box instead of throwing it out.

—Reader's Digest, April 2002, p 52

That is exactly what we do in our lives when we don't confess our sins. Instead of "throwing them out," we box them up and carry them around with us. And before you know it, our life begins to stink. Instead, we should confess our sins, so God can forgive us and cleanse our life.

Jim Wilson – Fresh Illustrations

1 John 1:9 – Sin – Anthony Phillips

In 1982 an unusual work of modern art went on display. It was a shotgun affixed to a chair. The artwork could be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly into the gun barrel. The problem was that the gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years. Amazingly enough, people waited in lines to sit and stare into the shell's path, although they knew that the gun could go off at any moment.

Talk about tempting fate!

Unfortunately, people do the same thing with sin, thinking that they can stare it in the face and still get away unharmed. Unlike the gun, however, sin—unless dealt with—definitely will kill them.

1 John 1:9 – Sin – Jim Wilson

Authorities in Uganda continue their efforts to control the recent outbreak of the deadly Ebola Virus. They fear the disease may spread into neighboring Kenya through seven relatives of a woman who recently died from the virus.

Sadly, this same woman unknowingly spread the virus when she fled a hospital and returned to her home region hoping to escape the disease. The woman died and spread the disease to at least three other relatives, who also died.

There is no cure for the Ebola virus, which is spread through personal contact. Ebola is frightening because there is no known cure, and the disease itself is not fully understood. So far the outbreak has claimed 113 lives in Africa. Officials insist the key to managing the disease is isolation of the victim, which breaks the cycle of transmission. No one knows how far the current outbreak will spread,

or how many lives it will claim.

Like Sin, Ebola spreads through personal contact, but sin is harder to control than the Ebola outbreak and impossible to escape. Though it infects everyone's heart, many people don't realize they are contaminated. Sin becomes a death sentence buried deep inside our being. The more we try to clamp down on sin, the more it tightens its grip. In a moment of pressure, or careless thought, sin gains a tighter hold on us. The ultimate result of sin is death, and isolation from God.

Running from sin is not the cure, nor is controlling it. Jesus is the cure for this devastating illness. We no longer have to die from sin. Jesus has already died for us. Confession is the first step of the cure. The apostle John wrote that if we confess our sins, confess our inability to control the illness, Jesus will forgive us. He removes all evidence of our sin sickness.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

—AP 11-15-2000, Reuters 11-14-2000,11-13-2000, Submitted by Jim Sandell

1 John 1:9 – Unconfessed Sin - Scientists know that extended space travel has definite effects on the human body. Astronauts aboard the Skylab grew between one and two inches taller while in space due to the lengthening and straightening of the spine in the weightless atmosphere. Their waistlines decreased several inches as their internal organs shifted upward. And their calves became smaller as leg muscles forced blood toward the upper part of the body. Sin has distorted the human spirit in much the same way that space travel distorts the body. The difference is that the damage caused by sin is infinitely greater, and longer lasting.

1 John 1:9 – No Short Cuts

Psalm 32:1-11

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. - Psalm 32:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll warns us that our society's message of "instant gratification" holds a danger for believers, the way an undertow in the surf can sweep away an unsuspecting swimmer. The danger is that our "instant" society can lead us to believe there are shortcuts to getting where we want to go. The fact, Swindoll writes, is that "there are no shortcuts to anything meaningful."

This observation really rings true when it comes to the issue of confession, forgiveness, and restoration. We all want peace of heart and a clear conscience before God. These blessings are available on a daily basis to every believer--but there is no shortcut to achieving them.

David found that out the hard way. For about a year after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband (2 Sam. 11), David tried to find peace in his kingly activities and his family. But the poison leaked out of the sin he had worked so hard to cover, eating away at his body and spirit. The pain didn't stop until David fell on his face before God in confession and repentance.

1 John 1:9 Illustration

Connie Mack, who managed the Philadelphia Athletics from 1900 to 1950, once said, "I've seen boys on my baseball team go into a slump and never come out of it, and I've seen others snap right out and come back better than ever. I guess more players lick themselves than are ever licked by an opposing team.

Many troubled Christians don't know how to handle the haunting memory of their past sins. Although confessed, these sins cling to their minds as barnacles adhere to the hull of a ship. They go into a spiritual slump and can't seem to pull out of it.

But as long as 1 John 1:9 stands, we never need to say, "I'm licked!" - 6000 Plus Illustrations for Communicating Biblical Truths

1 John 1:9 Andrew Murray - The New Life - THE CONFESSION OF SIN

1 John 1:9. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' -- 1 John 1:9.

The one thing that God hates, that grieves Him, that He is provoked by, and that He will destroy, is sin. The one thing that makes man unhappy, is sin. (Ge 6:5, 6; Ezek. 33:6; Rev. 6:16, 17) The one thing for which Jesus had to give His blood was sin. In all the relationship betwixt the sinner and God, this is thus the first thing that the sinner must bring to his God, sin. (Jdg. 10:10, 15, 16; Ezra 9:6; 9:2, 33; Jer 3:21, 25; Da 9:4, 5, 20)

When you came to Jesus at first, you perceived this in some measure. But you should learn to understand this lesson more deeply. The one counsel concerning sin is, to bring it daily to the only One who can take it away, God Himself. You should learn that one of

the greatest privileges of a child of God is, the confession of sin. It is only the holiness of God that can consume sin; through confession I must hand over my sin to God, lay it down in God, get quit of it to God, cast it into the fiery oven of God's holy love which burns against sin like a fire. God, yes, God Himself, and He alone, takes away sin. (Lev. 4:21; Nu 5:7; 2Sa 12:13; Ps. 32:5, 38:19; 51:5, 19)

This the Christian does not always understand. He has an inborn tendency to desire to cover sin, or to make it less, or to root it out only when he purposes drawing near to God. He thinks to cover sin with his repentance and self-blame, with scorn of the temptation that came to him, or otherwise with what he has done or still hopes to do. (Gen. 3:12; Ex. 32:22, 24; Isa. 1:11, 15; Luke 13:26) Young Christian, if you would enjoy the gladness of a complete forgiveness and a divine cleansing of sin, see to it that you use aright the confession of sin. In the true confession of sin you have one of the most blessed privileges of a child of God, one of the deepest roots of a powerful spiritual life.

For this end, let your confession be a definite one. (Num 12:11, 21:7; 2 Sam. 24:10, 17; Isa. 59:12, 13; Luke 23:41; Acts 1:18, 19; 22:19, 20; 1 Tim. 1:13, 15) The continued indeterminate confession of sin does more harm than good. It is much better to say to God that you have nothing to confess, than to confess you know not what. Begin with one sin. Let it come to a complete harmony betwixt God and you concerning this one sin. Let it be fixed with you that this sin is through confession placed in God's hands. you shall experience that in such confession there are both power and blessing.

Let the confession be an upright one. (Prov. 28:13; Lev. 26:40, 41; Jer. 31:18, 19) By it deliver up the sinful deed to be laid aside. By it deliver up the sinful feeling with a view to trusting in God. Confession implies renunciation, the putting off of sin. Give up sin to God, to forgive it to you, and to cleanse you from it. Do not confess, if you are not prepared, if you do not heartily desire to be freed from it. Confession has value only as it is a giving up of sin to God.

Let the confession be trustful (2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 32:5; Isa. 4:7) Reckon firmly upon God actually to forgive you, and also to cleanse you from sin. Continue in confession, in casting the sin of which you desire to be rid into the fire of God's holiness until your soul has the firm confidence that God takes it on His own account to forgive and to cleanse away. It is this faith that really overcomes the world and sin: the faith that God in Jesus really emancipates from sin. (1 John 5:5; 2:12)

Brother, do you understand it now? What must you do with sin, with every sin? To bring it in confession to God, to give it to God; God alone takes away sin.

Lord God, what thanks shall I express for this unspeakable blessing, that I may come to Thee with sin. It is known to Thee, Lord, how sin before Thy holiness causes terror and flight. It is known to Thee how it is our deepest thought, first to have sin covered, and then to come to Thee with our desire and endeavour for good. Lord, teach me to come to Thee with sin, every sin, and in confession to lay it down before Thee and give it up to Thee. Amen.

1. What is the distinction betwixt the covering of sin by God and by man? How does man do it? How does God do it?

2. What are the great hindrances in the way of the confession of sin?

Ignorance about sin.

Fear to come with sin to the holy God.

The endeavour to come to God with something good.

Unbelief in the power of the blood and in the riches of grace.

3. Must I immediately confess an oath or a lie or a wrong word, or wait until my feeling has first cooled and become rightly disposed? O pray, confess it immediately; come in full sinfulness to God, without first desiring to make it less!

4. Is it also necessary or good to confess before man? It is indispensable, if our sin has been against man. And, besides, it is often good; it is often easier to acknowledge before God than before man that I have done something (James. 5:16). -- Andrew Murray. The New Life

1 John 1:9 Psalm 32 TODAY IN THE WORD

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9

When we imagine "confession," many think of a movie scene where a man mutters to a priest behind a screen. In other words, personal confession may be a foreign concept. Confession was not unfamiliar to the psalmists. It was a regular practice of both individuals and the community in ancient Israel and early Christianity. Psalm 32 was included among seven "Penitential Psalms" or songs of confession (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143).

“Blessed is the one” who lives life according to God’s design and is forgiven before the Lord (vv. 1-2). Psalm 32 does not presuppose a sinless person, but rather one whose sins are forgiven. This psalm employs three key words: sin, transgression, and iniquity (vv. 1-2, 5). The psalmist does not intend for each word to convey a precise distinction from the two other words, but instead for the group of words to be parallel in meaning, reflecting different aspects of the same idea. Sin is an offense, a turning from God’s way. Transgression is willful defiance against God by crossing the boundaries He sets for us. Iniquity is a distortion or gross injustice, an absence of respect for God’s will. The psalmist declares that blessed is the one who experiences God’s forgiveness of sin in all its manifestations.

Verses 3 through 5 are the psalmist’s personal testimony of confession. Prior to confession, his spiritual life was weakened. He groaned, bearing the guilt. Though he had an awareness of his need to repent, he was stubborn, and God’s hand was heavy upon him. “Then” marks the contrast of life before confession and after. The psalmist acknowledged his sin to the Lord, and immediately God “forgave the guilt” of his sin (v. 5).

After reflecting on his deliverance, the psalmist calls others to the same course of action (v. 6). Do not be stubborn and resist confession, he pleads (v. 9). Psalm 32 ends with the chasm between the wicked and the righteous (vv. 10-11). The Lord’s unfailing love surrounds those who trust in God’s deliverance and choose to walk on His path.

APPLY THE WORD

Our sin creates barriers between us and God and between us and others. Genuine confession accepts God’s righteous judgment and His power to forgive and restore. It takes honesty, vulnerability, and courage to confront our sin and bring it to God, but we approach God confidently because of His promise of forgiveness and restoration in Jesus (Rom. 8:1-4). Make it a practice to confess your sin before God and others, perhaps with a spouse, friend, or pastor.

1 John 1:10 – Self Esteem – Jim Wilson

Gary Zukav has been sharing his spiritual insights with Oprah since the fall of 1998. In a recent episode, he responded to the following question: “How does one heal the inner feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem?” by saying, “This is the core issue of the human experience. Low self-esteem or lack of self-worth is not merely a psychological or sociological problem. It is the circumstance with which all humans struggle.”

—http://oprah.oxygen.com/rys/gary/rys_gary_main.jhtml, Submitted by Dave Bootsma, check out Dave’s website, “Keepin’ the faith.” at <http://members.truepath.com/newbeginnings/articles.html>

But why is it that everyone feels this way about themselves? Why is it that we feel like we are somehow supposed to be better than we are or that we are better than we think we are? Why do we need others to affirm us; to convince us that we are OK? Doesn’t this suggest that we are not OK? The Bible tells us that we are not OK because of our sin separates us from God.

1 John 1:10-2:2 The Person Who Rationalizes Sin – Ray Stedman

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

There is never any need to sin, but if we find ourselves doing so, we have a perfect defense available to us—a defense that the Father will gladly receive, one that He already assures us will be welcomed. We have an Advocate with the Father who will rush to our defense immediately, but His defense is of no avail to us if we are still defending ourselves. There cannot be two advocates in this case. You either rely on His defense of you—the manifestation of His work on your behalf, which has wiped away every stain, every sin that you ever will commit or ever have committed—or you must rely on your own defense. Here you are, standing before God, defiantly telling Him that you are not to blame, that you have a defense. You can explain all this by saying that you acted under the pressure of circumstances or by claiming that your sin is not what God says it is.

As long as you remain defiant or evasive, you are still justifying and excusing yourself, and therefore the judge can only permit the inevitable, built-in judgment that follows to upset you, overthrow you, harass you, baffle you, and leave you in weakness and folly. But if you will stop justifying yourself, He will justify you. The blood of Jesus Christ cannot cleanse excuses. It only cleanses sins. If you will say, “Yes, it wasn’t the pressure, it wasn’t the circumstances, it wasn’t that these things are not as bad as you say they are; it’s that I chose to be impatient or resentful. I decided to be worried and let anxiety grip me.” If we come to that place, then we discover that there is one who stands before the Father and reveals to Him the righteousness of His life, and God sees us in Him, and we are cleansed and accepted. Strength again flows into the inner person, peace comes back to our hearts, we are cleansed of

our sin, washed and restored to the grace of God. Then we can go back into the same circumstance, under the same pressure, and find our heart kept by the grace and strength of God.

Why does John say, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world?” The answer is this: It is to help us see ourselves. Why is it that these others, whose sins have already been atoned for on the cross, are living in estrangement and hostility to the God who loves them and who seeks after them? The answer is, of course, because they will not believe Him. They will not accept His forgiveness. That is the same reason we Christians are not enjoying the full flow of the Spirit of power, life, love, and wisdom in our experience. It is all available to us, but we will not receive it. Like the world, we are turning our back on it. We are saying to God, “I’m not interested in cleansing, because I really don’t need it. After all, this is not a sin; it is simply a weakness. I can’t help it.” That kind of thing is cutting the ground out from under the whole redemptive work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Though His power is all-available, we do not experience it because of that.

Father, search my heart. Make me open and honest. Teach me to stop excusing myself and accept completely the work of my advocate, Jesus Christ.

Life Application: When we sin, what happens when we justify our actions or make excuses for our disobedience? Do we have God's forgiveness for our past, present, and future sins?

1 JOHN 2

1 John 2:1, 2 Kings 3

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. - 1 John 2:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

There was a young man who, once grown and out of the house, slowly drifted away from his parents' lives. Now fully on his own, the selfish man rarely called home or stopped by for visits, except on rare occasions: when he was short on money. Perfectly content to live most of his life on his own terms, a financial crisis would always bring him crawling back home begging for a parental bailout.

Joram behaved in a similar way in today's reading. As the king of Israel, Joram determined to bring the wayward Moabites back under his thumb, enlisting the help of the kings of Judah and Edom to do so. No sooner had Joram led forth his expedition, however, than we are told they met with a crisis: “the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them” (v. 9).

Notice the responses to this difficult situation. While Joram immediately blamed God, Jehoshaphat's words offered a wiser way: “Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD through him?” (v. 11). These kings were in a fix and only godly Jehoshaphat recognized the importance of God's word in a difficult time. When Elisha the prophet had been called, the word was given: water will come, and Moab will fall. Indeed, God declared that it was too easy simply to provide needed water; He would defeat Moab as well. It turned out that the provision of water was also the provision of victory over Moab.

Understand the message here. To this wicked and rash king Joram, God delivered grace upon grace. But notice too the reason: it was not Joram who secured God's favor, it was Jehoshaphat, godly king in the line of David (vv. 13-14; cf. 1 Kings 22:41-43). Israel's victory over Moab may have been incomplete (vv. 26-27), but it was more than Joram ever deserved. We, like Joram, also receive God's abundant grace because another Righteous One stands by our side “who speaks to the Father in our defense” (1 John 2:1).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Let today's passage probe your heart: do you seek God's wisdom in all you do? Do you wait until you're in trouble before calling upon Him, or even blame God when things don't go your way? Perhaps you wonder whether you're worthy to approach God for help. Reflect on 1 John 1:5-2:2, a reminder that God's blessing of grace and victory over sin comes freely to us because of Christ. Then offer Him your thanks today for the blessing you have in Christ.

1 John 2:1-2, 12, Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6;

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. - 1 John 2:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Two of the basic principles of our legal system are the right of an accused person to know the charges against him and the right to face his accusers in open court. It's hard to imagine a more helpless feeling than being accused of something when you have no real idea what you're being charged with and no opportunity to defend yourself.

A person in this situation needs a defense attorney--and not just a skillful counselor, but someone who knows every fact in the case

and can act with complete authority. We have such a Defender in the heavenly courts, Jesus Christ the perfectly Righteous One.

We can be thankful for this because we are the ones under accusation by an accuser who doesn't follow the rules. "Accuser" is one of Satan's names (Rev. 12:10), and he's very good at that dirty business. The amazing thing is that the devil can take his accusations against us directly into the throne room of heaven.

In the book of Job we see the temporary access Satan has to the presence of God. We might think that the story of Job is one of those Old Testament situations that ended when Jesus came. But Revelation 12 indicates that Satan is still standing before God in heaven "day and night" to accuse His people (v. 10).

The reason Satan the Accuser does this is that he thinks he has a case against us. Even as Christians, we sin every day, and Satan knows that God cannot tolerate sin. The good news is that even though Satan tries to bring us up on charges, our Defender has already applied His blood to our sins and God has declared us not guilty. Having sacrificed Himself for our sins, Jesus now represents us in heaven.

APPLY THE WORD

In Revelation 12 we see how these martyrs overcame Satan.

1 John 2:1-2 1 John 4:10 Hebrews 2:14-18;

[God] loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. - 1 John 4:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Earlier this month we referred to the kind of god that some people have created in their own imagination and pretend to worship: a non-judgmental, easy-going deity who isn't really upset with anybody and welcomes all who come, regardless of the path they take to reach him.

But this 'feel good' deity of the '90s amounts to nothing when it comes to the nature of the true God as revealed in Scripture. God's love is infinite, without a doubt. But so is His holiness, an attribute of God that makes it impossible for Him to tolerate or compromise with sin.

As the psalmist wrote: 'God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses His wrath every day' (Ps. 7:11). Good theology is very important at this point, because it keeps us from charging God with displaying the kind of temperamental outbursts people often show when someone upsets them.

The anger of God suffers from no such defect. It is not an explosive rage that lashes out indiscriminately. Instead, as we said above, it is a fixed, righteous attribute of God's character that must be satisfied before sinful people can enjoy His forgiveness.

That's where the good news of today's reading comes in. Among all the benefits we enjoy as a result of Jesus' death on the cross is the fact that His sacrifice satisfied God's wrath against sin. The words 'atoning sacrifice' (1 John 2:2; 4:10) could be translated as 'satisfaction' or 'propitiation,' a word we don't hear much anymore. The phrase is a little different in Hebrews 2:17 ('make atonement for'), but it's the same term in the original Greek of the New Testament.

The picture here is tremendous. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, this part of Christ's work was foreshadowed by the 'atonement cover' (Exod. 25:17), the golden lid on the ark of the covenant. This was the place where the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15), thus satisfying, or propitiating, God's anger against sin for another year.

But Christ accomplished this permanently. If you know Christ as your Savior, God's anger against your sin has been satisfied, for all eternity!

APPLY THE WORD

Given the work that Christ has done for sin, it's foolish for sinful people to try and satisfy a holy God by their own efforts.

In much the same way, it's foolish for Christians to feel like we have to constantly earn God's favor by our devotion. Here's another issue for our thoughtful consideration. Are you serving God to try to win His approval, or out of gratitude because He has already approved of the Savior to whom you belong? Your answer will make all the difference in your Christian life.

1 John 2:1-2

He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. - Hebrews 9:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

In April, pirates from Somalia attacked the American cargo ship Maersk Alabama. As trained, the crew was hiding, and the pirates demanded to know where they were. Captain Richard Phillips offered to go as the hostage if the pirates would leave the rest of the crew. Captain Phillips endured five days at sea with the pirates. After his rescue, first mate Shane Murphy said the crew had talked with Phillips by phone: "Everyone you see here today has Captain Phillips to thank for their lives and for their freedom."

We find an even greater act of sacrifice in our text today. John addresses his readers as "dear children," reflecting their close relationship. They are his spiritual children. Notice that John shifts from the first person plural "we" in chapter one to the first person singular "I" here. The content of today's passage is more direct and intimate. He articulates his purpose for writing this letter in verse 1. Knowing assuredly that his desire for the Christian community will never be fully met, he reminds his readers of the gospel, the great and precious promise from God.

What happens if anyone does sin? Two scenes illuminate John's answer: Jesus in a courtroom and Jesus in the temple. First, Jesus Christ, the One who has lived righteously, speaks to the Father on behalf of those who have not lived righteously. Jesus is not simply a defense attorney, however, as the second scene makes clear. Jesus is also the Righteous One, our great high priest. Moreover, Jesus—who is without sin—receives God's judgment in our place. He is the "atoning sacrifice" for our sins (v. 2); by His blood our guilt is removed and we are purified (cf. 1:7). In Him we receive forgiveness and purification.

Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (v. 2). Christ's death is sufficient to deal with the sin of every human being (cf. John 1:29). His atoning sacrifice becomes effective in our lives when we "receive him and believe in his name" (John 1:12).

APPLY THE WORD

Today, spend time in prayerful and thankful reflection on the work of Christ on the cross and this tremendous demonstration of the Father's lavish love for us. Adopt Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus that you yourself would "have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Eph. 3:18). Praise God anew for your salvation in Christ by writing a poem, singing a song of worship, or meditating on Isaiah 53.

1 John 2:3-6

"Come, follow me," Jesus said. - Mark 1:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

What demonstrates your love for God most powerfully? Do you truly know God? When asked a similar question relating to how Christians could more faithfully witness about their faith in Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi said, "Live like Jesus did, and the world will listen."

John, concerned about believers' assurance in Christ and their relationship with God, broaches these kinds of questions in our passage today. How may we be certain that we know God the Father? Knowing Him includes more than believing facts about Him. Verse 3 teaches that having confidence that we know God depends upon continual obedience to His commands. When asked about such commands, Jesus claims that all the Law and Prophets derive from the two greatest commandments: love God wholeheartedly and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:34-40).

It is not a new idea to connect knowing God with obeying His commands. The prophet Jeremiah delivered the same message approximately 600 years before John wrote this letter. Jeremiah 31:31-34 anticipates the new covenant that Yahweh will make with His people, when His commands will be written on their hearts and consequently, His people will truly know Him. The new covenant comes through Jesus; the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts and empowers us to walk with God in obedience as He originally intended.

Some distort the truth by claiming that obedience to God enslaves us, but verse 5 turns this assumption upside down. God's love for us is made complete in us through our obedience; in living according to the boundaries God has set for us brings life and goodness that He intends. Also, as 1 John 5:3 teaches, our love for God is demonstrated in obedience.

Our passage concludes with the metaphor of walking (v. 6). When Jesus says, "Come, follow me," He invites us to live as He lived, do what He did, love as He loved, and so on (Mark 1:17). We cannot claim to know Jesus—and certainly not to love Jesus—if we are unwilling to walk like Jesus.

APPLY THE WORD

Verse 4 exposes the hypocrisy of saying one thing and doing another. We cannot have an authentic relationship with God if we disobey His commands. John invites us to be people characterized by obedience, who have the desire to obey. Today, let the Holy

Spirit search your heart for areas where you have been resistant, stubborn, or blatantly disobedient to His leading and God's Word. Repent and seek forgiveness, and invite the Spirit to transform your heart to an obedient posture as you grow in love for God and people.

1 John 2:3-6

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. - John 17:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

It is often said that religion is a private matter best left out of public scrutiny or polite conversation. Some people claim that it's only important that God sees their faith. As we will see, today's passage challenges that thinking on several levels.

To begin with, today's passage shows us that we can know Christians by their obedience to God's commands, such as the command to love. Not only does obedience show others that we are Christians, but it helps us to know for ourselves that we truly believe (v. 3). In fact, verse 3 is the first of several statements in which John tells us how we can have assurance of our own Christian faith.

Perhaps this assurance is better understood by looking at its negative counterpart in verse 4 (cf. 1:6). John states very plainly that the one who claims to know God but whose life doesn't show some element of obedience toward Him is a liar. That's pretty strong language!

It's important to keep in mind the context of this passage. John is not addressing the person who claims to know God and yet breaks one of His commandments. The present verb tenses used here indicate that John is not talking about an occasional act of sin, but rather a lifestyle of disobeying God. As writer Marianne Meye Thompson states, "The real question is not about those who are missing a particular area of God's commandments, but the person who refuses to obey them at all."

Verse 5 goes on to show that obedience can never be separated from love. This verse does not say that the more a Christian obeys, the more God loves that person. But it does say that our love for God and our willingness to do what He asks of us are bound together. And it's not just our love for God that is in mind here. As we seek to obey God, His love becomes more evident in our lives.

APPLY THE WORD

Today's passage is certainly not an invitation to morbid introspection. God is not asking us to scrutinize every area of our lives to see how we are obeying. Instead, today's passage shows that any desire to be obedient to God is evidence that we really do know Him. And growing obedience shows that we are growing in Him. First John 1:5-9 says that sin destroys our fellowship with God, so it only makes sense that obedience deepens our relationship with God and enables us to receive His love more deeply.

1 John 2:5, Mark 12:28-34

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. - 1 John 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Boy Scouts of America celebrate 100 years in 2010. The Boy Scouts are well known for their mantras "Be Prepared" and "Do a Good Turn Daily." Countless stories of Scout preparedness and heroism fill the shelves of scouting history. Their value system and behavior have been shaped by the frequently recited Scout creeds. In today's reading, we discover the Christian's life-defining creed.

After Jesus tells an incriminating parable, the religious leaders begin looking for cause to arrest Him (Mark 12:12). Their first strategy is to "catch him in his words" (v. 13).

In today's reading a teacher of the law asks Jesus to extract the most important commandment (v. 28). If this is indeed a trap, the intent is to force Jesus to exclude something essential from the law. Without hesitation, Jesus quotes Israel's own ancient creed: Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Moses originally delivered these words to God's people after their desert wandering, before entering the Promised Land. Moses reminded them that "because God loved your forefathers" He kept His covenant promises (Deut. 4:37-38). Obedience to God's commandments is viewed as response to His love. Jesus declares that nothing has changed: loving God supremely and unreservedly is our most important response to His love.

Jesus volunteers the second most important commandment (v. 31). In its original context, this commandment was contrasted to hating someone in your heart, seeking revenge, and holding a grudge (Lev. 19:17-18).

Although teachers of the law are painted in a poor light in Mark 12:38-40, the teacher of today's reading is an exception. He

considered Jesus' answer as good; he knew that love of God and neighbor "is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (v. 33); Jesus regarded him as "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). He demonstrated true understanding of God's love and our proper response.

APPLY THE WORD

When asked to identify the greatest commandment in Mark 12:28-34, Jesus answered that it was to love the Lord with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. By keeping these two goals before us, as God enables us by His Spirit, we can orient our lives around God's love. Consider ways that you can incorporate Jesus' words into your daily routine, perhaps through memorization, recitation, or devotional study, so that your life and loves are shaped by His priorities.

1 John 2:9-17

Do not love the world or anything in the world. - 1 John 2:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

An unconfirmed church tradition holds that, as an old man, the apostle John was too old and frail to walk. He was regularly carried to the church assemblies in Ephesus, and all that he would ever say was, "Little children, love one another!" When other members of the church asked why he kept repeating that particular phrase, John reportedly answered, "It is the Lord's command. And if this alone be done, it is enough!"

For the past several days we've been examining in detail this command that so comprehensively dictates how we should live. We're commanded to love everyone from our family and neighbors to strangers and enemies. The mandate to love has no escape clause. But as sinners living in this world, we face a constant struggle between our desire to love as God does and our propensity for straying. Today's passage in John points the way to victory in two particular struggles: hatred within the church and the desire to love worldly things.

When John uses the word brother, he is most likely referring to fellow Christians. Throughout his teaching, John repeatedly stresses his deep desire for love to reign in the body of Christ. Here he says that loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is the difference between walking in complete darkness and enjoying perfect light. John's assurances to children, fathers, and young men all encourage believers of their standing in Christ, and love for each other is the confirmation of the reality of the light of Christ reigning in their hearts.

On the other hand, love for the world is a dangerous trap. John isn't prohibiting love for unsaved people; rather, he's warning against adopting a worldly philosophy. The world lusts after selfish desires and pleasures, placing hope in possessions and achievements. A Christian who exhibits that kind of lifestyle cannot succeed in selfless love. What's worse, a person who invests time and resources in the things of this world will miss out on the everlasting benefit of loving others.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you want to find out what and who you truly love, examine your schedule and your checkbook. What do you spend your time and money on? Look back at how you've spent your time over the last week or so. Are you spending any time helping others? Have you been available for people in need? Are you using your money only to meet your own desires? Make a heartfelt decision to change as God directs you.

1 John 2:12-14

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. - Revelation 2:7b

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the best-loved and best-selling Christian classics *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, traces the allegorical journey of Christian from his home in the City of Destruction to the Eternal City. Each point along this journey represents a trial, temptation, or triumph in the Christian life. Despite the fact that this book was written over 450 years ago, it remains popular today.

Today's passage also addresses the various stages of the Christian life. Although John calls the entire community "my dear children" (2:1), in today's passage, he addresses specific stages of Christian maturity.

John begins by focusing on "children," or new believers. First, he assures this group that indeed their sins have been forgiven (v. 12). Second, John assures these new believers of their relationship with the Father (v. 13). Just as it was true in John's day, it's still the case that these two areas are frequently the most doubted by those who are new to the faith. So John reminds them of these foundational truths: their sins have been completely forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ (1:7) and they are now children of God,

the Father (3:1).

Next, John focuses on the “fathers,” or those who are mature in the faith. It’s interesting that John writes almost the exact same thing twice to this group (vv. 13-14). These individuals have known Christ for a long time, and their relationship with Him has been tested and has deepened over the years. Perhaps John is reminding them that although they are getting older and have been through much, the Lord whom they have known is changeless.

Finally, John focuses on the “young men,” or those who are somewhere in between the very young and the mature in the faith. These individuals are learning what it means to experience the enemy’s attacks. They are learning how to stand firm through prayer and how to become strong through God’s Word (v. 14).

APPLY THE WORD

Don’t let any of the designations used in the passage make you feel excluded! The term father could be expanded to include anyone who has known the Lord for a long time and who has nurtured others in the faith. The term child includes all who are relatively young in the faith. And young man refers to those who are somewhere in between; this person is progressing in the faith and has experienced God’s victory in some areas. Reflect on your “stage” in the Christian life and what these verses say concerning that stage.

1 John 2:12-17

The man who does the will of God lives forever. - 1 John 2:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

When Thomas Jefferson arrived in France as U.S. ambassador in 1785, he called on the French minister for foreign affairs. ‘You replace Monsieur Franklin?’ asked the minister.

‘I succeed him,’ was the reply. ‘No one can replace him.’

We would consider it a compliment if someone called us irreplaceable. In the spiritual sense, we are! No one else can step in and fulfill God’s plan for us the way we can and that should be an encouragement to us in each of the seasons of faith. The value and importance of each person in God’s family is obvious from today’s reading. There is some debate about why John wrote to his audience this way. If he was thinking of chronological age, it seems odd that he would put fathers between children and young men not once, but twice. It could be that he was speaking to believers in various stages of spiritual life without trying to be chronologically exact.

The message is clear in any case. John actually uses two different terms for ‘children.’ In verse 12 the word could be translated ‘infants,’ while verse 13 refers to children who are under instruction. For believers in this stage of life, knowing that their sins are forgiven and that they have a heavenly Father are emphasized truth the writer of Hebrews called ‘the elementary teachings about Christ’ (Heb. 6:1).

Spiritual parents, those in the mature years, have passed from basic knowledge of God to what John Stott calls a ‘deep communion with the Father.’ The message to these people is the same in each case, with the emphasis on the maturity of their faith and the implied leadership this gives them in the church.

The ‘young men’ are described as strong and vigorous and right in the thick of spiritual warfare. Youth is a season of faith in which we often fight the battles that deepen and strengthen our faith and prepare us for spiritual leadership.

The final three verses of this text show us why we need to be at our best in each season of faith. The world is always exerting its downward pull on us, throwing lust and pride in our way. But through His salvation, the daily fellowship He offers us, and the strength He provides, God has given us everything we need to win over the world.

APPLY THE WORD

The verse for today gives us a great word of promise and assurance that God is pleased by our commitment to be faithful to Him.

Someone has said that as Christians, we are ‘immortal in the will of God.’ Maybe the author of that quote got the idea from 1 John 2:17. Jesus taught us to pray that God’s will would be done on earth (Matt. 6:10). Today, let’s make ourselves available to Him for the accomplishment of His will in our lives.

1 John 2:12-14

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. - Revelation 12:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls, Children of All Ages,” shouts the ringmaster playfully as he welcomes visitors to the Greatest Show on Earth from underneath the stripes of his clownish top hat. This thunderous welcome address can be heard inside a three-ring circus as the ringmaster hopes to grab the attention of the entire audience. In today’s passage, the author employs a similar rhetorical device, but this is no playful, clownish exhortation.

For the second time, the author of 1 John addresses his readers as “dear children” (cf. 2:1). He employs this affectionate term ten times throughout the letter. It refers to everyone in the congregation: men and women, young and old. It is important to note that the terms fathers and men do not exclude women. Rather, in the original language of the New Testament, masculine plural nouns like “brothers,” “men,” and “fathers” include both males and females. Just as we might hear “Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls,” verses 12 through 14 today might sound like: “Dear children: Fathers and mothers, young men and young women. Everyone, pay attention.” Notice that these are titles for family members, reminding us that the body of Christ is a family of brothers and sisters, spiritual fathers and mothers, with Jesus our elder brother and God our father (cf. Heb. 2:11).

It’s helpful at this point to re-read 1 John 1. How many echoes of chapter 1 do you hear in our passage today? The author reiterates the fundamentals of our identity to prepare us for the remainder of chapter 2. Verse 13, however, introduces a new idea: “You have overcome the evil one.” Verse 14 includes enhancements: “You are strong and the word of God lives in you.” In this immediate context, the word of God refers to the message heard from the beginning and the command to love one another. Therefore, standing strong means keeping the word of God fresh in our lives, and the consequence is victory over the Evil One (cf. Rev. 12:10-11).

APPLY THE WORD

God’s Word is powerful and effective. It pierces the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts (Heb. 4:12), guides our path (Ps. 119:105), and arms us against the Evil One (2 John 2:14; Eph. 6:17). Memorizing Scripture guards us from sin; its roots grow deep to teach, rebuke, correct, and train us in righteousness (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 119:11; 2 Tim. 3:16). Take the next step in the discipline of Scripture memory.

Related Resources:

Memorizing His Word: why do it? links to resources

Memory Verses by Topic -consider bookmarking to facilitate review

1 John 2:15-17

Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? - James 4:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

When rescuers were finally able to pull a middle-aged man from the wreckage of a horrible car accident, he was taken to a nearby hospital. But it soon became apparent that he would die. As the chaplain comforted him, the man, who was a Christian, exclaimed, “As I look squarely at eternity, I realize now just how much I wasted my life on things that don’t matter.”

What a sad revelation! Today’s passage offers a strong challenge to those who “waste their lives on things that don’t matter.” John opens this passage with uncompromising words: “Do not love the world or anything in the world.” At first glance, verse 15 may seem at odds with John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” Most likely, John is using the word world differently in these two texts. In John 3:16, world refers to the lost people of the world, whereas in 1 John 2:15, world refers to an entire system of beliefs and values—what we might call a “worldview.” This worldview is completely opposed to God and His ways.

To clarify what he means, John lists three elements of this worldview in verse 16. First, he warns against “cravings.” These are misplaced appetites for some of our most powerful drives such as for food, for intimacy, and for recognition.

Next, John talks about the “lust of the eyes.” This includes both what we can see and what we can imagine. This can best be summarized as our tendency to look at the external qualities without really inquiring about what’s inside. For example, many people are tempted by the pursuit of wealth because of all they imagine it will enable them to possess.

Finally, John addresses pride, or that self-sufficiency that attempts to manufacture what God has promised—or what He has forbidden—rather than humbly allowing Him to give what we need.

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s passage doesn’t condemn everything material as evil. Instead, it focuses on the affection that we have for the “stuff” around us. In other words, it’s not so much about what kind of car we drive, but rather the reasons we might have for wanting it or the

intensity of our desire for it. What John is saying, however, is that we can't ever let these things distract us from the eternal: God Himself. All these things will eventually be gone, but God is everlasting. That's a reminder we all need to hear again.

The Father opposes the world: 1 John 2:15-17

The Holy Spirit opposes the flesh: Gal. 5:16-7

The Son opposes the Devil: Luke 4, 1 John 3:8

1 John 2:16

What other gods could we have besides the Lord? Plenty. For Israel there were the Canaanite Baals, those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution. For us there are still the great gods Sex, Shekels, and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: self), and the other enslaving trio, Pleasure, Possessions, and Position, whose worship is described as "The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some. Indeed the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run his life becomes his god and the claimants for this prerogative are legion. In the matter of life's basic loyalty, temptation is a many-headed monster. James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.

THE WORLD...

1. Originally created good (Ge. 1:31).
2. Cursed and corrupted through Satan (Gen. 3:1-24).
3. Now enemy occupied territory with Satan as God (2Cor. 4:4, John 12:31, 16:11).
4. Whole world lies in his power (1John 5:19).
5. Permeated by Satanic influence, a defiling (2Peter 1:4, 2:20, James 1:27), deceptive (2Cor 11:14-15, Rev. 12:9), scheme (Eph. 6:11), that is at work around and in us; designed to convince us to conform (Rom. 12:2) to a mindset and lifestyle that are essentially anti-god and pro-self (cf. 1 Peter 5:8, Eph. 1:1-3, 6:12, 16, Isa. 14:11-14). (From J. Grant Howard, *Balancing Life's Demands*, p. 134)

A scuba diver lives in the water but breathes the air—he takes his environment with him. Believers are exhorted to be in the world but not of the world.

1 John 2:17

"Some day," D.L. Moody used to say, "you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now!" He preached his last sermon in Kansas City on Nov 23, 1899, from the text Luke 14:18: "And they all with one consent began to make excuse." When he gave the invitation, fifty stood to their feet and went across the street into the inquiry room. He was too ill to continue the Kansas City campaign, so he took the train back to Northfield. On Friday, Dec 22, he went "home." Five years before his home going Moody had said, "If it can be said, faithfully said, over my grave, 'Moody has done what he could,' that will be the most glorious epitaph." Instead, 1 John 2:17 was chosen: "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever." W. Wiersbe, *The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*, p. 209.

1 John 2:17 Esther 2:1-4

The world and its desires pass away. - 1 John 2:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

In a recently published book of essays, one woman writes a tragic account of her pursuit of independence from others: "The reality was ... I did not know how to live in a decent way with another human being... I tormented every man who'd ever loved me: I called them on everything... There was, of course, more than a grain of truth in everything I said, but those grains, no matter how numerous, need not have become the sandpile that crushed the life out of love."

This same wistful regret echoes through the first verses of today's reading. We do not know King Xerxes's emotional state at this time, but we can draw clues from the historical context. King Xerxes divorced Queen Vashti in the third year of his reign. He didn't marry Queen Esther until his seventh year as king. In the interlude, King Xerxes made a disastrous expedition to Greece. In 480 b.c. his navy faced defeat at Salamis, and in 479 b.c. his army was routed at Plataea. His ambitions for expanding his empire must have deflated, along with his power-hungry ego.

So when the text tells us matter-of-factly that King Xerxes "remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her" (v. 1), one wonders whether or not he regretted his decision to banish Queen Vashti. His failed political conquest left him lonely and longing for the marital companionship he once shared with Vashti. At least that's how his personal attendants saw it. As a

solution to his melancholy, they propose that the king fulfill his royal decree and “let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti” (v. 4).

This passage illustrates the emptiness of pursuits apart from God's kingdom. King Xerxes ruled the largest empire of his time, but it wasn't enough. He wanted to strive to conquer more territory. King Xerxes had a harem full of beautiful women, but he wanted a queen. Even all that his power and pleasure afforded him left him like a poor man, begging for more. Without God, his life would always be a life of striving, rather than of rest and peace.

APPLY THE WORD

Read 1 John 2:15-17. It contrasts the temporal desires of the world with the eternal pursuits of heaven. One example of the world's desires is pursuit of wealth. Open your checkbook register or this month's Quicken report for a quick inventory: Where have I invested for God and where have I invested for myself? If you haven't “put your money where your mouth is,” begin to make changes and commitments in giving of your finances as well as time and skills to your church and ministries of Christ.

1 John 2:15-17 Romans 12:1-2;

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. - Romans 12:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

When Nigerian believer Femi Adeyemi was a student in America, he was once asked, “In what ways do you see Americans compromising the gospel? If you could use one word for your answer, what would it be?” Femi replied, “Worldliness. American Christians look no different from the world. When I look at the church, I see little difference between non-Christians and Christians. We talk and dress the same, tell the same jokes, watch the same talk shows, and the list of similarities goes on and on... Americans sacrifice their families to achieve material comfort. Many seem unready for the cost of discipleship if it will bring pain.”

Worldliness, especially in our leisure choices, has invaded the church. Along these lines, Romans 12:1–2 urges us to draw a strong contrast. Unbelievers conform to the pattern of the world, which is evil and corrupt. “The whole world is a prisoner of sin” (Gal. 3:22). “Conform” means to be molded or shaped according to the world's corrupt and godless standards.

As believers, on the other hand, we are to offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” to God, a picture of worship and self-denial. We don't accomplish this by our own knowledge or willpower, but rather our minds are transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. As a result, we know God's will, act in holy ways, and please Him in leisure and every other area of life.

The 1 John passage similarly portrays love of the world and love of the Father as polar opposites (cf. James 4:4). The former can only last temporarily the latter lasts for eternity. “The world” consists of “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does” (1 John 2:16). The world is characterized by pride, covetousness, greed, vanity, and selfishness.

APPLY THE WORD

Would an outside observer see any differences between the way you practice leisure and the way unbelievers do? Reflect on this question today, meditating on how to be salt and light in this area and asking the Holy Spirit to bring important issues to your mind.

1 John 2:15-17 Esther 5:11-14

After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin ... gives birth to death. - James 1:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some describe Wilt Chamberlain as the best basketball player to have ever played the game. Though he retired from the NBA in 1973, he still held the record for the most average points scored per game at the time of his death in 1999. His personal life wasn't as admirable. In his biography published in 1991, Chamberlain made scandalous boasts that he'd had tens of thousands of sexual partners. Chamberlain exemplifies what we learn from today's reading: boasting proves not so much what we have as what we desperately want.

Haman spent a great deal of time and effort boasting to his friends and family of his wealth, his virility, his power and prominence (v. 11). He added an important detail to his boasts, a chord of irony for all of us who know about Esther's plan. “I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave!” (v. 12). His boasting proved the pride of his heart. He believed two things of himself: I deserve all that I have, and I deserve even more. How quickly boasting gave way to craving.

Haman admitted that he couldn't enjoy a single one of his boasts because of Mordecai. “All this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate” (v. 13). Haman was like the hungry man of 1 John 2, boasting of all he had and craving what he had not. Haman, like Xerxes, pursued that which would forever elude him. Tragically, he couldn't see that sin is a

tyrant; it always demands more of us, keeping our hearts restless and our souls starving.

Verse 14 proves the destructive nature of sin as we see in today's key verse. Pride became boasting, because Haman couldn't stay silent about how great he was. Boasting produced cravings and desires, because Haman couldn't be satisfied until he had it all. Craving produced hatred, because Mordecai was the one man standing in Haman's way. And hatred produced plans for murder. How quickly "harmless" bragging gave way to great wickedness.

APPLY THE WORD

In Matthew 5, Jesus described anger as murder and lust as adultery. Today we see another sin of the mind and heart, pride, at the root of Haman's sin. These aren't "small" sins simply because they might be less noticeable to others. They can be our greatest spiritual pitfalls, leading us into a progression of other sins.

Take inventory of these three sins of the heart: pride, hatred, and lust. Where do you need to make confession to God? Take another step and confess to a brother or sister in Christ and ask for their prayer support in the battle against these sins (cf. James 5:16).

1 John 2:18-19

There are four basic categories:

- 1) Those who think they are saved, but aren't. Matthew 7:21-3
- 2) Those we think are saved, but aren't. 1 John 2:18-19
- 3) Those who are saved, but don't act like it: Corinthians.
- 4) Those who are saved, and they act like it.

1 John 2:18-23

No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. - 1 John 2:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

Over the past few years, the U.S. government has spent millions of dollars reissuing paper currency. In addition to a new, off-center design, several other features were added, such as a watermark. Although this was costly, it was considered necessary to make counterfeits more difficult.

Consumers and businesses lose a great deal from counterfeit money, yet the consequences of spiritual counterfeits are far more serious. That's why John warned his readers about these pretenders, whose offer of salvation was a deadly counterfeit.

John begins this warning by linking the appearance of "antichrists" to the "last hour," the time between Christ's ascension and His second coming. The term antichrist literally means "against Christ." Jesus Himself warned about people who would come claiming to be the "Christ" (Matt. 24:3-5, 11), and Paul gave similar warnings (Acts 20:29, 30). Here John points out that even though these individuals claimed to be Christians, the fact that they left the church showed that they never really were Christians. They would not be able to do what they were doing if they had truly been believers (v. 19). Although these were specific individuals in John's day, every age has known such individuals, who are against Christ and promise a way to God apart from Him. Although these false teachers are scary, John says that true believers have an anointing from the Holy One (v. 20). John reminds his listeners that every believer knows what is needed for salvation. In other words, the gospel is plain enough for all to understand. It's true that we keep growing in our understanding of the Lord and His Word, but the knowledge needed for salvation is not reserved for only a few select individuals. Even the least educated Christian doesn't need some kind of "extra" knowledge—the gospel is all anyone ever needs.

APPLY THE WORD

First John emphasizes two essential characteristics about the true God: God is light (1:5) and God is love (4:16). Both characteristics are twisted or denied by modern cults. For example, cults often use deception or hatred to gain members.

Cults often claim to have some "secret knowledge" that promises life or salvation. But the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is plainly set forth in the Bible for all to examine.

1 John 2:24-27

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. - 2 Timothy 2:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

It's often said that the best way to detect a lie is to know the truth. This is the case whether we're dealing with counterfeit money or counterfeit truth. Recall from yesterday's study that John warned his audience to be aware of false teachers, or antichrists. He reminded them that they did not need some kind of additional special knowledge for their salvation. Instead he redirected their focus back to this essential truth: Jesus is the Christ (v. 22).

In today's passage, John again reminds His listeners to hang on to what they heard from the beginning—from the first time they heard the gospel message. They did not need something new, they needed to cling to the knowledge that they already had.

There's always the temptation to think that the gospel message is too simple. Maybe John's audience was tempted to make the gospel sound more sophisticated or philosophical, just as those against Christ were attempting to do. We may be tempted to do the same thing at times, by trying to make the gospel message sound "more relevant" for today. But the absolute core of the gospel is, of course, that Jesus is the Christ. Only by steadfastly remaining in this truth can one remain in the Father, and thereby receive the promise of eternal life (v. 25).

In addition to special or secret knowledge, these antichrists may have been teaching people that some type of spiritual anointing was also necessary to gain eternal life. Once again, John reminds these believers that they have already received all that they need to understand the gospel and to remain in Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

When John says that believers "do not need anyone to teach you" (v. 27), he is referring to the false teachers, the antichrists, who are outside the church. One of the best ways to "see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you" (v. 24) is to receive solid, Bible-based teaching.

1 John 2:28, Matthew 24:36-51

Continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. - 1 John 2:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

The first rule for a job interview: be on time! First impressions count, and what is your future employer to think if you arrive late? Best-case scenario, he'll figure that you may have gotten lost. Even still, he'll wish you had driven the route the day before and verified your directions. Worst-case scenario, he'll consider you lazy. Either way, you certainly can't count on getting hired.

Our passage today illuminates how the church needs to be ready for Jesus' second coming. Will He find us prepared, like the wise and faithful servant (vv. 45, 46)? Or will we resemble the wicked and foolish servant who failed to expect His master's return (vv. 48-50)?

The church of Jesus Christ can make herself ready for His return in three different ways. First, we should prepare for His coming just as Noah did (v. 37). Noah believed God when He said that He would flood the earth. He obeyed God by building an ark. For a period of many, many years, he woke up every day with a future reality as his compass. The flood is coming; I've got to be ready. Are our lives characterized by that kind of urgency? Are we fulfilling our individual callings? Are we warning our lost friends and neighbors about eternal punishment apart from Christ?

Second, the church can be ready by keeping watch. The entire chapter of Matthew 24 describes the events that foreshadow the coming of Christ. Are we looking at today's events with an eternal perspective? We don't know when Christ will come (vv. 36, 42), but we can and should be watchful.

Finally, we can be ready by choosing obedience rather than sin in our daily lives (v. 44). We don't know when to expect Christ. Will He come and find us shamefully disgracing His name and neglecting our responsibilities (v. 49)? Or will He find us faithfully and wisely executing His business?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Consider the faithful example of Noah. He spent many years building the ark. He didn't get preoccupied with the stuff of life so much that he forgot what God had called him to do. In fact, his calling became the very stuff of his life. He also didn't allow himself to be influenced by the wickedness of his generation (cf. Gen. 6). Are you, like Noah, faithfully working for God day by day? Are you, like Noah, walking with God rather than the crowd?

1 John 2:28-3:3

To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. - John 1:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

For years Sergei wanted to be a part of a family. At age ten, he had never known family life. He had orphanage friends, but it wasn't the same. With each birthday, his dream faded, but it never completely died. Then at age eleven it finally happened: an American couple adopted him as their son and brought him to the United States. Within a year, his self-confidence grew alongside his laughter and smile.

Deep down, all of us share this same desire for belonging, a desire that can only ultimately be fulfilled as a child of God. Perhaps the greatest privilege we have as children of God is the confidence to stand before Him. The shame to which John refers (v. 28) most likely has to do with the shame of those who have denied Christ. Remember John's encouragement about forgiveness and purification through the blood of Christ (1:9). It's precisely because of this that these believers can stand confidently before the Father—a confidence that nonbelievers can never have.

Yet along with privilege comes responsibility: believers are to do what is right (v. 29). Recall that 1 John 2:3 says that doing His commands confirms that we know Him. In the same way, doing what's right doesn't make someone a child of God; rather, doing what's right confirms that a person has truly been born again. Both these privileges and responsibilities cause John to marvel at God's love for His children (3:1).

It may be easier for us to understand what it means to be a child of God by considering newborn babies. Just as a baby does not bring about its own birth, so too becoming a child of God is not something that we could bring about on our own.

APPLY THE WORD

Consider parallels between physical and spiritual birth. We've listed a few in today's study, but you'll no doubt come up with several more. For example, just as we are born into a certain physical family, so too we are forever born again into the family of God. Just as physical families have certain family resemblances, so too members of God's family resemble each other to the extent that they resemble their Father. What are some other ways in which physical birth and childhood illustrate being a child of God?

1 JOHN 3

1 John 3:1 Luke 15:11-32

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! - 1 John 3:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Buddhists tell their own story of a prodigal son. A son leaves home, loses all he has, and becomes wretchedly poor. His father searches but can't find him. Much later, the son returns to town, but fails to recognize either his father or his former home. The father doesn't reveal this, and instead employs his son as a household servant.

The son does his job faithfully, and advances in rank until he's in charge of the estate. The father is pleased with the change in his son's character. On his deathbed, he calls everyone together, reveals the son's true identity, and all rejoice.

This is rather different from Jesus' parable! In the Buddhist version, the father (Buddha) rewards his "enlightenment"—merit earned through good works. By contrast, the Christian version focuses on God's grace and mercy.

A younger son selfishly and impatiently asks for his share of the family estate. Rejecting his father's authority, he leaves home and goes off to lead a wild, sinful lifestyle. When his money runs out and a famine strikes, he's forced to take a job feeding pigs.

The reversal is shocking. From being a "party animal," the son falls to coveting the food of animals unclean to Jews. Brought low, he reasons that since even the family servants have enough to eat, he's got nothing to lose by returning home. He also realizes, though, that because of his sin he deserves nothing, so he conceives a humble, repentant speech (v. 21).

Verse 20 is one of the most remarkable verses in all the parables. The father is watching for him. Is he angry or bitter? No. Filled with compassion, he runs to embrace his lost son. Brushing aside the rehearsed speech, the father declares an all-out celebration. It's as though a dead person has returned to life (vv. 24, 32; cf. Rom. 6:11)!

1 John 3:1-3

Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. - Romans 5:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Searching desperately for Sohrab, Amir visited a dilapidated orphanage in war-ravaged Afghanistan. Barefoot children in frayed sweaters played among steel-framed beds without mattresses. The orphanage director explained that there is “little shelter, almost no food, no clothes, and no clean water.” Taliban leaders visited regularly to exploit the children in exchange for money; if he denied them one child, they would take ten. Yet the orphanage director continued to sacrifice everything to care for the children. When this scene from *The Kite Runner* ends, a tiny ray of hope flickers that one day redemption and healing will come to the children. Similar hope of renewal fills our passage today.

Chapter 3 erupts with celebration (v. 1). God, Creator and King, calls us His children; He is our Father. We are adopted into His family. The word *lavished* evokes images of royal hospitality extended toward a pauper. The Father's love is abundant, expansive, and immeasurable.

John illuminates the identity of God's children. Those who receive Jesus and believe in His name inherit this birthright (see John 1:12), not by natural birth, but through spiritual rebirth. Paul teaches that the Spirit testifies to our adoption and we are co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6-7). God's children are united with Christ: just as the unbelieving world did not recognize Jesus as sent from God, it will not recognize us (v. 1).

Notice the present and future indicators (v. 2). We are now God's children; at Christ's return, we will be like Him in His purity, “for we shall see him as he is”—not as in His earthly ministry, not even by faith as we do now, but in the fullness of His heavenly glory (v. 3). The hope of becoming like Christ in the future ignites our desire to become like Him in the present. In response to God's love and this future hope, we obey Christ's commands and trust that presently God is transforming us into Christ's likeness through the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

APPLY THE WORD

Today, in response to God's lavish love for you in Christ, spend time in prayerful adoration and thanksgiving. Meditate on the Father's love for you, focusing on these passages: Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 124:1-8; Luke 15:11-32. If you feel like expressing your thoughts, you could write a poem or song of gratitude as you bask in the Father's love. Or sing “How Deep the Father's Love for Us” or another worship song that expresses your praise for God's love.

1 John 3:1-3

But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. - 1 John 3:2b

TODAY IN THE WORD

Dr. George Sweeting, the former chancellor of Moody Bible Institute, tells how enduring the hardships of the Great Depression “taught my family many life-building lessons. We learned the importance of each family member as we struggled to meet the monthly mortgage payment... The Depression days also taught us thrift and frugality... We also learned the value of money and the importance of avoiding credit.” Finally, Dr. Sweeting says, “The Great Depression strengthened our faith... I look back with gratitude for the lessons we learned.”

Dr. Sweeting offers an example of the positive effect that dire circumstances can have on us. God wants our trials to have a purifying--or sanctifying--effect on our characters (Jas. 1:2-4). He also wants our anticipation of heaven to have the same purifying effect.

We certainly have all the reasons we need to motivate us toward holy living as we look forward to Christ's return. God has lavished His redeeming love on us for no other reason than His great grace. We have gone from being God's enemies to being His children--literally, His “born ones” who are also God's heirs.

But as satisfying as being God's heirs is now, John says that so much more awaits us in heaven that we can't grasp it. We can be sure it will be far beyond anything we can imagine or dream.

John does give us one important glimpse of what will happen; he says that when Christ appears our bodies will undergo a transformation that will make us “like him.”

We're called to be like Jesus Christ spiritually right now. But when He comes back for His church, “We will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:51-52). We will be able to imitate Christ without the battles of sin.

APPLY THE WORD

In what specific ways does your hope of heaven, and the anticipation of seeing Christ, affect your day-to-day life?

1 John 3:1 Matthew 19:13-22

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! - 1 John 3:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

A popular children's hymn goes as follows: "Jesus loves the little children/ All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white/ They are precious in His sight!" Contrast this with William Penn's observation, "Men are generally more careful of their horses and dogs than of their children."

Unfortunately, the disciples tended to resemble Penn's remark! In Jesus' day, children weren't considered citizens, although it's likely they were well-loved in many families. In religious matters, most people didn't think children were capable of independent thinking. These attitudes help explain why the disciples rebuked those who brought their children to Jesus (v. 13).

Yet this account helps us understand some of Jesus' attitudes toward prayer and how He modeled it for His disciples. The passage doesn't give direct teaching on prayer, nor does it record a specific prayer uttered by Jesus. Instead, it shows us that all human beings, especially those who might be overlooked, are invited to pray.

Although laying on hands was a known practice for blessing, Mark adds the tender comment that Jesus "took the children in his arms" (Mark 10:16). This action shows us at least two things about how Jesus prayed for people. First, Jesus' prayer was personal. He didn't stand far off and offer some blanket blessing for a large group. We get the impression that He took each child in His arms and prayed a special blessing for that child. Second, Jesus touched people as He prayed for them. Earlier in Matthew, we learn that Jesus touched a man with leprosy as He healed him (Matt. 8:3).

APPLY THE WORD

Although there are certainly times when touching another person isn't appropriate, in our culture we're generally too hesitant to touch others. But touch can be a powerful blessing, especially with prayer. Consider what it would mean to gently place your hand on the shoulder of a grieving brother or sister as you pray for them. Or the comfort your Bible study or Sunday school class could give when you lay hands on an individual who needs prayer. What a simple way that we can follow the example of Jesus.

1 John 3:2

We know that when he appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. - 1 John 3:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

At the age of 12, Doris Duke inherited a fortune of \$80 million. Her father, James Buchanan Duke, controlled two successful companies and was the benefactor of Duke University. He died in 1925, leaving his only daughter with an unimaginable inheritance and the description of "the richest girl in the world."

Today's text focuses on our future inheritance in Christ. It's easiest to think of our future sanctification, often called glorification, as a trust promised for the children of God (3:1, 2). The will was drawn up at the death of Christ. When Christ died and rose, His rights and privileges as Son become available to those who believed in Him (cf. John 1:12). The Father guarantees full payment, and He's already paid a deposit (cf. Eph. 1:14). At the second coming of Christ, He will pay in full (3:2).

Like Christ, we will then enjoy all the benefits of being in God's family. We will walk with God as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. Temptations, fears, and doubt will cease to plague us. Relationships will no longer suffer because of our own sin. We won't be subject to the approval of others, but will be fully approved by God. These are some of the ultimate gifts of our sanctification we can anticipate.

While God guarantees this for our future, we still strive for personal holiness today. The apostle John hasn't forgotten the lesson Jesus taught him (see yesterday's reading): "continue in him" (2:28). Stay close to Christ, acknowledge His presence, and let His words dwell in you. Our sanctification depends on our identification with Jesus. We began in Him for salvation and now we must "continue in Him" for sanctification. It's because "he is righteous ... that everyone who does what is right has been born of him" (v. 29).

Our hope in Christ for the future leads us to personal purity for today (3:3). It's not a "have-to" but a "want-to" attitude.

APPLY THE WORD

God rewards those who long for His return (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8)! Many things keep us from focusing on our future hope in Christ: the cares of today, the prominence of what's visible over the invisible, the attacks of the Enemy against our faith. Pray for God to strengthen your eagerness for Jesus' return. And not surprisingly, when you hope for Christ's return, you will more readily share the good news with others who don't know Him.

1 John 3:2 John 14:1-6

We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. - 1 John 3:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

The late preacher and author Vance Havner told of the time when, as a boy, he carved the inscription 'Heaven I hope to win' on a chimney brick outside his home. Returning to the house more than fifty years later he found the inscription, well worn but with the words 'heaven' and 'hope' still visible. Havner said of that experience, 'I have my Savior's word about [heaven]: 'If it were not so, I would have told you' (John 14:2). That settles it. If it weren't true, He would let us know. And on that rock I stand.'

Havner was right on target. Heaven and hope are two words that go together. Our hope of heaven is as sure as Jesus' truthfulness. He promised us a home with Him, and urged us to trust Him so completely for it that we can rest assured.

Unlike belief in hell, belief in heaven is a popular item today. We see books, magazines, television shows, and even Hollywood films about angels everywhere.

But like most popular movements, we need to make sure that what is being said lines up with the Bible's teaching on heaven and how people get there. If not, a lot of people could be led down the wrong path and miss heaven. That's how much correct theology matters. And that's where much of the popular belief falls short.

Actually, the truth is so much better than fiction anyway. The best thing about heaven is Jesus' presence; heaven is being with Him (v. 3).

But the Savior didn't leave us in the dark about how a person can reach heaven. In His exchange with Thomas, Jesus answered for all time the question far too many people today are still fuzzy about. There aren't many paths to paradise.

Jesus is the one preparing heaven for those who believe in Him. And He's the one coming back to take His people home. So He has the right to claim, 'I am the way.'

We Christians have been accused of being heavenly minded. Guilty as charged! Paul said if our hope in Christ is limited to this life, we are to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19). But like Vance Havner said, Jesus' promise is a rock on which we can stand.

APPLY THE WORD

Our hope of Christ's returning to take us to heaven should have a purifying affect on us today (1 John 3:3). When we see Jesus, John says, we will finally be like Him. Ideally, that moment will be the culmination of our lifelong quest to be as much like Jesus as we can be. Are you carrying around an attitude or action that isn't helping you practice the purity of life Jesus wants? Determine to get rid of the problem now. You'll have to leave it behind someday anyway!

1 John 3:1-24

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us! - 1 John 3:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Online dating has changed the way millions of men and women approach romance. Instead of spotting your potential loved one across a crowded room, people now scroll through a variety of potential candidates on a computer screen. The single person looking for love enters his or her personal data into a computerized Web site or online dating program. The program will screen those characteristics, finding the closest matches. Web sites like e-Harmony and Match.com claim that their techniques have produced hundreds of thousands of marriages and long-term relationships. No wonder they are popular! Don't we all hunger to find our one true love?

Everyone wants to feel loved in a special and intimate way. A good deal of our self worth comes from knowing that someone knows us and loves us. Famed psychologist Abraham Maslow described our need for love as an important platform in his pyramid, the Hierarchy of Needs. We all need to be loved.

In today's passage, John describes the way God loves us. Chapter 3 emphasizes the type of love God gives us. It is not stingy or reserved. It is "great" and "lavish" (v. 1). This is an effusive love, an over-the-top type of love. God's love toward us is amazing. We also know that we are His children, and we are not yet in our final state.

The second part of verse 2 is important. God's love promises to transform us. When God appears, we will be made like Him. His love will "purify" us (v. 3). This purity excludes sin. John warns us to keep in mind the final transformation that God promises to us as His children to motivate our behavior now. We are not to be like those who do not know Him. We are to love others, as God has

loved us (v. 10).

God's dramatic love for us required great sacrifice (v. 16). Our love for others should mimic His sacrifice. Our words and our actions should be marked and transformed by love (v. 18). How great a love God has given us!

APPLY THE WORD

All of us are searching for love. Sometimes, though, we look for it in the wrong places. We may even start to feel bad about ourselves because we are not loved as we think we should be. Whether you are single or married, an adult or a child, you know how important it is to experience love. Today, take time to thank God for the lavish way He loves you, and look for opportunities to extend this extravagant, sacrificial love to others in your life.

1 John 3:3, James 5:7-9

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. - James 5:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Dr. John MacArthur points out the central place that the hope of Christ's return should play in the lives of His people. 'Three times in [James 5:7-9], James refers to the believer's great hope, the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The realization that things won't always be as they are now, that believers are headed for 'the city ... whose architect and builder is God' (Heb. 11:10), provides great hope for those undergoing persecution. The more persecuted a church is the more eagerly it anticipates the return of Jesus Christ.'

James' readers needed patience for several reasons. Being patient in the face of

persecution was one of them. We pointed out yesterday that some of these Christians were almost certainly among those being exploited by the rich and powerful. One way we react to mistreatment is to strike out at others, even those who aren't responsible for our problem (James 5:9).

But patient endurance is the better way. At this point we need to turn to James 1:2-4 and remember that the purpose of trials is to mature and strengthen us, not frustrate us. A farmer doesn't have any choice but to wait for fall and spring rains. But his patience is rewarded with a 'valuable crop.'

The hope of Christ's coming is the answer to impatience and grumbling in the face of hard times. Those who feel like they are going to collapse under the weight of a trial can find strength to 'stand firm' (v. 8) in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is coming back. Then He will relieve His people of their suffering and reward them for faithful service.

The Lord's return also has a purifying effect on His people. John wrote, 'Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as [God] is pure' (1 John 3:3). Most people who are expecting a special guest at any minute wouldn't be caught with a dirty, messed-up house.

Part of the urgency of James' appeal is that Jesus' coming is so near. The expected guest is already 'standing at the door!' (James 5:9). From the standpoint of God's plan, nothing is holding back the return of Christ. And since God does not measure time the way we do (2 Pet. 3:8-9), we need to make sure our lives are in good order to meet Him.

APPLY THE WORD

Someone has said that whenever God allowed hard times in the Bible, the problem always 'came to pass,' not to stay. That means our problems are temporary, too. That may not seem to be the case for you right now, but the same Word that urges us to be patient also tells us that our patience will be rewarded. Ask God today to give you the strength to be faithful to Him one more day, if that's your need. You may also know a hurting friend who needs this word of encouragement today.

1 John 3:4, Exodus 32:19-35

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. - 1 John 3:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

A monument stands in Japan to honor twenty-six believers who gave their lives rather than deny Christ. Several centuries ago, a new leader became convinced that he needed to eliminate the Christians in his province. To identify believers, he placed a painting of Jesus on the ground and demanded that each citizen step on it. Twenty-six people, including two missionaries and one child, refused to walk on the picture. The new leader had them crucified.

We are amazed at the courage of people who remain faithful to the Lord even in the face of suffering. Many of us will never have to

make that kind of decision. Instead, the challenge is to be faithful in the everyday circumstances that threaten to draw us away from Christ. Today's reading reminds us how quickly God's people can be tempted to turn from Him. Moses' 40-day absence was all it took for Israel to come unglued.

When Moses returned to the camp after receiving the law from God, he set about a painful process of judging and purging the evil from Israel. Smashing the stone tablets of the law perfectly symbolized the people's violation of God's commands even before they had been communicated to the congregation.

Then Moses pulverized the calf idol and made the people drink the concoction. This provided a vivid illustration that they would have to taste the consequences of their sin.

The most poignant step of judgment for Moses was probably his confrontation with his brother Aaron. Aaron's ridiculous excuse, "'Out came this calf!'" (v. 24), underscores the fact that his actions as the leader in Moses' absence were indefensible. In his retelling of the story, Moses said God was so angry with Aaron He would have killed him if Moses had not intervened (Deut. 9:20).

Moses then had to take the painful step of judging those who persisted in their sin. Verses 27-29 are startling because they demonstrate the horror of sin in God's sight.

Moses' leadership in cleansing and preserving Israel is remarkable. He was truly a man of God, willing to have his name blotted out of Israel's registry rather than see God destroy the nation He had redeemed from Egypt (v. 32).

APPLY THE WORD

Spiritual leaders often have to make hard decisions--the kind that don't win friends and influence people. The leaders God has given us need our prayers and support. Our culture is a spiritual wilderness, and it takes real maturity and wisdom to guide God's people through the hazards. A midweek note from you to your pastor or other leader might be just the encouragement they need right now. Why not take a minute to bless someone who helps to "'keep watch over you'" (Heb. 13:17)?

1 John 3:4, Romans 1:18-32

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. - 1 John 3:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

In dealing with children, we often try to soften some issues, realizing that the full reality of a situation would be too much for them to grasp. So, we tell them that their aunt went to see Jesus, or that the murderer hurt his victims because he was bad. them to bear. In today's society, we often see this happening with adults. The difference is that they are able to handle the whole truth. Yet, our society pins euphemisms on sin so choices, follow their sexual preferences, engage in alternate lifestyles, or simply decide to be true to who they really are. because God has already identified sin for what it is: lawlessness or wrongdoing (1 John 5:17), the violation of His holy and perfect standards. Simply changing the name to something more palatable does nothing to divert His condemnation against sin. improve on Paul's list of offenses that deserve God's judgment (Rom. 1:28-32). I find examples of each category in today's text, some of them in abundance. makes people uncomfortable about what they're doing when there's someone around who keeps reminding them of the truth. of salvation. Our calling is not to berate lost people, but to tell them the truth in love with the goal of pointing them to the cure for sin. We don't do unbelievers any favor when we let them hide behind euphemisms and excuses. Today's lesson brings a needed reminder that the temptation to rename and excuse sin is not limited to unbelievers. re not harboring pet sins on which we have slapped new labels. Thankfully, we don't have to be perfect to share the gospel. But if we are not authentic in our daily lives, others will spot the inconsistency. If the Holy Spirit reveals a blind spot today, bring it to the Cross and leave it there.

1 John 3:4-10

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. - 2 Corinthians 5:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Writer Doris Greig relates the following: "The story is told of a little girl who was riding in the car with her daddy. She decided that she wanted to stand in the front seat, but her father commanded her to sit down and put on her seat belt. She refused, so he told her a second time to sit down. Again she refused. Her father said, 'If you don't sit down immediately, I'll pull the car over ... and spank you!' This moved the little girl to obey, but in a few minutes she said quietly to her daddy, 'I'm sitting down outside, but I'm still standing up inside.' "

As cute as this little girl may have been, there's nothing cute about rebellion. Spiritual rebellion can either be an open defiance or a hidden resistance: either way it's a refusal to do as God commands. Today's passage puts this in terms of "sin" and "breaking the

law.”

Because believers are children of God, focusing on our true identity and all that God is doing in us has the effect of purifying us (v. 3). Even more, Jesus came to take away our sins (v. 5). For these two reasons, John declares that no one who remains in Him can keep on sinning, or living in rebellion, against God. In fact, John says that the person who persists in defying God has probably never known Him (v. 6).

In the midst of this passage is a very important truth about the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. So far, John has taken great care to show that Jesus is both fully human and fully God. But he also wants his readers to know that as fully human, Jesus is also completely without sin. Although He is able to understand our weakness and to intercede for us (Heb. 4:15), “in him is no sin.”

APPLY THE WORD

Sin is one of those words that we tend to use without defining. Sometimes we hear people calling a moral failure a “mistake,” implying that they didn’t know better. But the Bible is clear that sin is defiance against God and His ways. If you have a Bible dictionary, look up the following words: trespass, sin, rebellion, and transgression. See if you can put together your own definition of sin. You might also look over Galatians 5:19–21. We need to be as clear as John on this: “sin is lawlessness.”

1 John 3:7-10

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. - 1 John 3:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

“She called me chip o’ block,” the toddler cried, describing the affront by her cousin. The child’s tears quickly dried as her aunt explained that “chip off the old block” in this case meant that the little girl resembled her mother, a compliment and not an insult. We all reflect our parents in some way, whether our physical appearance, personality, or preferences. In today’s passage, children of God are compared with children of the devil, and the identifying markers are found in actions.

The author again warns of the deceivers that were referenced in 2:18-29 and gives another litmus test to distinguish these faulty trail guides. Verse 7 parallels verse 8. The letter repeats some earlier themes: John encourages us to do what is right, including walking in the light (1:7), obeying his word (2:4-6), and loving one another (2:9-11). When we do these, we are righteous, reflecting Christ, the Righteous One (2:1).

The contrast is doing what is sinful. There are no neutral origins; sinful actions are “of the devil.” The echo of Genesis 3 and 4 recalls Satan’s sin, lying about what God said to Adam and Eve and then crouching at Cain’s door (cf. John 8:42-46). Followers of Jesus live under the influence of the Holy Spirit abiding in them. Those who do not follow Christ live under the influence of the Evil One and are seduced by him.

Do not miss the powerful ending of verse 8. Jesus came to take away our sins (v. 5) and to destroy the devil’s work (v. 8). God came in the flesh to undo the work of the Evil One. Christ did not come only to stop the Devil from killing, stealing, and destroying, but also to adopt us into a new family—to redeem us from being the devil’s children to being God’s children. Our adoption was a rescue mission. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, we have been given new birth from God and freedom from sin. This is why “no one born of God will continue to sin” (v. 9).

APPLY THE WORD

Verse 7 sounds a warning. What leads you astray? Is it people (false teachers, deceivers, or divisive people) or things (consumerism, sexual misconduct, media, gossip, laziness, or lies)? Be vigilant; pray for protection from the Evil One. Christian musicians, Casting Crowns, capture how easily we can slip away from following Christ in their song “Slow Fade”: “It’s a slow fade, when you give yourself away, when black and white turn to gray; thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid; People never crumble in a day.”

1 John 3:7-20

He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. - 1 John 3:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the hope of answering the nature versus nurture debate, scientific researchers have performed many studies on twins separated at birth. What really influences us most? the researchers asked. Are we shaped more by our environment or by our heredity? These researchers have found that the twins bear striking psychological resemblance to one another as adults, despite never having known one another or been together. According to these studies, nature seems to trump nurture.

Our reading from 1 John emphasizes that our spiritual transformation is a matter of a change in nature, not nurture. At the point of conversion, a definitive change in heredity takes place. God's children are reborn from His seed (v. 9). Our new spiritual genetic code produces an unmistakable family resemblance. Our key verse today emphasizes that true salvation in Christ produces true likeness to Christ.

Do you want to know whether you are truly a child of God or whether your local church fellowship is a community of true believers? The apostle John gives us a no-fail test to administer, two broad categories for all people. Either we are children of the Devil or children of God. There is no neutral ground.

Children of the Devil sin just as the Devil himself has sinned and continues to sin (v. . These people are lawless (cf. 1 John 3:4). They have no regard for God's commands in Scripture. They act in anger, hatred, jealousy, and callousness.

On the other hand, children of God resemble Christ. They renounce sin. They aren't perfect, but they do not persist in patterns of sin (v. 9). However, rather than just simply being characterized by don'ts, they are also recognized by their dos, specifically in this passage, their love for the family of God (vv. 10, 11, 16). In this letter, we hear an echo from the teaching of Jesus Himself (cf. John 13:35).

Like Father, like Son—Like Christ, like the church.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you struggle with doubts about your own salvation? This passage ends with a great promise for you. It gives us courage to face the fears and doubts that condemn us. It insists that if our lives exhibit a growing courage and willingness to tangibly love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we can know that we belong to Christ (vv. 18-20). By laying to rest these doubts about our salvation, we can have the confidence He gives us as His children.

1 John 3:11 Song of Solomon 4:8-9

We should love one another. - 1 John 3:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many of the most popular songs throughout history have described the thrills and frustrations of romance. Common themes include loving someone who apparently loves someone else, feeling unsure of someone else's romantic feelings, and the roller-coaster ride of falling in and out of love.

What usually passes for love in today's world, however, is often only self-gratification. This kind of "love" is primarily a matter of physical attraction. When the initial thrill of desire fades, so does the love of the one who experienced it. The groom's love for his bride was markedly different.

It did include physical attraction. The groom praised his bride's beauty and said that she had stolen his heart with one glance of her eyes. But his love was not selfish. Instead, it was characterized by a desire for the bride's well-being. He pleaded with her to come away from the lions' dens and the haunt of the leopards to a place of safety and intimacy.

An abiding concern for the other person and an atmosphere of intimacy are the primary ingredients in a healthy love relationship. They are also interrelated. A genuine concern for the other provides the kind of environment that in turn allows those who love one another the freedom to be intimate.

The rewards of biblical love come to those who give of themselves on behalf of those they love. As scholar and author Miraslov Volf has observed, there is more to marital love than eros: "It has to do with how you treat each other when dishes need to be washed or garbage taken out, when misunderstandings arise and when one has transgressed against the other. Love is not the desire to be united with the other, but action on behalf of the other, and constancy in pursuit of his or her well-being."

APPLY THE WORD

Author Rainer Maria Rilke has written that "Love ... consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other." Human love is never completely devoid of self interest. However, the more we can nurture, protect, and respect the other, the greater the likelihood that our own desires will be satisfied.

1 John 3:11-18

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. - John 15:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Recent polls show that the average American church member gives between 2 and 3 percent of his or her annual income to charity, including the local church! Our passage for today offers a significant challenge to the people behind this disturbing statistic.

You may have noticed that 1 John focuses on a few very important topics and keeps returning to them. In today's passage, we come back to the theme of love, which in many respects sets the gospel of Christ apart. Having reminded his listeners of the command to love, John illustrates it with two starkly contrasted examples: first, the negative example of Cain, and then the perfect example of Jesus.

John had already made the link between sin, hatred, and the devil (v. 8). The example of Cain is a chilling portrait of a child of the devil (v. 10), for we see that Cain was jealous of his brother's righteousness. It wasn't even that he was coveting a possession or physical characteristic of Abel, but rather that he couldn't tolerate that his brother did what was right. Cain represents the "world" here, and John wants his readers to know that those who hate do not have eternal life. Moreover, the actions of Cain reveal why the world hates true believers (v. 13).

In welcome relief to the example of Cain is the supreme example of Christ, who laid down His life on our behalf. What a contrast! Cain took another life; Christ gave His own life. Love like this can never be counterfeited. It may be possible to put on a pretense of love; indeed, Cain may have feigned affection for his brother. But given enough time, hatred can't be masked. In Cain's case, his hatred led him to murder.

APPLY THE WORD

"The test of Christian love is not loud professions about loving the whole church, but in quiet actions of helping a brother who is in need," writes Doris Greig. Few are called to lay down their lives for someone, but all of us are called to help with the needs of those around us. This may involve giving financially, but it may also involve helping someone with home repairs or making meals for a family. The approaching holidays provide many welcome opportunities to help out, but let's never forget that needs are year round!

1 John 3:11-18

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. - 1 John 3:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

The end of yesterday's passage anticipates the whole of today's study. Doing what is right generally is manifested in loving one another specifically. Genuine love for fellow believers is one of the identifying marks of God's children. Today's text depicts what loving one another is not (vv. 12-15), and then describes what loving one another is (vv. 16-18). Today we'll explore the remarkable contrast.

The opposite of loving one another is hatred, for which Cain is the prototype (see Gen. 4:1-25). The brewing jealousy in Cain's heart bloomed into murder. The author is not talking about "other people." We are not off the hook of this exhortation. The readers of 1 John 3 are to reflect on the murderous thoughts and intents of their own hearts.

v At first, verse 13 might seem misplaced, but Jesus' message to His disciples in the Upper Room clarifies the connection. Jesus' exhortation to love one another (John 15:9-17) is followed immediately by the lesson that the world will hate His followers (15:18-25). In order to face the inevitable hostilities and persecution of unbelievers, Jesus' followers must love one another.

Jesus Christ's sacrificial death on the cross is the prototype of loving one another and provides the absolute contrast to Cain. Hatred results in the death of others; love results in the death of self, the laying down of one's life (v. 16). Eternal life is not an infinite extension of life as we know it; it is new, resurrection life in Jesus. Our lives become newly defined by Christ and His love—we are not only reconciled to God, but also to one another (vv. 14-15).

Verses 17 and 18 apply the call to lay down our lives in very practical terms. We are invited to love generously, expending our resources to relieve the needs of others (cf. Deut. 15:7-9; James 2:15-16). This cannot be reduced to a metaphor for spiritual poverty. The passage is talking about material needs, and love ought to manifest "with actions and in truth" (v. 18).

APPLY THE WORD

The resounding message of today's text is that "we should love one another" (v. 11), "not with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth" (v. 18). The early church embodied Christ's love toward one another (see Acts 2:42-46). Is there a brother or sister in Christ you know who is in need? Pray and ask God how He is leading you to embody His love, and begin praying for Christ's generous, sacrificial love to characterize you more and more.

1 John 3:12, Genesis 4:1-12

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. - Jeremiah 29:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

The story is told of a man who took a taxi one day. He commented on the way that the driver had skillfully avoided pedestrians who frequently crossed in front of the cab. The driver shrugged. "Yeah, but it's because if I hit them, I have to fill out a report!" he said.

Sometimes good actions stem from selfish motives, something we see as far back in human history as Cain. There's much discussion on why Cain's sacrifice wasn't acceptable. Some suggest that Abel's sacrifice was better because it involved blood. That may be, but it's clear from Leviticus that grain offerings were perfectly acceptable. So maybe the problem didn't concern what Cain offered, but rather how he offered it.

Cain's reaction to the Lord's displeasure confirms this. The Lord's response (vv. 6-7) suggests that He offered Cain a second chance. No doubt God had somehow instructed Adam and Eve how to worship Him, and they instructed their sons. In any event, verse 7 shows that Cain could have done the right thing. But rather than repent, Cain became angry—so angry that he fell prey to sin, which is pictured like a beast ready for action (v. 7).

Hebrews 11:4 indicates that Abel offered a better sacrifice because he was a righteous man. It seems that Abel offered as an act of pure worship, whereas Cain probably offered in order to earn the Lord's favor. It's possible that the content of both offerings was perfectly acceptable in and of themselves. What determined the Lord's blessing, however, was the heart of the one who made the offering.

The rest of Genesis 4 shows how unrighteous Cain was. Indeed, 1 John 3:12 says that Cain "belonged to the evil one." Rather than turn away from his anger, Cain hardened himself in it. Abel's murder didn't occur in the "heat of the moment," rather it was premeditated. Cain invited his brother out to the field so that he could kill him. It's staggering to see sin's progression in just one generation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Like the cabbie who did the right thing with the wrong motive, Cain thought he could worship the Lord without changing his evil attitude. But the Lord wasn't fooled.

Neither is the Lord fooled when we try to worship Him with anger and resentment in our hearts. Instead, He sees past all our "offerings" to our hearts. It's only when the heart and the actions are in line that we have acceptable worship with the Lord.

1 John 3:15, Genesis 4:1-15

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. - 1 John 3:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

At the Battle of Fredericksburg, Confederate general Robert E. Lee witnessed an impressive display of skill and brutal force by his soldiers. He remarked, "It is well that war is so terrible—otherwise we should grow too fond of it." Indeed, in the most primal part of our inner beings, we are often attracted to the violent execution of justice, vengeance, or even pent-up anger. If the consequences of acting on those impulses weren't so severe, violence might be even more pervasive.

We should be careful when we contrast ourselves with a bad boy like Cain, mankind's first murderer. In one sense, Cain couldn't fully comprehend the magnitude of his actions, because up until that point no human had ever physically died. But ironically, Cain's primary exposure to death may have been the very act that prompted his wrath: Abel's sacrifice of the firstborn of his flock. He likely also would have been familiar with the use of animal skins as clothing, so death would not have been a completely foreign concept. Still, murder was unexplored territory, and Cain was the first to cross that frontier.

The terrible act was prompted by jealousy. Although Cain's offering was rejected, he still enjoyed communication with God and the invitation to bring an offering that would be accepted by God (v. 7). Therefore, it appears Cain was in fact angered more by the praise Abel received than he was by his own rejection.

God's warning to Cain is particularly telling, because it anticipated the struggle within him, actually providing the only evidence we have that Cain deliberated at all about the decision to kill his brother. But even though God used the picture of sin crouching outside Cain's door, we need to remember that sin was not actually an external force. Thanks to Cain's parents, sin was already an inextricable element inside the human heart. It proved to be a beast Cain was unable to master. He expected others to repay his wrath with yet more violence, but in His mercy God protected him.

APPLY THE WORD

Thankfully, most Today in the Word readers are not guilty of murder, but that doesn't mean we are not guilty of a similar wrath. When jealousy or contempt drives us toward hate, we face the same challenge Cain did. Stopping short of murder does not mean we've mastered the sin that threatens to consume us. We may instead use the weapons of gossip, slander, or bitterness. Today choose one person who draws your ire and ask God to replace that emotion with love.

1 John 3:18, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. - 1 John 3:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

William Wilberforce, one of the more well-known members of the Clapham Sect, worked tirelessly in Parliament to abolish the British slave trade. But it was Hannah More, a lesser known member, who wrote this on the subject of notable Christian service: "We are apt to mistake our vocation by looking out of the way for occasions to exercise rare and great virtues, and by stepping over the ordinary ones that lie directly in the road before us."

This notion is at the heart of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13. What matters most isn't always our greatest achievements, spiritual or otherwise. When considered in the light of what will endure, all of the spiritual gifts, whether tongues or knowledge (which the Corinthians esteemed) or prophecy (which Paul valued), have secondary importance. What matters most is that we've acted for love and in love. Love will be the final criterion for our spiritual lives. And love is what will distinguish the Christian life and community.

We must remember that Paul wasn't waxing eloquent on the theme of love for the purposes of poetry. 1 Corinthians 13, before it became a common passage to be used in weddings, was included in a letter to a church whose sins of pride and arrogance, whose misuse and misunderstanding of spiritual gifts, and whose socioeconomic differences had become sources of division. Paul hasn't pushed the pause button on his main themes of his letter, but in this chapter, he gives feet to the character of love. It is the force that he knows can unify the Corinthian community.

When the Corinthians decide to love, the factional infighting and envious quarreling in the community will end (cf. 1:11, 3:3). When the Corinthians begin to love, the exercise of spiritual gifts will build up, rather than divide, the community. When the Corinthians consider controversial questions of Christian faith and practice, and when love governs that discussion, the unity of thought and mind to which Paul first called them will be realized (1:10).

APPLY THE WORD

Love can heal what pride has injured. It can bind up the places where we've been wounded and where trust has eroded. In a commentary on 1 Corinthians, one New Testament scholar says, "Love requires the formation of character." He means to highlight that what Paul has described in this chapter isn't necessarily how we feel love for others but how we show love. To love is to need a radical inner transformation. To love is to depend on Christ, whose example defines for us what love is (1 John 3:16).

1 John 3:18 Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-13

Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. - 1 John 3:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

A church in Cincinnati, Ohio, has had phenomenal growth over the last several years. Their primary means of evangelistic outreach has been to show acts of kindness to people in their community. On several occasions they have volunteered to clean restaurant bathrooms, rake the leaves of the yards of elderly residents, and provide free Sunday newspapers to community newcomers. And each time they do such things they state that they are doing so to show the love of Christ in a tangible way.

How would you feel about cleaning a restaurant bathroom or clearing a neighbor's snowy sidewalk? This might be fine for another church, but we often have our own excuses for not meeting the needs of others. We are no different from the disciples in today's reading. For every generation, showing brotherly kindness is more difficult than it first appears.

It's important for us to realize that the two accounts of miraculous feedings in Mark 6 and 8 are recorded primarily to validate the messianic claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. But one is struck by the contrast between the way Jesus responded to needy people and the way His disciples responded. In fact, the two miracles could very well serve as a mirror for our souls.

Like the disciples, we might be inclined to excuse ourselves from showing acts of brotherly kindness because we're busy. After a hard day's work, we want rest, not responsibility (6:30-31). At the same time, the disciples seem to have thought that if people were able to get to Jesus, they were surely able to take care of their own needs (v. 36). And then there was the issue of ability. The disciples saw the crowds and assumed that there was no way they could minister to all those hungry people. Their resources were limited and the task seemed impossible (6:37; 8:4). They had all of their excuses in place, just like us.

APPLY THE WORD

To counter any excuses that you might use to avoid practicing brotherly kindness, be intentional about helping someone today. You can start with a simple prayer asking God to bring someone into your life who has a need that you can meet. It might be anything from fixing someone's flat tire to taking someone out to lunch who is discouraged with life. Brotherly kindness doesn't become a virtue overnight. But it can become a quality in our lives when we intentionally seek to make it one.

1 JOHN 4

1 John 4:1-3

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. - 1 John 4:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the greatest struggles the early church faced was the threat posed by the Gnostic heresy. Charismatic teachers, such as Valentinus and Ptolemy, claimed access to secret knowledge, which they would share with only a few select "spiritual people." Given their belief that matter and the body are evil, some Gnostics denied that Jesus was truly human. Gnosticism not only threatened to divide Christians into two classes, but also endangered the doctrine of the humanity of Jesus.

Yesterday's passage ended with our confident assurance of knowing that Christ lives in us through the Spirit He gave us (3:24). In today's text, the author brings to our attention the many others who claim to have God's Spirit indwelling them, but in fact are "false prophets." We are urged to exercise discernment each time we encounter people who claim to speak in the name of God (4:1). John gives a straightforward measurement for testing the spirits and evaluating their messages carefully. The content of their teaching will determine whether they are truth or falsehood. The criterion of examination is spelled out in verse 2.

False prophets at first appear to be genuinely from God (cf. Matt. 7:15), but God had warned His people long before that many would try to distort God's Word, dilute the truth, and urge people to go after other gods (see Deut. 13:1-8). A proper belief regarding Jesus' Incarnation was the issue at hand for the original recipients of 1 John. To "acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" affirms His humanity (v. 2). Belief that Jesus is not only fully God but also fully human is essential to our salvation as well as our transformation to become more like Him. Early church leaders fought relentlessly against those who would teach otherwise. The spirit of the antichrist is a spirit of deception and lies. In our context, the spirit of the antichrist deceives people by denying the truth about Jesus (v. 3).

APPLY THE WORD

Paul urged Timothy: "Watch your life and doctrine closely ... if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16). Whether you are a spiritual teacher, mentor, or student, you must be thoughtful and "test the spirits." Consider the influences and teachers in your life. Do you utilize spiritual discernment as you listen to their messages? The Bible is the ultimate litmus test to measure the content of what you hear and read. Be attentive to the Spirit so that you will not be led astray.

1 John 4:1-3

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. - 1 John 4:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many early Christian heresies denied the humanity of Christ. Docetism, for example, taught that spirit is the highest reality and matter is less real. From this perspective, matter came to be viewed as morally evil. Therefore, a holy God couldn't have become a man, but could only appear to have had a physical body. Jesus' humanity was an illusion.

Apollinarianism said that Jesus was human, but incompletely so. In this heresy, His body was the only human part of Jesus. He did not have human emotions, will, or soul, but only human flesh, animated by His divine nature. This made Jesus less than fully human.

Fighting a similar heresy, the Apostle John exhorted his readers to "test the spirits" (v. 1). We believe in the supernatural, but not everything supernatural is good. We must determine whether a spirit--which can mean a person led by a spirit, or a religious idea or teaching--originates from God.

How can we tell? The test of an Old Testament prophet was whether what he said happened (Deut. 18:21-22). Were his words true? The standard of truth is still the same today, even more so, because Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6).

The litmus-test question now is this: does the spirit, person, or teaching affirm that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? Do they believe He was a real human being? If yes, then God is present (v. 2; cf. 1 John 2:23).

John was opposing gnosticism, a heresy that denigrated flesh as a lower reality. But we must remember that God Himself created

flesh and breathed life into it (Gen. 2:7). There is nothing inherently corrupt about bodies. In fact, we believe that one day we'll be resurrected with glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:42-44)!

If the Incarnation is not affirmed, then a spirit is not from God (v. 3). Instead, it is the "spirit of the antichrist"--not the specific Antichrist of the end times, but anyone in general who is anti, or against, Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

As we near the end of this month's study, why not take what you've learned and put it into a fun form?

1 John 4:1-6

TODAY IN THE WORD

Early in World War II, British intelligence obtained one of the machines Nazi Germany used to encode secret messages. British codebreakers and mathematicians solved the machine's coding procedures, and soon the Allies had access to German war plans. The codebreakers provided British general Bernard Montgomery with the battle plan of German commander Erwin Rommel, helping the British defeat the Germans in North Africa in 1942.

The enemy of God and His people has a code, too, one that he uses to try to confuse and outwit believers in spiritual warfare. Besides direct attacks and obvious temptations, Satan's strategy includes using the very language of the Christian faith against us.

We have a good example of this strategy in the New Age movement. Many New Agers talk about "God" and claim to be "born again." They stress the importance of "spirituality" and urge us to seek life's "higher purposes." In addition to New Agers, many different cults are out there, claiming to have extra revelation or the key to the "real meaning" of the Bible.

These ideas may seem new or modern, but today's text shows that the enemy has always been in the business of trying to deceive "even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). The devil twists the truth just enough to trip up the unsuspecting. The apostle John leaves no doubt that the deception of the world's false prophets involves more than human effort. These deceivers are under the influence of evil spirits, with Satan at the controls (1 John 4:1-3).

Satan tries to slip his lies past us; but the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, has broken the devil's code, assuring us of spiritual victory (v. 4). Because the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (v. 6), we need not succumb to Satan's deceptions.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to "all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2). We are included in this greeting! We may not be struggling with the Our topic this month is spiritual warfare, a teaching of Scripture that is gaining more attention as the lines between truth and error continue to blur in our culture. Our battle with Satan and his forces is real, but the outcome has already been decided. Christ secured victory when He died on the cross and rose from the dead.

1 John 4:1-6

Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. - 1 John 4:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

At his death in 1836, founding father James Madison, the last surviving signer of the Constitution and last surviving member of the Continental Congress of 1776, left behind a document entitled 'Advice to My Country.' In part, Madison advised his fellow countrymen to cherish the 'Union of the States,' and to be on guard against enemies who come disguised, like 'the Serpent creeping with his deadly wiles into Paradise.'

Good advice, isn't it? Madison's use of biblical imagery drives the point home forcefully. This great leader recognized that, in the words of today's text, there is a 'spirit of falsehood' (v. 6) at work in the world. James Madison was not a theologian, but he was right in locating the fountainhead of this deception in the Garden of Eden.

We have been saying all month long that theology matters. It matters because theology seeks the truth about God, and God is the source of all truth. The truth about God saves people and sets them free. So we should not be surprised that Satan, the 'father of lies' (John 8:44), and his demons are active in spreading falsehood.

And since no one can be saved without believing that 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (v. 2), we can understand why a person's belief about Jesus is always the test of truth.

John reminds us there is a lot more going on in the battle for truth than is visible to the eye. Sometimes Christians wonder why unbelievers just don't get the picture when it comes to the gospel. After all, God has made His truth evident to everyone (Rom. 1:19-

20).

But grasping spiritual truth involves more than just having the right information. Unbelievers often do see the truth, but they suppress it (Rom. 1:18) because they don't want to forsake their sin and submit themselves to Jesus Christ.

Satan is in there doing his part, too. His job is to '[blind] the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel' (2 Cor. 4:4). Except for grace, we would be among that number. Praise God for showing us His truth!

APPLY THE WORD

If you feel confused by conflicting truth claims, or if you just want to sharpen your understanding of the Bible compared to what other religions say, we want to recommend a great resource.

It's a pamphlet from Moody Press called *The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error*. There are two editions, one on cults and one on world religions. These give handy comparisons of what others teach about doctrines such as the Person and work of Christ, and what the Bible says. Ask your local bookstore for these attractive pamphlets.

1 John 4:4, 2 Peter 2:10-22

The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. - 1 John 4:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Ever since the day the apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would attack the flock (Acts 20:28-37), these evil people have plagued the church. Thank the Lord for leaders such as Paul and his fellow apostle, Peter, who were faithful to warn God's people of the danger.

We've been noticing that Peter spared no words to expose people who dressed like sheep and sneaked in among God's flock to destroy people's faith. Today, this danger is still with us.

In fact, the church today may even be more vulnerable to deception because the deceivers have become more polished and market-savvy. What are these people really like? Second Peter provides us with the answer.

First, false teachers are arrogant (2 Peter 2:10). We're not sure if the "celestial beings" referred to are angels. The point seems to be that although even God's powerful angels do not slander the false teachers, these arrogant people are not afraid to slander angels and blaspheme holy things.

Second, spiritual deceivers are ignorant of spiritual realities (2:12). Peter was not talking about well-intentioned, but misguided, people who don't have their theology straight. False teachers don't care about truth. Often, they toss in enough truth to confuse people, then twist and deny the remaining truth.

Third, false teachers are driven by the worst possible motives--lust and greed (2:14). Peter cited as an example the evil prophet Balaam, who agreed to curse Israel for money (Num. 22-25). God stopped him every time. Later, he paid for his greed with his life (Num. 31:8).

Fourth and finally, false teachers can't deliver on their own lies (2:17-19). They're like the so-called sexual revolution of the 60s, which touted sexual freedom while enslaving people to their own lusts.

APPLY THE WORD

Reading passages like 2 Peter 2 should leave all of us more cautious and aware of the reality of spiritual deception in our own day.

1 John 4:4-6

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world! - John 16:33

TODAY IN THE WORD

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus devoted much of his philosophy to the problem of death. His answer was to deny the existence of an afterlife. He argued that humans need never fear punishment nor anticipate reward from the divine after death. As Christians, we confidently reject Epicurus's answer to the problem of death, for Christ has overcome death through His resurrection. As today's passage teaches, in Christ we are also overcomers.

"Them" and "in the world" require us to review 1 John 4:1-3 in order to understand today's text (v. 4). John refers to "many false prophets" (v. 1). He confirms that his readers are God's children, and that through His Spirit they overcome false teachers by

rejecting heretical teaching. “World” in verse 5 refers again to the unbelieving world and its accompanying values, attitudes, and actions (cf. 2:15-17). Just as the world does not know us because it did not know Jesus (1 John 3:1), so also the false prophets “from the world” are known by the world (v. 5). Audiences approve when their values, attitudes, and actions are validated. As Paul declared, “to suit their own desires” many will follow false teachers to hear “what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim. 4:3).

“You” of verse 5 changes to “we” and “us” in verse 6. John refers to himself alongside other true teachers, his fellow Apostles. At first, his statement may seem brash if not altogether arrogant (v. 6). The basis of his authority, however, is not his personal gifts, capabilities, or charisma. Rather, his authority is founded in his relationship with Jesus, the One he has known from the beginning, whom the eyewitnesses have heard, seen, and touched (1 John 1:1-3). John confidently makes this claim because persistent acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ confirms those who are from God. Likewise, persistent rejection of the gospel identifies those who are not from God. John concludes by reiterating that the Spirit bears witness to the truth about Jesus Christ (v. 6).

APPLY THE WORD

In this life, many people, circumstances, and influences threaten to destroy our relationship with God. Whether you or someone you love is being attacked, experiencing such times of despair and feeling separated from God, cling to the confident assurance of Romans 8:31-39: “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us ... neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers ... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

1 John 4:7-12

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. - Romans 5:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

A missionary was picking up a package in a foreign post office. When the official recognized her as a missionary, the woman became a little anxious, not knowing if that would help or hinder matters. But to her surprise, the official began recounting all the good things that she and her coworkers had done for the local church and the townspeople. Finally, the official exclaimed: “You love our people!” Then, to her greater surprise, he waived the tax on her package!

The centrality of love for believers can't be overemphasized; perhaps that's why the command to love one another appears for the third time in today's passage from 1 John (cf. 2:7–11; 3:11–18). Here, the command is linked to the very nature of God Himself.

We can think about this in the following way: think of an individual who loves you. You may say that this person is loving, but that is not the same as saying that this person is love! God alone is the origin of love, and because we have been born from Him, we are able to love one another (v. 7).

Although the claim that God is love is quite simple, we must think about love in biblical terms, because we use the verb love rather inconsistently! We can say that we love ice cream, and then say that we love our children. But biblical love is all about unconditional giving as exemplified in Jesus Christ. This love doesn't even consider what it might get in return--it simply loves the other person.

Additionally, love is understood by what God does in history. This is best seen in the love of the Father that gave His only Son, Jesus Christ (vv. 9–10).

APPLY THE WORD

The Christian perspective on love is unique among world religions. Although many groups advocate love generally, only God shows love lived out in the person of Christ.

1 John 4:10 Hebrews 2:14-18; **1 John 2:1-2**

[God] loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. - 1 John 4:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Earlier this month we referred to the kind of god that some people have created in their own imagination and pretend to worship: a non-judgmental, easy-going deity who isn't really upset with anybody and welcomes all who come, regardless of the path they take to reach him.

But this 'feel good' deity of the '90s amounts to nothing when it comes to the nature of the true God as revealed in Scripture. God's love is infinite, without a doubt. But so is His holiness, an attribute of God that makes it impossible for Him to tolerate or compromise with sin.

As the psalmist wrote: 'God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses His wrath every day' (Ps. 7:11). Good theology is very important at this point, because it keeps us from charging God with displaying the kind of temperamental outbursts people often show when someone upsets them.

The anger of God suffers from no such defect. It is not an explosive rage that lashes out indiscriminately. Instead, as we said above, it is a fixed, righteous attribute of God's character that must be satisfied before sinful people can enjoy His forgiveness.

That's where the good news of today's reading comes in. Among all the benefits we enjoy as a result of Jesus' death on the cross is the fact that His sacrifice satisfied God's wrath against sin. The words 'atoning sacrifice' (1 John 2:2; 4:10) could be translated as 'satisfaction' or 'propitiation,' a word we don't hear much anymore. The phrase is a little different in Hebrews 2:17 ('make atonement for'), but it's the same term in the original Greek of the New Testament.

The picture here is tremendous. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, this part of Christ's work was foreshadowed by the 'atonement cover' (Exod. 25:17), the golden lid on the ark of the covenant. This was the place where the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15), thus satisfying, or propitiating, God's anger against sin for another year.

But Christ accomplished this permanently. If you know Christ as your Savior, God's anger against your sin has been satisfied, for all eternity!

APPLY THE WORD

Given the work that Christ has done for sin, it's foolish for sinful people to try and satisfy a holy God by their own efforts.

In much the same way, it's foolish for Christians to feel like we have to constantly earn God's favor by our devotion. Here's another issue for our thoughtful consideration. Are you serving God to try to win His approval, or out of gratitude because He has already approved of the Savior to whom you belong? Your answer will make all the difference in your Christian life.

1 John 4:10, Matthew 27:32-54

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. - 1 John 4:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

In *The Heart of the Cross*, Philip Graham Ryken reflects on the meaning of the Crucifixion:

"When Jesus said, 'It is finished,' He was announcing that He had done His job, that He had completed His task and finished His project. What He had finished was suffering for sin. The suffering of Jesus Christ was not tragic suffering. It was saving suffering. Before Jesus died on the cross, humanity was in bondage to sin. We were sold as slaves to sin, and we deserved to die in captivity. A price needed to be paid to redeem us, to buy us back from sin and death. But the price of redemption was a perfect sacrifice, a price we could not pay... Christ died for us, offering Himself as a sinless sacrifice, buying back our freedom by paying sin's price."

Jesus Christ was God's perfect sacrifice of atonement. As you read the Crucifixion account again on this Good Friday, we hope, in light of this month's focus on sacrifice, that it speaks to you with renewed power and depth.

We see in Matthew's narrative exactly the same scene as was prophesied in yesterday's reading from Isaiah. A Lamb is led to the slaughter. He's an innocent victim, misunderstood by those witnessing the event. Yet He goes willingly, knowing that His punishment brings peace between God and man.

Jesus' public execution was humiliating and painful in the extreme. The insults heaped on Him struck even at His relationship with His Father (Mt. 27:43). Thieves dying with Him felt themselves superior. Although all this suffering was intense, the most painful moment Jesus experienced was surely His separation from His Father (v. 46). Yet in the end, He gave up His spirit willingly (v. 50; cf. Jn. 10:17-18).

APPLY THE WORD

Is there a Good Friday service at your church? We know that Friday is the end of a busy week of work or study for you, and that "going to church" may not be high on your list of relaxing activities. But don't think of this as a duty--think of it as love. Your Savior, out of love for you, suffered and died. Your whole life, everything you are and do, is based on that. This time of worship can increase your love for your Savior.

1 John 4:11-16

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. - 1 John 4:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Thirty years ago many people worked with typewriters, and if they used a computer at all it might be to play Oregon Trail on green-screen Apple computer at school. Today, nearly everyone depends on computers in some way, whether for occupation, communication, or education. We rarely second-guess how the technology works or even if it will. We tacitly know and rely on computers as a backbone for society. Our text today reveals a greater, eternal foundation which we know and rely upon, not merely for a smoothly operating society but for all eternity.

From the point when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, God has made a way for His presence to dwell among His people, though in a limited sense (for example, the tabernacle and temple). Through Jesus, God has reconciled us to Himself so that He now dwells fully in us by His Spirit (see 1 Cor. 6:19). Loving one another is the sign that the invisible God lives in us and that His love is made complete in us (v. 12), for love for one another is the outgrowth of God's love for us (v. 11).

Verse 13 celebrates the reality of God dwelling in us through His gift of the Holy Spirit and serves as a hinge between verses 12 and 14: the Spirit effects our love for one another (v. 12), and the Spirit testifies to the truth about Jesus (v. 14). If we love one another, and if we believe in Jesus' true identity, God Himself lives in us. The indwelling of His Spirit provides the foundation for confidence in God's love (v. 16).

A true confession of Jesus' identity is indispensable (note 2:22-23; 4:1-3). Today's text expresses two truths about Jesus that must be acknowledged: He is Savior of the world (v. 14) and Son of God (v. 15). The emphasis is on Jesus as Savior because some among the original audience were claiming to be without sin, and they therefore didn't see their need for a Savior (cf. 1:16-2:2). "Son of God" recalls verses 9 and 10 from yesterday's text.

APPLY THE WORD

First John is written to a community of Christ's followers, so let's not neglect application among the community of God's people. Often in local churches, right confession of truth might be present, yet accountability and reconciliation between people is lacking. Are there hostility, tension, power battles, unresolved issues, and unforgiven hurts among the body of Christ where you worship? Leaving sins unaddressed is not the way of God's love. Pray to be a minister of reconciliation and agent of God's love in your community.

1 John 4:11-21

Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us. - 1 John 4:16-17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Anyone searching for an example of mature Christian love will find one in the life of hymnwriter Fanny Crosby. Going blind in an accident shortly after birth, she lived to the age of 92 and gave the church some of its best-loved hymns. Asked if she believed Christians would know each other in heaven, Mrs. Crosby answered, 'I've thought about that quite often and I know that I will not have a bit of trouble recognizing my friends or my beautiful Savior. However, in case I do, I will go to the One whom I feel is my Savior and will say, 'May I please look at Your hands?' I'll know my Savior by the print of the nails in His hand.'

You may recognize that last line as the theme of one of Fanny Crosby's well-known hymns, 'I Shall Know Him.' Our subject today is the maturity of love, and it's obvious from her life and writings that this amazing woman displayed a love for Christ that's worth imitating.

The world has a fuzzy definition of love. There is enough bad understanding out there to last most people a lifetime. That's one reason the Bible's clear teaching on love is so refreshing. God's Word never stutters or wavers on what it means to love God or other people. Biblical love demands a commitment of the will, not just fiery emotions.

You can see this, for example, in verses 14 and 15. Love is not whatever the people involved want it to be. Christian love is firmly anchored in the confession that Jesus is Son of God and Savior of the world. We didn't come up with this on our own, either. It's the Holy Spirit's ministry within us that produces this confidence.

Since love is a response to God's never-failing love for us, He defines the boundaries and sets the conditions. That's why the Bible commands us to love one another (v. 21). This was John's immediate concern because he wanted his readers to realize that anyone who did not live a life of love toward others was living a lie.

But when we grasp how much God loves us, and we live out His love toward our fellow Christians, God's love is 'complete,' or perfect, in us. That's another term for mature love.

APPLY THE WORD

Genuine love is an unmistakable mark of those who are living in the mature season of their faith.

How can we know whether we are measuring up to the standard the Bible sets for complete or mature love? The Word has its own gauge, stated in Philippians 2:1-4. Why not take a few extra minutes to review these verses, asking God to make His love strong in and through you? You may also want to read verses 5-11 and thank the Lord for the incredible love Christ demonstrated on the cross.

1 John 4:12, 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

No one has ever seen God: but if we love one another ... his love is made complete in us. - 1 John 4:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

When pastor Scott Wright first met his future wife, he wasn't a Christian. No doubt he noticed her beautiful eyes and winsome smile, but what he recalls most from that time was how she and her friends loved each other. They really enjoyed being together. Prior to meeting his wife, Scott thought he knew how to have fun—parties, baseball games, late nights drinking. But the love and joy he encountered in this new group wasn't like anything that he'd seen before. Eventually this is what drew Scott to Christ.

The popular chorus “And they'll know we are Christians by our love” captures Scott's experience. Millions of people like him have been “loved” into the kingdom. Given the power of Christian love, it's no wonder Paul prayed that the Thessalonians' love would increase.

Recall from yesterday Paul's praise to God for the good report about the Thessalonians. The benediction recorded in today's passage flows naturally from that gratitude. Notice first the affirmation of Christ's deity. Many scholars believe that 1 Thessalonians is one of Paul's earliest letters, which counters the popular idea that the very early church didn't affirm that Jesus was God.

From this, Paul turns to love. Notice that Paul prays that the Thessalonians would not only love each other, but also love everyone else. It's easy to love those within your own circle, but love extended to outsiders is powerful. For the Thessalonians this included loving their persecutors. Finally Paul prays that the Thessalonians would be strengthened to be holy and blameless in God's presence. Here holiness indicates being set apart for God, and blameless is a legal term that describes a believer's standing before God. Here we see another link between godly living now and Christ's future return.

Today's prayer anticipates the rest of the letter, where holiness (4:1-8), love (4:9-12), and Christ's return (4:13-5:11) will be discussed further.

APPLY THE WORD

Today's prayer can be prayed for all believers everywhere because love and holiness should always be increasing in every believer's life. The connection between love and holiness can be easily overlooked, but as Bible scholar D. Edmund Hiebert aptly notes, “An unloving man cannot be a holy man.” Notice also that the process of standing blameless at Christ's return begins now. Consider adopting this wonderful prayer for yourself and other believers in your life, such as members of a Bible study group or choir.

1 John 4:13-21

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear... The one who fears is not made perfect in love. - 1 John 4:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

In a culture where great value is placed on information and productivity, we can't help but be tempted to measure our spiritual health and vitality by our Bible knowledge. We also find ourselves judging the quality of our spiritual lives according to what we've accomplished for the Lord. In this modern context, the words of Jesus sound strangely discordant: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Love is the supreme characteristic of a follower of Christ. It is the telltale sign that the Spirit of God has taken up residence in a sinful human heart.

But the love a believer has for his fellow human beings finds its source in a greater Love. Like a river whose source is the mighty ocean, so a believer's love for humanity originates in God's love. It's the breathtaking moments we have as believers when we drink deeply of God's love for us that we pour out love for others.

The gospel is the ocean, and we are the rivers and streams and bubbling brooks.

Notice that the opposite of love is not hatred. It is fear. John seems to be alluding here in this passage to fear of judgment, and certainly it's the gospel that drives from our hearts the fear of being punished for our sins. Jesus took on our punishment. Jesus secured for us God's abiding love, and because of that love, He has punished His own Son in our place.

But it's also true that a fresh experience of God's love for us frees us from fear in other aspects of our lives. We're commanded to engage with God's love in two different ways (v. 16): we should know it (cognitive), but we should also rely on it (experiential).

Relying on the love of God means developing the kind of faith that believes in God's goodness and power. That faith, founded on God's love for us, drives out fear.

APPLY THE WORD

In the past, how and where have you been most aware of God's love for you? Have you sensed God's nearness most in the context of fellowship with other believers? Through your private Scripture reading? Maybe you connect most intimately with God through music or as you explore nature. Identify what is most meaningful and profound for you, and seek to make that a regular part of your spiritual practice.

1 John 4:13-21

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1 John 4:17-18

We ... are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory. - 2 Corinthians 3:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

The context of today's text is the day of judgment (v. 17). The term "day of judgment" refers to the time when there will be a final and eternal judgment by God of all people (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10). Our passage today speaks about having confidence on the day of judgment.

In 1 John 2:28, the author refers to confidence at Christ's coming that results from our loving relationship with God. In our passage today, the basis for assurance on the day of judgment is more specific. We have confidence because "love is made complete among us" (v. 17) and we are "made perfect in love" (v. 18). What does that mean? The answer lies in the last words of verse 17: "because in this world we are like him." God's love is made complete in us as we become like His Son, Jesus, and we are "being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). Because God has loved us perfectly in Christ and made us like Him, perfect in love, we do not fear punishment on the day of judgment.

Fear is a curious word in the Bible. On one hand, Proverbs 9:10 teaches that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom"; on the other hand, verse 18 in our passage states that "perfect love drives out fear." Though seemingly different, "fear" in these two contexts is connected. As one New Testament scholar put it, "To fear God is to revere him and give him due respect and honor. Fear of God is linked to love of God and obedience to his commandments."

Our passage today addresses the fear of God's punishment that will be meted out to unrighteous unbelievers. As Christians, we fear God, the judge of the whole world, and we give Him all the reverence, respect, glory, and honor due Him. But since He has freed us from the punishment of sin through Christ, we do not fear His condemnation.

APPLY THE WORD

Many Christians live enslaved to fears. As Jesus sent out His twelve disciples, He addressed the topic of fear (Matt. 10:26-30). Similar to the disciples' evangelistic mission, fears can hinder us from sharing the gospel with friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers. As Jesus instructed the Twelve, so also He exhorts us to throw off such fears for the sake of those who do not yet know Him. Today, pray for opportunities to courageously share the perfect love of God that drives out fear with those around you.

1 John 4:18, Numbers 33:50-56

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear. - 1 John 4:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

It's customary at the close of a president's term in the White House for every member of the staff to turn in letters of resignation. The incoming Commander-in-Chief has the utmost flexibility to decide who will fill the White House under his watch.

As Israel prepared to advance on Canaan, God made His intentions perfectly clear: the Lord was to be the new ruler of this land, and He wanted Israel to clean house.

The command was total. They were to drive out all the people. They were to destroy all the objects of worship. They were to demolish all the places of worship. God wanted every living person and every trace of false deity removed from the land of His dwelling (v. 52).

The consequence for disobedience was practical. God didn't threaten Israel with His wrath. He merely notified them of the suffering that would naturally spring from leaving any remnant of the enemy in their land: those people would be as unbearable as a barb to the eye! We see in the book of Judges just how true God's prediction was.

The Promised Land was to be Israel's land for the taking. God didn't say, "If you try really hard and fight unbelievably well, then the land will be yours." Victory didn't depend on their special talent; rather, defeating and driving out the enemy would be the result of faithful obedience to His commands.

When Moses made this announcement to Israel, it would have been particularly reassuring for them. They hadn't even crossed the Jordan River and God was already instructing them how to divide up the land once they had possession over it. It wasn't a matter of if they would conquer Canaan, but when the land would be theirs. Such confidence from a leader can embolden a people. Had all twelve leaders who originally surveyed the land shown such boldness, perhaps they could have avoided forty years of wandering and judgment in the wilderness.

APPLY THE WORD

There are battles in our lives that God has already won for us, including the ultimate victory over sin! If there are recurring sins in your life that seem unbeatable, remember that your God is the God who defeated the Canaanites. Our own ability is not the issue—He requires only our faithful obedience. If you find yourself struggling in some area, consider whether your level of obedience needs a boost. Spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, giving, and Scripture memory can help us follow Christ more faithfully.

1 John 4:19, Exodus 20:1-26

We love because he first loved us. - 1 John 4:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Michael Dukakis was asked in the second presidential debate of 1988, "Governor, if Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?" The "Ice Man," as some in the public called him, answered coolly with a policy discussion of his opposition to the death penalty.

The public would have preferred his outrage at the scenario—at least they would have seen that something or someone mattered to him. Anger, when someone we love is violated, is the expected response. The same is true of jealousy. In a marriage relationship, two people pledge to love each other exclusively. If that commitment is threatened, jealousy is in order.

God is a jealous God because He loves us. The Mosaic Law given in the chapters to follow (and more thoroughly, in the book of Leviticus) are set in this context of love. Notice that the book of Exodus doesn't open with the words, "You shall not." It's taken us twenty chapters to get to the commands given by God through Moses, and it's a deliberate choice made by Moses when writing Exodus. The "rules" can only be understood when set in the context of the "rescue." The past nineteen chapters have taken us through God's call to Moses to save His people, the ten plagues to prove His authority and power, and the Exodus itself—a splendid scene of rescue. Even when the people have complained of hunger and thirst in the wilderness, God has provided for them.

His Law makes sense in light of this narrative backdrop. The Israelites needed to see that this God, who described in detail the plagues to befall the Egyptians, this God whose word was always and completely true, was binding upon them. This was a God with authority over all creation. His words to them mattered. They were bound by His words because they were the words of the Rescuer.

APPLY THE WORD

Our culture tries to convince us that rules are inherently bad. But the Bible turns that notion on its head. God's rules are good because He is good, and because He wants our best. In fact, the Ten Commandments can be read as rules that, when obeyed, are meant to restore what fell apart in the Garden of Eden. Read through each of the commandments, and reflect on how they can restore our relationship with God and our relationship with one another.

1 John 4:19, 20

Keeping Faith: Answering Love

Jesus linked the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" to one of the foundational statements of the Old Testament (cf. Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-31). Found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, this call to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength," became the central confessional statement of Judaism. Such a command was a common feature of treaty language in the ancient Near East. In the context of Deuteronomy it was a call to respond to God's covenant faithfulness with love and obedience.

Viewed through this lens, the love that Jesus commands of His disciples is answering love. It is the reply of the heart to the experience of God's grace. Love is listed among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. It is also described as something that is mediated to the believer by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). The relationship between these two aspects of our Christian experience creates a kind of "call and response," in which God's love prompts us to love Him in return and to love those whom God loves. God's love is both the source and the motive for the love we show to our neighbor. We love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). But we also love others because God loves them. Love for God and hatred of one's neighbor are incompatible. Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen (1 John 4:20).

The obligation to love God with our entire being, and the companion obligation to love our neighbor as ourselves, define the ethical boundaries of the Christian life. Every decision we make should be shaped by these complementary responsibilities. How do my actions reflect love for God as He defines love? How do they demonstrate God's love for my neighbor?

Biblical love, then, is not mere sentimentality. It is more than a choice. Ultimately, it must be a work of grace. "One cannot 'love' someone simply at command or forgive him or have respect for the life and property of another (to name only a few of the things that are mentioned in the commandments) simply because one is commanded to do so," theologian Helmut Thielicke observes. "I can do all this only if I stand in the discipleship of this Lord and see the world, my country, my neighbor through his eyes." Answering love is much more a way of seeing than it is a way of feeling.

1 John 4:19-21

We love because he first loved us. - 1 John 4:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many people in our culture look to entertainment stars for guidance on how to live and love. They imbibe lessons like Tina Turner's infamous song, "What's Love Got to Do With It?" A New York Times article found that an astounding percentage of girls age 12 to 17 defended pop star Chris Brown after he beat up his girlfriend, fellow pop star Rihanna. Clearly, people are confused about the nature of true love, lost without the embrace of God's unconditional and unlimited love.

Verse 19 reiterates verse 7 through 12. We love because God first loved us. This absolutely contrasts the typical foundations and motivations of human "love." Because of the gift of God's love we have already been given, we love others. This is exactly opposite of "loving" in order to earn the imperfect gift of human love in return. The difference between the two is profoundly significant.

Verses 20 and 21 echo 1 John 3:11-16 and commend a practical and necessary consequence of understanding verse 19. John describes someone whom his readers may encounter: the person claims she loves God, yet simultaneously speaks and acts hatefully toward brothers and sisters (v. 20). She is a liar. To lie is to make an untrue statement with the intent to deceive, to create a false or misleading impression. Her falsehood is exposed: this liar "cannot love God."

One theme common to John's Gospel and 1 John is the invisible or unseen God (v. 20; cf. John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46). This is an argument from lesser to greater. If the readers cannot fulfill the lesser requirement to love fellow believers who are highly visible, then they cannot fulfill the greater requirement to love God the Father whom they have never seen. Jesus uses a similar argument in the Parable of the Talents (see Matt. 25:14-30). He says, "You have been faithful with a few things [the lesser]; I will put you in charge of many things [the greater]" (vv. 21, 23). Jesus is also the command giver in our passage today (v. 21; cf. John 13:34).

APPLY THE WORD

In light of God's Word and through the Spirit's power, prayerfully evaluate your most significant relationships. With complete honesty, finish this sentence: "I love because..." 1 John 4:19 turns our defective motivations for love upside down. We do not love only when we feel like it or when it feels good, but rather because God first loved us. God's love transforms us, so that we love as generous givers instead of pining takers. Memorize 1 John 4:19 so that its truth may take deep root in your relationships.

1 John 4:13-21

And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother - 1 John 4:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Believe it or not, the Super Bowl is just two months away! Each year, record numbers of people watch this mega sporting event. Companies spend millions to launch creative new ad campaigns. People throw elaborate parties. All eyes seem to be focused on this one event. This may be the spectator sport par excellence.

Now while it's perfectly fine to be a spectator of the Super Bowl, our study so far has shown us that we can't remain spectators when we talk about God's love. It's true that we have witnessed His love in the life and work of Jesus Christ, but it's equally true that we must live out His love as well. This has been a repeated theme in 1 John.

Today's passage begins with a summary of the entire gospel message (vv. 13–15). Let's review. The greatest evidence of God's love is His sending His Son. Even more, He sent His Son as the Savior of the world, the One who takes away sin. No one stands outside of this sphere! To acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God encompasses the entire gospel. This is the love of God for us, and we are to "rely" upon it (v. 16).

But how do we "rely" upon the love of God? By basing our entire confidence to stand without fear on the day of judgment on God's love for us (v. 17). Because we have already experienced God's love, we have no fear of punishment, which here refers to eschatological punishment from God for nonbelievers.

Remember, we are acceptable before God because of what Christ has done for us, not because we are somehow good enough. If it were not for Christ's shed blood, we would have no basis to stand confidently before Him. But we rely on Him and not on ourselves.

APPLY THE WORD

Many Christians have a hard time believing that they stand before the Father with no fear of punishment. Today's passage encourages us to "rely" upon the truth of God's love as revealed through Jesus Christ. To help you meditate on this, consider the following quote from writer Marianne Meye Thompson: "To know that we are forgiven for our sin, loved in our weakness, saved by his mercy, destined for fellowship with God, all because we are supremely valued by God--that is to know the perfect love that drives fear away."

1 JOHN 5

1 John 5:1-5

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. - John 13:35

TODAY IN THE WORD

One leading reason missionaries return home prematurely is team strife. The pressures of cross-cultural living and decision-making with people who disagree about ministry and life philosophy germinate conflict. Team dysfunction also hinders work in local churches and other ministries, and it is often left unresolved until it becomes fatally cancerous. Today's passage inextricably connects love for fellow believers with love for God.

At first, John seems to suggest that whoever loves God the Father loves His Son, Jesus (v. 1). Closer reading clarifies that "his child" refers to the children of God, our fellow believers. The phrase "this is how we know" occurs seven times in 1 John, including in verse 2 (cf. 2:5, 18; 3:10, 16, 19, 24). John persists in reassuring his readers regarding their relationship with God. In this case, John sets up the relationship differently: rather than knowing we love God because we love our fellow believers (2:3-11), here we know we love fellow believers because we love God and obey Him (v. 2). Taken together, it's clear that love for God and love for fellow believers cannot be separated.

Obedying God's commands is not burdensome, because through spiritual rebirth we overcome the world, the values, attitudes, and actions opposed to God. The epicenter of this faith that overcomes is the belief that Jesus Christ is God's Son. One theme of 1 John is Jesus' identity. Our text today begins and ends with two confessions about Jesus. First, Jesus is the Christ. "Christ" is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word Messiah or "Anointed One," who God promised would bring hope and deliverance to His people (see Jer. 23:5-6). Second, Jesus is the Son of God. He is almighty and eternally divine.

Another predominant theme of 1 John is our love for God. Christians often focus on pleasing God, serving God, and like the eldest son in Luke 15, slaving for God, yet not as frequently on loving God first and foremost. John continuously raises this topic because of its centrality for the life of faith.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you volunteer or serve full-time on a ministry team? Do you recognize the devastating effects of team disunity? The Evil One delights to bring destruction through division among servant leaders. Loving one another on your ministry team is the unshakable foundation for unleashing the Spirit's work, yet it is impossible apart from God's indwelling love in each of us. Pray regularly for team unity and commit to resolving conflict quickly (see John 17:20-23; Rom. 15:5-6; Eph. 4:2-3; Col. 3:12-13).

1 John 5:1-5

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. - Matthew 11:30

TODAY IN THE WORD

To receive a high school diploma, one must either graduate from high school or pass the General Education Development Test (GED). The GED measures an individual's knowledge and academic skills against those of high school graduates. In short, the GED provides a standardized way of ensuring that an individual has reached the level expected of a high school graduate.

You could say that John also presents a type of "standardized test." This test, however, is used to measure true Christianity from false teaching. This test is designed to affirm to believers that they are truly children of God. The ones who fail the test are those who reject Jesus Christ.

So far, we have encountered various sections of this "test," so let's summarize them. The first test of true belief is obedience (1 John 2:3-6); the second test is love (1 John 2:7-11); and the third test is correct belief (1 John 2:18-27). Today's passage brings all three tests together. Even before the tests are applied, however, John reminds his readers that the first step is being born of God. We can love, obey, and believe only because we have become God's children.

John then moves to the test, or affirmation, of true faith: love. Those who have been born of God love God and others born of God (v. 1). Although verses 1 and 2 seem circular, they show that it's impossible to love God without loving other believers and equally impossible to love other believers without loving God.

The next affirmation of true faith is obedience, but notice that obedience springs from love: we obey God's commands because we love Him (v. 2). The statement that God's commands are not burdensome (v. 3) indicates that these commands are not intended to earn God's favor, rather they are joyously obeyed because of our love for God.

APPLY THE WORD

Today's passage shows that these three tests are so closely interwoven that they can't be easily separated. God's intention for the

human family is the closest example of this. Parents love their children, and children love their parents. Because children love their parents, they want to please them and to obey them. Because children know that their parents love them, they put their trust in them. Seeing just a glimpse of this three-way interrelationship helps us to understand its perfect expression in God's love for us, His children.

1 John 5:5, Hebrews 12:1-1

Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. - 1 John 5:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Runners training for a marathon spend weeks and months in preparation for the race. They eat the right foods, go to bed early, and endure grueling training regimens in order to prepare both body and spirit for the challenge ahead. What motivates a runner to run a marathon? Martine Costello, in an interview with CNN Money had this answer: "It's a challenge that we take on, with just our hearts and the body God gave us. We run because if we can make it through 26.2 miles, everything else will seem easy. Marathons offer a moment in time when an average person can feel like Michael Jordan and do something extraordinary."

"An average person doing something extraordinary" is a wonderful description of who we can be in Christ. Today's passage places us in the thick of the race that is our Christian journey. We are not alone, but are "surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses" (v. 1). The writer encourages us to finish the race well and to "run with perseverance." We are not to be consumed by endless introspection or accept the self-help mentality touted by the world, but rather to "fix our eyes on Jesus" (v. 2).

In this race, Jesus is our example. He endured struggle and scorn and shame. Yet He completed His calling. We will also endure struggle as we walk with Jesus (v. 4). We are asked here to see some of this "hardship" as discipline (v. 7). We are not promised an easy life but a purposeful one. We are children of God, and thus will be both rewarded and disciplined by a Heavenly and loving Father (v. 10). This is God's way of molding us into His image.

As the author reminds us, we are to "throw off everything that hinders us" (v. 1). As we complete this study on finding our identity in Christ, we must throw off the temptation to define ourselves by our own past, present, or future. By fixing our eyes on Jesus, we will finish the race victorious.

APPLY THE WORD

Anyone who has ever tried to run knows that it is not easy. The initial excitement that comes with a new pair of gym shoes can quickly be extinguished by a gut-wrenching side ache. Yet, consistent training makes running increasingly satisfying. As you run the race of your Christian life, keep your focus not on your daily aches and insecurities, but on who you are in Christ and how He is shaping you. Run the race with perseverance—you are guaranteed a victorious finish!

1 John 5:6-12

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. - John 10:10b

TODAY IN THE WORD

Certain conditions must be met before eyewitness testimony is admissible in a U.S. law court. First, the witness must have been physically present at the crime scene. Second, the witness must be deemed legally competent to give testimony. The testimony of a witness who was intoxicated or insane at the time of the crime will not be accepted.

Jewish law courts also had strict rules for admissible testimony. Deuteronomy 19:15 says that an accused individual could only be convicted by the testimony of two or three witnesses. In today's passage, John uses legal terminology to show that the testimony concerning Jesus Christ goes well beyond legal requirements.

First, John says that Jesus came by water and blood. Most scholars believe these refer to Jesus' baptism (the beginning of His ministry) and to His crucifixion (the purpose of His ministry). Thus John first appeals to the historical testimony to the work of Christ. It's likely that heretics were denying the "blood," or the fact of Jesus' crucifixion (v. 6).

Others point out that these two elements come together in John 19:34, when both blood and water came from Jesus' side after He died on the cross. In addition to affirming that His death was real, water suggests the coming of the Holy Spirit, and blood, the effectual cleansing for our sins.

Next, John points out the important role of the Holy Spirit as a witness to Christ (cf. John 15:26; 16:13-15). Not only was the Spirit an eyewitness to Jesus' baptism and crucifixion, but He also continually affirms the truth of who Jesus Christ is. Together, these three elements offer one unified testimony (vv. 7-8). This goes far beyond what Deuteronomy 19:15 required.

But even greater than the standards of human testimony is the fact that God Himself testifies to Jesus Christ. True faith accepts this testimony. This verse exposes the heresy of those false prophets: they reject God's own witness concerning His Son.

APPLY THE WORD

People may say that they know that God is real because the Holy Spirit tells them so. But today's passage teaches the Spirit's testimony works in conjunction with the historical facts about Jesus Christ. After all, some heretics claim that the Spirit agrees with them, too. For this reason, it's essential to know the facts about Jesus' life. You can begin by studying passages about His baptism (Matt. 3:13-17) and crucifixion (Matt. 27:45-56). You can also read articles about the life of Jesus Christ in a Bible dictionary.

1 John 5:6-13

I write these things to you who believe ... so that you may know that you have eternal life. - 1 John 5:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Imagine a familiar scene from the middle of the week at a Christian summer camp. Emily is an awkward but lively twelve-year-old with braces, French braids, and denim shorts. For the first time she hears the compelling gospel message. Without hesitation, Emily accepts the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus. Now think ahead many years. How does Emily know that what happened that July evening at summer camp still means anything? Emily's confidence has been sealed with the promises of today's text. This same assurance of God's gift of eternal life is for you today.

The word testimony and its derivatives occur eight times within eight verses, revealing the unmistakable theme of our passage. Earlier, the human testimony of the eyewitnesses is highlighted (see 1:2; 4:14), but the ultimate testimony about Jesus is revealed in verse 9. In both Old and New Testament times, important issues were decided with the testimony of two or three witnesses (cf. Deut. 17:6; John 8:17-18). John accordingly presents three witnesses: water, blood, and the Spirit (v. 7). As 1 John teaches, one of the primary roles of the Spirit is to testify to the truth about Jesus. Water refers to the baptism of Jesus by John, particularly that God the Father testifies at Jesus' baptism (see Mark 1:9-11). Blood refers to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. All three witnesses are tangible.

Verses 10 and 11 mention two gifts from God: first, the testimony about His Son, and second, that through Him God gives eternal life. The theme of life is central to all of John's writing, including his Gospel and his letters, and life is always identified with Jesus. Jesus Himself is the life (cf. 1 John 5:20; John 14:6). The one who "has the Son" has life (v. 12). To "have Jesus" is to be indwelt by His Spirit, for God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to make their home in you (John 14:23).

APPLY THE WORD

Every follower of Jesus endures times of doubt, periods when we question the certainty of eternal life in Jesus. John writes to establish unquestionable confidence: "So that you may know that you have eternal life" (v. 13). This assurance does not come from a feeling or state of being, but results from belief in the reality of God's gift in Jesus, confirmed in His life, death, and resurrection and guaranteed by His Spirit. Let us rest and rejoice in God's unshakable promise of eternal life in Christ.

1 John 5:13, 1 John 1:1-4

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

It's not uncommon for people nearing death to write letters to their loved ones recounting significant life events, sharing hopes and dreams for the letter's recipient, perhaps even urging a specific course of action.

Toward the end of his life, the apostle John wrote a series of letters (1, 2, and 3 John) that similarly encouraged believers to remain faithful. Tradition maintains that the author of the Gospel of John and the epistles bearing his name are the same person, and there's no compelling reason to doubt this. In fact, there are many parallels between the gospel and the epistles of John. As you read through today's passage, you may have thought of John 1:1-18. Yet the purposes of the two writings are different. The Gospel of John was written so that nonbelievers might believe (John 20:31), whereas the first epistle of John was written to assure believers of their salvation (1 John 5:13). In fact, 1 John is like a refresher course in the basics of Christianity.

That's a pretty good description of our study this month—a "back to the basics" course through 1, 2, and 3 John, and the letter of Jude.

We begin with 1 John, which was likely written between 85 and 95 a.d. to believers in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Some type of false teaching was creeping into this area, and John was fearful that these believers might be led astray. So 1 John begins by

reminding us that our faith is rooted in the historical, physical person of Jesus. He did not just appear to be human, as some of these false teachers claimed. He was in fact fully human and fully God. That is the main point of the message proclaimed (v. 3): the gospel is about the real-life person of Jesus Christ, the very life and person whom John witnessed personally (v. 1).

APPLY THE WORD

As we noted above, 1 John encourages believers to know that they have eternal life. This month's study will provide a good opportunity to reflect on eternal life. You can begin by noting your initial reflections on the everlasting life that you have received by faith in Jesus Christ. Then look at each of the following verses: 1 John 5:11–12; John 10:10, 17:3; Psalm 121:8. How does each of these verses add to your understanding of eternal life? Consider memorizing one or more of these verses throughout this month.

1 John 5:13-17

I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. - Mark 11:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Martin Luther said the following about prayer: "Do you mean to say that this promise is always true even though God often does not give what we have asked for? As His Word shows, it is certainly His will to deliver you from all evil, not to leave you in temptation, and to give you your daily bread... If you pray in this way—that all may go according to His will—then your prayer is certainly heard... If it is not heard according to our will, then it is heard according to the will of God, which is better than ours."

This is great encouragement for prayer! John also addresses believing prayer in today's passage, where the privilege of prayer is linked to the eternal life we have in the Son.

At the beginning of our study, we mentioned that John wrote 1 John to assure believers of their eternal life—not just life that lasts forever, but eternal fellowship with God. Verse 13 nicely summarizes this. Now John adds one more assurance of true faith: prayer.

The assurance of prayer was central to Jesus' teaching, as the Lord's Prayer shows (Matt. 6:8-13). "Hearing" in verse 14 implies response: we can be sure that God fully responds to our prayers that are in His will.

John's immediate application is to a believer who has sinned. We can probably assume that this person has confessed, since John so emphasized confession. The prayer is likely one requesting protection and restoration to the fullness of life in the Son (v. 16).

APPLY THE WORD

Bible commentator Stephen Smalley observes: "Prayer is not a battle, but a response; its power consists in lifting our wills to God, not in trying to bring his will down to us."

1 John 5:13-21, 1 John 5:20

The Son of God has ... given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. - 1 John 5:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies theories of knowledge. How do you know that you know anything? Different epistemologists offer different answers: some posit that knowledge is only possible to the extent of sense perception, while others assert that it is impossible to know anything with certainty.

In our passage today, John described a number of things that believers in Christ can know with full confidence. As we conclude our section on how to grow in the knowledge of God, we'll also see the implications for our intercession and protection.

The first thing that believers can know is the assurance of eternal life (v. 13). The resurrection of Jesus has guaranteed our own future; death is not the end of our existence, for we will live with God forever. Second, we know we can approach God with confidence (v. 14). As we grow in our knowledge of God, we know more of His will and our own desires are shaped to conform with His.

Not only can we approach God with our petitions and pleas, but we also know that He hears us (v. 15). This passage reveals some of God's character: He is not a distant deity who does not care for people, nor does He demand to be bribed or cajoled. God loves His people, hears their requests, and responds to them. This means that we can also go to God on behalf of others and intercede for their restoration (vv. 16-17).

Next, we know that growing in the grace and knowledge of God bears the fruit of freedom from persistent sin. This isn't a doctrine of sinless perfection, but rather the promise of freedom from the bondage of sin and protection from the Evil One (v. 18). In a world blinded by Satan, we are the children of God and safe both now and for all eternity.

Finally, we are able to know all this and have hope, confidence, and protection because of Jesus Christ (v. 20). Faith in Jesus enables us to grow in the knowledge of God and to declare that He is truth.

APPLY THE WORD

This letter concludes with the exhortation, "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (v. 21). In light of what we know about God and our relationship with Him, how can we pursue any lesser affections? In your spiritual journal, write out each thing we know as believers and its implications for hope, confidence, prayer, protection, etc. Use this list in your prayer time and throughout the day to help keep your attention and devotion focused on our loving Savior and God.

1 John 5:14, Exodus 32:1-14

This is the confidence that we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. - 1 John 5:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Michael Gerson, who served as chief speechwriter in the George W. Bush administration, spoke about his responsibility to articulate the President's voice: "I've never been in a circumstance where I've been asked to write something that I didn't believe in for President Bush." That's a model for a successful match between a speech-writer and his President.

Moses was called by God to speak for Him. And that commissioning required that Moses knew God and understood His character. Like all the prophets of the Bible, Moses was responsible to tell the people about God's nature and proclaim God's words. Today's reading reveals just how well Moses understood God's motivation and character.

At first glance, it might seem that Moses did a fantastic job of convincing God to change His mind. The Israelites' dissolution into idolatry had stirred God's anger, and the language of verse 10 indicates His willingness to destroy them. Moses cited a litany of reasons why God should not destroy His people because of their sin. His reasons reflected insight into who God was.

Moses remembered the reason for which God had delivered the people from Egypt: so that He would "gain glory for [himself]" (Ex. 14:4). Moses did not want to see the renown and fame, which God rightfully deserved, compromised. He didn't want to hear the nations falsely accuse God. He also reminded God of His faithful love for His people. He had confidence that God was eager to turn from anger and show love. This was exactly how God was soon to reveal Himself to Moses (Ex. 34:6).

Because Moses understood God's nature, he had confidence in approaching Him. He never persuaded God to do something outside the bounds of His character. Instead, he asked God to conform to what was already true of Him. This is an example for our approach to God in prayer.

APPLY THE WORD

Moses is our model for intercessory prayer. First, we must begin by recognizing God's character. For example, He does not delight in punishing evil people. "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" (Ezek. 18:23). As we pray for people who do not yet know Christ, we can call upon God's character of mercy and love to reveal Himself to them.

1 John 5:14-17

If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. - 1 John 5:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Before Jesus died on the cross, God's people experienced daily, tangible reminders that they were separated from Him. The only access to Him had to be mediated through priests and sacrifices. Consider the numerous temple courts, from the outer courts of the Gentiles all the way into the Holy of Holies, where the high priest could enter only once a year. Do you ever stop to think that our "easy" access and confidence before God through Jesus is incredible? Now, through Christ, our Great High Priest, "the curtain of the temple was torn" (Mark 15:38), and we approach God's throne of grace with confidence (Heb. 4:14-16). This is the background of today's passage.

In addition to the assurance of eternal life (v. 13), there is confidence in prayer (vv. 14-15). This passage celebrates our confidence not only in Christ's victory to bring us into God's presence, but also confidence that God hears us when we beseech Him according to His will. "He hears us" is repeated twice and suggests a positive response. Jesus similarly promises answered prayer while sharing the Passover meal with His disciples (John 16:23).

Verse 16 offers an example of praying according to God's will. Previously, John outlines what to do when you yourself sin (1:9). Here

he teaches that we need to pray for fellow believers who fall into sin. The “sin that does not lead to death” includes those sins committed by believers in Jesus. Forgiveness is offered by Christ’s atoning sacrifice. To pray with confidence for our fellow believer who is trapped in sin is to pray that God would grant him life. This is in accord with God’s will.

The “sin that leads to death” is all sin committed apart from belief in Jesus. This sin leads to spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). The unbeliever who denies Jesus and His essential, atoning death does not have the remedy for sin and the sin nature, and therefore without belief he cannot experience life.

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s passage emphasizes confidence in prayer and the prayer of Christians for fellow believers. Praying according to God’s will may seem intimidating. How do we know God’s will? We know His will first and foremost in the person of Jesus Christ and as it’s revealed in the Scriptures. Today, pray the prayer Jesus taught His disciples as a template for praying according to God’s will (Matt. 6:9-13). For a deeper study of this prayer, read *The Lord and His Prayer* by N. T. Wright or *Praying the Lord’s Prayer* by J. I. Packer.

1 John 5:16

What does John mean when he says, “There is a sin that leads to death” (1 John 5:16)?

John’s words must be understood in context. John is talking about two kinds of sin—one that leads to death and one that does not lead to death. What John says at the beginning of verse 16 is a major clue to unlocking the meaning of this passage: “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death.” John uses the family term “brother.” By using a family term, John shows us that the two kinds of sin he is talking about are the sins that a Christian may potentially commit. Since a person who is truly saved and born again of the Spirit of God cannot be lost, the “death” that the sin in this context leads to cannot be eternal death, i.e., eternal separation from God in hell, the lake of fire. In context, then, John means that there is a sin that a Christian can commit and the consequence is physical death. Some Christians in the church at Corinth committed such a sin. As a result of taking part in communion in an unworthy manner, some of the Corinthian believers died (1 Cor. 11:27-30). Ananias and Sapphira are also sad examples of Christians who committed a sin that resulted in physical death (Acts 5:1-11).

1 John 5:18-21

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. - John 10:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

The past year has been filled with a series of financial scandals. Beginning with the fall of the Enron Corporation, the “infectious greed” of many top-level corporate executives has been exposed. If you could peek into the private world of any one of these individuals, you probably wouldn’t find them bowing down to carved wooden or stone “idols,” but their lives suggest that they were indeed caught up in another type of idolatry: the worship of money.

At first glance, the final words of 1 John might seem strangely out of place. After all, the focus has been on love, obedience, and belief--idolatry has never even been mentioned! And yet, we’ll see that the greatest obstacle to eternal life is idolatry, or the worship of anything apart from God in the hope of getting life.

The final verses of 1 John each begin with the bold declaration “we know.” First, John declares that believers know that the child of God does not live a life characterized by sin, a familiar theme for John, going back to chapter 1. Instead, the child of God is protected by the only-begotten One of God, Jesus Christ. The “safety” here probably includes being kept from on-going sin; that is, through confession and obedience, the believer is protected.

Second, believers know that they are children of God, even though the world is controlled by the one who is completely opposed to Christ (v. 19). But believers need not fear, because they can’t be touched by the Evil One--the eternal life of the child of God can’t be taken away.

Finally, believers know that the Son of God has come and has given knowledge. The fact of His coming in the flesh has been a major point of John’s epistle. And the fact that in Him we have received all the knowledge that we need for salvation has also been stressed in 1 John. Despite what any heretic might claim, God is made truly, fully, and only known in Jesus Christ!

APPLY THE WORD

Perhaps some of the recent financial scandals could have been avoided if individuals had stopped to question their priorities. Perhaps if one had made the connection between greed and the attempt to find life apart from Christ, things might have turned out differently.

1 John 5:19 , John 12:30-31

TODAY IN THE WORD

For many Americans of an earlier generation, the term "company town" strikes a familiar chord. These were communities built and operated by companies to house their employees. Since the company ran the town, it did not matter whether a person was paying the rent, buying groceries, or shopping for clothes. All the profits went to the same source, the employer.

As far as unbelievers are concerned, this world is Satan's "company town." He's the boss, the prince of this world, the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph. 2:2). We sing that God has the whole world in His hands, and that's true. But until Christ returns and claims His rightful throne, Satan has the unsaved world in his lap.

That fact doesn't need to keep God's people awake at night except in our concern for the lost. It's not as if the devil is going to unseat God from His throne. One of the world's prevailing misconceptions about the battle between good and evil is that the two forces are more or less equal, locked in a titanic struggle for control. But that's not what the Bible says!

But for the time being, we need to realize that the world is Satan's domain, his sphere of operation. The question is, what does this mean for the daily spiritual warfare we are called to wage?

One conclusion is that as the children of God, we are in hostile territory. But we are not defenseless. The apostle John explains: "The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true" (1 John 5:20). The best defense against the devil's lies is to know the truth of God and the God of truth.

Another conclusion we can draw is that since the world is under the influence of Satan, we know what kind of influence we can expect the world to exert on us.

APPLY THE WORD

Here's another conclusion we can draw from today's lesson. Since "the world and its desires pass away" (1 John 2:17), we shouldn't allow ourselves to become attached to this planet and temporal things. There's nothing wrong with having possessions. But we need to hold them in an open hand, because they are merely temporary.

1 John 5:19

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. - Ephesians 6:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

In C. S. Lewis's book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lucy visits Narnia through a wardrobe and learns from Mr. Tumnus that the White Witch "has got all Narnia under her thumb. It's she that makes it always winter and never Christmas." The so-called Queen put an enchantment over Narnia to keep it forever in winter, but never Christmas. Yet Mr. Beaver announces, "Aslan is on the move. He's the King. He's the Lord of the whole wood, but not often here ... the word has reached us that he has come back. He is in Narnia at this moment. He'll settle the White Queen all right." Similarly, the prince of this world and his imminent defeat is the focus of today's passage.

When studying God's Word, noting comparisons and contrasts is a helpful tool for interpreting the text. Notice the connection between today's verse and yesterday's. Also, observe the contrast between God's children and the Satan-dominated "world," which, as we have seen before, is a familiar theme in 1 John (cf. 2:15-17; 3:10; 4:5-6). John compares the position of God's children to the position of the unbelieving world: the former belong to God while the latter lives under the authority and power of the Evil One. Believers in Jesus Christ are no longer under the Evil One's control, and no longer slaves to sin; sin is not their master. God our Father "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13).

The children of God inherit victory over the devil because Christ came to destroy his work (1 John 3:8). Jesus has pronounced judgment on the world, and the prince of this world has been driven out. But a tension exists: although the devil has been defeated once for all through Christ's death and resurrection (see Col. 2:13-15), the unbelieving world is still under his control until he is finally bound and dethroned forever (Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10).

APPLY THE WORD

Ephesians makes clear that until Christ returns, we will battle against "the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (6:12). In order to stand strong against "the devil's schemes," such as lying, lust, covetousness, injustice, and general spiritual attack, let us put on the full armor of God (6:11-18). The LifeGuide Bible Study *Spiritual Warfare* by Jack Kuhatschek is an excellent workbook for individuals or groups seeking to stand in the midst of spiritual struggle.

1 John 5:21

Watch your life and doctrine closely. - 1 Timothy 4:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

When navigating a ship, an error of one degree seems miniscule, but continued travel in an errant direction will lead the vessel miles off course. Similarly, false belief about Jesus, even if seemingly slight, has increasingly deleterious effects upon orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right practice). Today's text warns against such false belief leading to idolatry.

Nothing in 1 John readies us for 5:21, as nothing explicit is said about idols up to this point in John's letter, though he does call Jesus "true God" (v. 20). John may be speaking of the actual idolatry of his day (cf. Acts 17:23; 1 Thess. 1:9), but it is more likely that the "idols" are those conjured by the false teachers. Idolatry is the worship of false gods. The antichrists' false claims about Jesus are idolatrous, because false belief leads to worship of something that is not God. In contrast, John exhorts us to maintain right belief about Jesus, "the true God and eternal life" (v. 20). Those who truly know Jesus completely avoid idols and those who endorse them.

First John 5:18-21 summarize John's major themes. As our study of 1 John ends, let's review one edifying thread woven through John's letter: assurance for believers in Jesus Christ, God's Son. First, assurance is grounded in obedience to the command to love and live like Jesus (2:3-6; 3:14). Second, confidence on the day of judgment is based on righteous living and loving in Christ (2:28-29; 4:17).

Third, certainty in prayer results from living and praying according to God's will (3:21-22; 5:14). Fourth, God's testimony about Jesus resides in our hearts (5:9-13). Lastly, all assurance is guaranteed through God's Spirit living in us (3:23-24; 4:13). As one New Testament scholar states: "The grounds of assurance are ethical, not emotional; objective, not subjective; plain and tangible, not microscopic and elusive."

APPLY THE WORD

Sometimes Christians read God's Word piecemeal, one verse or passage at a time, often without connecting the small portion to the larger context, namely, the chapter, book, Testament, and Bible as a whole. Today, take time to read 1 John in its entirety. This is a good practice for any Bible study: at the end of a study, take some time to re-read the entire book. If you need a resource to encourage you, read Gordon Fee's *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*.

1 John 5:21, Ezekiel 8:1-9:11

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. - 1 John 5:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Imagine walking into a church, ahead of you is a cross, to one side is a piano, and to the other side, a small organ. It looks pretty much like any other church you've been in. Suddenly you notice small voodoo dolls along window ledges--above them, crystals hang. Instead of hymnals, you find Tarot cards in the pew racks. A cold chill runs down your spine. Sadly, if people from Ezekiel's day could have traveled in time and space, they probably would have felt right at home in this "church."

About fourteen months after Ezekiel's acted parables (see August 4), he was taken by the Spirit to Jerusalem (vv. 1-3), where he was horrified to find in the holy Temple "the idol that provokes to jealousy." This vile image, probably a Canaanite fertility goddess, provoked God's holy jealousy because it stood for all that is against Him and His people. And this horrible image stood opposite the glory of the Lord. Such abomination eventually drove His glory from the Temple, for His holiness cannot coexist with evil.

The entire Temple was defiled with pagan practices. Ezekiel discovered seventy elders, worshipping what were probably Egyptian gods (v. 10). They were worshipping in the dark, thinking that somehow the Lord couldn't see them or that He had forsaken them (v. 12). What the spiritual leaders were practicing in secret, the rest of the people were doing openly. Tammuz was a pagan god of the underworld, whose worshipers believed that their tears (v. 14) enabled him to provide rain and fertility. Just past these women, Ezekiel saw 25 men worshipping the sun--with their backs turned to the Temple (v.16)! It's no wonder that such flagrant violation of God's commandments in his House provoked his wrath!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Idolatry is a problem of every human heart--sophisticated idols are still idols.

One way to detect an idol is to ask, "What do I think I must have in order for life to be good?" For example, a successful career, a stable family, or a nice home. Or consider a specific element of your life, and ask, "If this item were taken away would I still believe

that abundant life was possible?” Now take your answers to the only One who can release us from idols—Jesus Christ!

An Expository Study of 1 John Part 10 (of 10 parts): An Exposition of 1 John 5:13–21

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These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might 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. Little children, guard yourselves from idols (1 John 5:13–21).

The first four verses of 1 John formed the prologue to the epistle, setting forth the foundational realities of the gospel. These nine concluding verses appropriately form an epilogue to the epistle, restating and supplementing the truths that have been set forth. In verse 13 John declared that his basic purpose in writing was to assure his readers that they have eternal life through faith in the Son of God. In verses 14–17 John enlarged on the results of that assurance in the believer’s practice of prayer and intercession. In verses 18–20 he summed up the thrust of his apostolic message in three ringing certainties, and in verse 21 he abruptly closed the epistle with an urgent call to the readers to guard themselves from idols.

The Purpose to Assure Believers of Eternal Life

Verse 13 indicates that the epistle was drawing to a close. John’s stated purpose in writing was “that you may know that you have eternal life.” The stated purpose of the Fourth Gospel, “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:31), was evangelistic; this epistle was written to confirm the faith of those “who believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). Only here in the epistle did John identify his readers as those who believe “in the name” (εἰς τὸ νομα, literally, “into the name”), who by faith have entered into a living relationship with Him in all that His name stands for, that He is indeed the Son of God incarnate.

In the opening clause of verse 13, “These things I have written to you” (ταῦτα γράψαμι υἱ), the intended scope of “these things” has been understood in different ways. Some interpreters hold that the designation marks a close connection with verses 11–12,1 as indicated by the similarity in thought and language. Then verse 13 is viewed as emphatically applying these truths to the readers. In support, Hodges points out that “similar expressions in 2:1, 26 refer to the immediately preceding material and the same is true here.”² But others hold that John’s statement here more naturally looks back to the epistle as a whole.³ This statement of purpose clearly sums up what John had been doing in this epistle. Plummer points to the close connection between the statement of purpose in 1:4 and 5:13 and remarks that “there is nothing there or here, as there is in 2:26, to limit ‘these things’ to what immediately precedes.”⁴ Burdick observes, “In 1:4 John uses the present tense γράφομεν, ‘we are writing,’ to describe his task in its beginning, whereas in 5:13 he employs the aorist indicative (γράψαμι, ‘I have written’) to look back on the task he has completed.”⁵ Under this view there is an obvious parallel between verse 13 and John 20:31. The view that “these things” looks back to the entire epistle brings the epistle to a natural climax.

First John 5:13 also has a textual problem. After, “These things I have written to you,” the King James Version, following the Textus Receptus, has a longer text: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” This is the reading of three uncials of the eighth and ninth centuries and of most later minuscule manuscripts. Proponents of the longer reading suggest that the shorter arose through scribal elimination of the apparent redundancy. Hodges remarks that the longer reading “prepares the ground for the discussion about prayer which follows by inviting continued faith in God’s Son on the part of those who already have received eternal life through Him.”⁶

However, most modern editors⁷ agree that the reading of the earlier witnesses (א, B, Syriac) is more likely the original, “especially since να πιστεύητε seems to have arisen as a scribal assimilation to the statement in Jn 20:31.”⁸ The rendering of Rotherham represents the structure of the verse in its shorter form: “These things have I written unto you—In order that you may know that ye have Life Age-abiding—Unto you who believe on the name of the Son of God.”⁹ Thus the opening clause refers to the things John

has written, followed by a purpose clause indicating his aim, and an appositional concluding clause declaring the identity of those addressed. Most modern English versions reverse the second and third clauses.¹⁰ This writer believes it is more effective to retain the original order.

John's stated purpose in writing is "in order that you may know that you have eternal life." The verb "know" (εἶδτε, an old second perfect subjunctive with a present meaning) denotes a "knowledge that is characterized by assurance, something known with certainty."¹¹ His aim was to strengthen and deepen the assurance they already had. His purpose is still timely. As Stott remarks,

It is common today to decry any claim to assurance of salvation, to dismiss it as presumptuous, and to affirm that no certainty is possible on this side of death.... If God's revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe and live, but also that we should know, presumptuousness lies in doubting His word, not in trusting it.¹²

The content of this assured knowledge is "that you have eternal life" (τι ζωετε αὐνιον, literally, "that life ye are having eternal"). Placing the adjective "eternal" at the end of the clause emphasizes the nature of that life, "life that is endless (as to time) and life that is God-breathed (as to quality)."¹³ The present tense verb asserts that the readers already are in possession of this life.

The third clause, "to you who believe in the name of the Son of God" (τος πιστεύουσιν ες το νομα το υο το θεο), is an appositional expansion of "to you" (μν) and more precisely characterizes the recipients of the letter. The present tense articular participle (τος πιστεύουσιν, "to those believing") designates a definite group characterized by a living faith uniting them with the Son of God. This faith assures them of eternal life and marks the sharp antithesis between them and the anti-Christian heretics. This 10th and last occurrence of the verb "believe" in this epistle again shows that an active faith is foundational to true Christianity.

The Confidence of Believers before God

Accepting the view that verse 13 looks back to the epistle as a whole, commentators generally regard the remainder of the epistle as an appendix or postscript, analogous to John 21. Some, like Bultmann,¹⁴ even regard verses 14–21 as the work of a later redactor. Plummer notes that "some go so far as to conjecture that the same person added chapt. 21 to the Gospel and the last nine verses to the Epistle after the Apostle's death."¹⁵ But he notes that the conjecture is devoid of historical evidence, since both Tertullian (ca. 160/170-ca. 215/220)¹⁶ and Clement of Alexandria (ca. 155–ca. 220) quoted from these closing verses of the epistle "and both these writers in quoting mention S. John by name."¹⁷ As to any argument drawn from the content of the verses, Plummer points out that "the diction is S. John's throughout, and some of the fundamental ideas of the Epistle reappear in these concluding verses."¹⁸ These verses are to be accepted as part of the original epistle as written by John. The "And" (κα) of verse 14 indicates that John desired to add something further. Lenski remarks, "The fact that John is thinking of the dangers that are besetting his readers becomes evident in what he adds."¹⁹

Having expressed the certainty that faith in the Son of God works in the hearts of believers, John gave expression to this certainty in the matter of prayer and intercession. In verses 14–15 he dealt with the believer's confidence before God in prayer, while in verses 16–17 he related that confidence to the practice of intercession.

THE CONFIDENCE OF ANSWERED PRAYER (VV. 14–15)

The opening "And" indicates that personal assurance of salvation finds expression in the believer's confident approach to God in prayer. John spoke of the believer's confidence in expressing his prayer before God (v. 14) and added the assurance of receiving God's answer (v. 15).

The confidence in asking (v. 14). "And this is the confidence which we have before Him" (κα ατη στυ παρηρησια ν χομεν πρς ατόν) contains the fourth reference to the believer's "confidence" in this epistle. In 2:28 and 4:17 the term is used in connection with the believer's confidence at Christ's return. In 3:21–22 and here it relates to the believer's present confidence as he stands before God in prayer. As a compound noun (πάρ, "all" and σις "speech") it denotes the freedom of speech that enables believers to express their minds and desires before God without hesitancy or fear of embarrassment. Personal assurance of salvation begets in believers' hearts the confidence that God is accessible.

The demonstrative "this" (ατη) looks forward to the "that" clause as expressing the nature of the believer's confidence, while "we have" (χομεν) marks it as the present possession of John and fellow believers. The prepositional phrase "before Him" (πρς ατυ) makes clear the Godward relationship of this confidence. The preposition πρς basically means "near, facing,"²⁰ and pictures the believer expressing his request as he stands in communion with God in a "face-to-face" relationship with Him. The pronoun "Him" may refer to "the Son of God" (v. 13), but more probably it refers to God the Father, since Christian prayer is generally addressed to Him. This imprecision in the use of the pronoun in relation to God is characteristic of John; he accepted the Father and the Son as truly one in nature and knew prayer could freely be addressed to either.

The believer approaches God with the assurance "that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (v. 14b). The indefinite

“anything” (τι) leaves unrestricted the content of the request the believer may present, indicating his “freedom to approach God in prayer anywhere and anytime.”²¹ In Philippians 4:6 Paul urged his readers, “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Since John here used the middle voice, “if we ask anything” (ὅταν τι αἰτήσῃμεθα), some like Westcott²² and Lenski²³ hold that the request involves the personal interest of the one making it. While a personal interest in the request being made is natural and desirable, the verb cannot be understood as restricted to such personal requests. Since in verse 16 John used the active voice, the difference between the active and the middle cannot be insisted on. Arndt and Gingrich point to James 4:2–3 as an example of this interchangeable usage of active and middle.²⁴ The verb in itself simply presents a request for something to be done.

However, the added phrase “according to His will” (κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ) marks an important limitation on one’s assurance that his request will be granted. In 3:21–22 John spoke of confidence that the requests of Christians would be answered “because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” Here the condition is that their prayers are “according to His will.” These two conditions set forth the human and the divine requirements for effective praying. Prayer that is assured of God’s answer must be offered “according to” (κατὰ with the accusative, “down along the line of” or “in harmony with”) God’s will. It is a very gracious limitation, since God’s will is always for the welfare of His children. Graciously He “does not allow them an unbridled liberty to ask whatever may come to their minds.”²⁵ Yet whenever a Christian has a request that he is not sure is in accord with God’s will, he can follow the example of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed for the removal of “the cup,” but added “yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt” (Mark 14:36; cf. John 12:27–28). Prayer is not a device for imposing one’s will on God, rather it is the bending of one’s will to His in the desire that His purposes may be done. “Prayer, according to God’s will,” G. Williams notes, “is an activity growing out of the consciousness of the sweet relationship of a child and a father. Such an intimacy involves harmoniousness of will and only asks for what accords with that will.”²⁶

In such praying believers are assured that “He hears us” (κούει μὲν), not merely that He listens but that He listens favorably. In asking for what they know to be God’s will, His saints have the glorious privilege of working together with God in furthering His sovereign purposes. Such praying “unites puny man to Almighty God in a miraculous partnership.... It is the most noble and most essential ministry God gives to His children.”²⁷

The assurance of the granted requests (v. 15). Verse 15 amplifies the preceding verse. The conditional statement, “And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask,” implies no doubt; it simply indicates that believers can be sure their trust is not misplaced. The expression “if we know” (ἐάν τις ᾄσῃ) may denote that this is the assurance of the Christian community, as Smalley suggests,²⁹ but Bultmann holds that it refers not to the community but to the individual praying believer.³⁰ While John included himself among these individuals, it certainly is a privilege open to all believers.

The assurance that God hears prayer is now expressed comprehensively as to the scope of the request, “in (or “as to”) whatever we ask” (ἐν ὅτι αἰτήσῃμεθα “that which if we may be asking”). It widens the possible scope of one’s praying in keeping with God’s will. Having submitted his will to God’s will, the believer feels at liberty to request God concerning any specific need.

Assurance in asking God results in assurance of God’s answer: “we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (οἱ ᾄσῃμεν τι χρομέν τὰ αἰτήματα τῆκαμεν πρὸς αὐτόν). “We know” reechoes the believers’ assurance concerning their petitions; they know they “have” (χομέν) the divine answer. The present tense suggests that by faith a believer accepts God’s answer as his. The actual reception may be immediately experienced, or the bestowal may be gradually realized in subsequent experience. In making request for various needs believers by faith can appropriate God’s immediate response.

THE COUNSEL IN RESPECT TO INTERCESSION (VV. 16–17)

Without the use of any connective particle John now turned to the practice of intercession for others. He noted an occasion that prompts the believer’s intercession (v. 16a) and declared the result of such intercession (v. 16b). He further noted that the nature of the sin in view may limit the practice of intercession (v. 16c). Verse 17 added a note of warning and also encouragement for the intercessor.

The occasion prompting the intercession (v. 16a). The occasion is graphically portrayed: “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death.” The opening “If” (ἐάν) presents the scene as hypothetical but the condition indicates that it may actually occur. Realistically John accepted the possibility that a brother may sin. The indefinite “If anyone sees” (ἐάν τις ᾄσῃ, “if anyone may see”) leaves open this intercessory function to any member of the church, regardless of his rank or status among the brethren. The call for intercession arises whenever he “sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death” (ὅταν τις ᾄσῃ ἑνὸς ἀδελφοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντος ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον). The aorist verb “sees” (ᾄσῃ, “may see” as a specific occurrence) makes clear that it is a matter not merely of personal suspicion but of an observed fact.

This individual believer observes “his brother committing a sin” (ὅταν τις ᾄσῃ ἑνὸς ἀδελφοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντος ἁμαρτίαν, literally, “his brother sinning a sin” or “sinning sin”). “His brother” makes it clear that both the one seeing and the one seen are believers. The expression “sinning a sin,” used only here in the New Testament, “emphasizes the outward present character of the act.”³¹ The present participle with the

anarthrous noun may denote either that he was observed in the very act of committing a specific sin or seen as he engaged in some sinful habit. Probably the former is meant here. Under either view he was observed sinning a sin “not leading to death” (μ πρ ς θάνατον, literally, “not unto death”). This striking expression occurs three times in verses 16–17, while its opposite, “sin unto death,” occurs only once. John did not discuss the distinguishing mark of either.

This sin characterized as “not unto death” is not necessarily fatal. This is evident from the fact that the preposition is not ε ς (“into”) but πρ ς (“facing,” or “moving in the direction of”) death. Sin as lawlessness (3:4) and unrighteousness (5:17) by its very nature moves in the direction of death (James 1:15) unless it is repented of and forgiven. John envisioned that this fatal outcome might be averted as the intercessor prayed.

The result of the intercession (v. 16b). John completed his projected picture by noting the believer’s intercession and the divine response: “he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death” (απήσει, κα δώσει ατ ζώην, το ς μαρτάνουσιν μ πρ ς θάνατον). The rendering “he shall ask” assumes that the future tense has the force of a gentle imperative, setting forth the way the believer should respond to the observed situation. But it is more probable that the verb has the force of a regular future. As a true believer he will not be indifferent to what he has seen, nor say with Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9; cf. 1 John 3:11–12). His love for his Christian brother or sister will prompt his intercessory request on behalf of the sinning individual. “For John,” Barker observes, “it would be obvious that not to pray for a brother would be as much a betrayal of God’s love as to withhold material aid from him if he hungered or thirsted (3:17).”³²

But the fact that the second future verb (δώσει, “he will give”) has no expressed subject creates difficulty for the interpreter. Two views as to the intended subject are advocated: either “God will give,” or the intercessor, who is the subject of the preceding verb, will give. Advocates of the latter view³³ hold that the two parallel verbs, both without an expressed subject, should naturally be taken as having the same subject, insisting that it “seems rather violent to give them different nominatives.”³⁴ If John intended the second verb to have a subject different from the first, he would have felt it necessary to state the subject explicitly. In support of the interpretation that John presented the intercessor as giving life to the one sinning, appeal is made to James 5:20. Under this view John must be understood as applying to the intercessor what God does through him. Proponents of the view that the subject of this second verb is God point to the contents of this epistle. “That God is the subject is supported by the Johannine view that God gives life (5:11) and the believer possesses it (5:12) rather than distributes it; cf. John 5:26; 10:28; 17:2.”³⁵ Certainly the Scriptures teach that God is the only true Source of spiritual life. But the very ambiguity in John’s statement seems to suggest that God delights to perform His saving work on behalf of His sinning people in cooperation with the Spirit-prompted prayers of His saints. Through Spirit-prompted intercession for what he knows is God’s will a believer has the glorious privilege of working with God in the fulfillment of His redemptive purposes. Thus “Spirit-empowered, Bible-based praying is working with God at the very point where the action lies!”³⁶

In the statement “God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death” (δώσει ατ ζώην, το ς μαρτάνουσιν μ πρ ς θάνατον), the identity of the dative singular pronoun ατ (“to him”) is most naturally understood to mean the sinning brother for whom intercession was made. The following dative articular participle then enlarges on the efficacy of such prayer. The New International Version changes the grammatical construction to make this clear: “God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death.” The assurance that God will give “life” (ζώην) to the sinning brother does not imply that he no longer possesses spiritual life. In the context this bestowal of life must be understood as a renewal and strengthening of the life already possessed (3:14; 5:11–13), prompting a fuller spiritual life and victory in Christ.

The sin that limits the intercession (v. 16c). John was aware that the nature of the sin being committed can negate the effectiveness of the believer’s intercession. John categorically declared that “there is a sin leading to death” (σπιν μαρτία πρ ς θάνατον, “there is a sin unto death”), but he did not identify the one thus guilty. He did not say that the individual in view is a Christian. The sin is not identified, nor does the original assert that one specific sin is in view, since neither τ ς nor μία is used. Clearly it is a sin persisted in until it culminates in death. John apparently assumed that the observant believer would be able to distinguish between these two types of sin, but he offered no guiding criteria.

As to the intercessor’s response to a case of “sin unto death,” John simply remarked, “I do not say that he should make request for this” (ο περ κεινης λέγω να ρωτήσ, literally, “not concerning this [sin] I say that he should make request”). The forward position of “concerning this” makes it emphatic. “The sin unto death is isolated and regarded in its terrible distinctness.”³⁷ The case at once raised a question for the intercessor. John stated his response negatively: “not ... I am saying that he should make request.” He did not expressly prohibit intercession, but as Smalley notes, “the use of ο (‘not’) at a distance from λέγω (‘I say,’ or ‘I command’) implies that the dissuasion is mild.”³⁸ The use of “I say,” only here in the epistle, suggests that John was offering his own feeling in the matter. The use of the aorist tense verb “request” (ρωτήσ) here does not seem to carry a meaning distinctly different from the verb “ask” (απήσει) used before. In the context both convey the thought of intercession. The use of the singular “he” in both verbs suggests that the intercession in view is personal rather than a united congregational activity.

What is this “sin unto death” for which intercession is not enjoined? Both the identity of the sin and the nature of the resultant death have been variously understood. Used with no definite article, both nouns are qualitative rather than specific. Suggestions about their identity are best offered in light of the epistle as a whole.

One view is that “sin unto death” is a sin so serious “that God judges that sin with swift physical death.”³⁹ Bruce expounds this view as follows:

Elsewhere in the New Testament instances occur of sins which caused the death of the persons committing them, when these persons were church members. Ananias and Sapphira come to mind (Acts 5:1–11); the incestuous man at Corinth is possibly another example, if he suffered “the destruction of the flesh” in the literal sense (1 Cor. 5:5), and those other Corinthian Christians who are said to have “fallen asleep” because of their profanation of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:30) certainly provide further examples.⁴⁰

This view assumes that those guilty of this fatal sin were believers and members of the local church; their death showed they were guilty of “sin unto death.” But since John did not prohibit intercession for those thus guilty, it seems that John at least condoned prayer for those who had thus died. The only other direct mention of “death” in this epistle is the double occurrence in 3:14 where its meaning clearly is spiritual, not physical death. And in 3:15 he pictured the murderous attitude that hatred produces as the very antithesis of “eternal life.” The expression “unto death” in John 11:4 cannot be used as a parallel to support the view that John means physical death here, since the context is different; there the reference is to “sickness unto death,” here to “sin unto death.” In the New Testament “death,” whether physical or spiritual, is always viewed as the penal consequence of sin.⁴¹ Sin produces separation. In physical death man’s nonmaterial being is separated from his physical body; in spiritual death the soul is separated from God; in eternal death the human being is banished from the presence of God.

In accepting the view that John here referred to spiritual death, the question must still be faced as to the nature of the sin that produces this separation from God. Contrasted with “sin not unto death,” it clearly denotes sin that is carried to its ultimate conclusion. In view of what John had said about the false teachers (1 John 2:18–23), the reference seems to be to the sin of apostasy. These false teachers manifested the spirit of the Antichrist, separated themselves from the true church, and perverted or rejected the apostolic message of redemption in Christ. In deliberately rejecting the incarnate Son of God, in whom alone eternal life is available, they committed themselves to a spiritual attitude and course of action that could only be characterized as “sin unto death.” It was not a sin committed by a true believer. Those guilty of “sin unto death” have deliberately cut themselves off from the divine remedy for sin available in the incarnate Son of God.

The warning and encouragement for the intercessor (v. 17). The absence of a connecting particle for verse 17 is arresting. It offers the readers a timely warning and an encouragement. The assertion, “All unrighteousness is sin” (π σα δικία μαρτία σιν), warns against carelessly assuming that some forms of sin are inconsequential. The term “unrighteousness” (δικία) portrays sin in its negative character as a departure from or failure to measure up to the divine standard of what is right. The conscience of the believer becomes aroused when such deviations are measured in the light of God’s holiness and His revealed will for His own. John’s words are a summary rejection of the claims of Gnostics who maintained that their elite intellectual enlightenment made them acceptable before God and so were indifferent to demands for righteous living inherent in the gospel.

The added words “and there is a sin not leading to death” encouraged John’s readers to continue interceding for erring believers. The connecting “and” suggests that his readers must hold the two parts of this sentence in proper balance. All sin is serious but not all sin is hopeless and beyond the reach of Christian intercession. Whenever a Christian brother commits a sin “not unto death,” intercessory prayer on his behalf is God’s gracious arrangement whereby His saints are privileged to work together with Him in furthering His redemptive purpose for their sinning brother.

The Certainties of the Christian Faith

Having spoken of the believer’s confidence in connection with prayer and intercession, John now made three ringing affirmations concerning the certainties of the Christian faith (vv. 18–20). His triple declaration “We know” reasserts the realities set forth in the epistle. He declared the believer’s relationship to sin (v. 18), reasserted the crucial contrast between the believer and the world (v. 19), and expounded the reality concerning Christ’s mission (v. 20).

THE BELIEVER’S RELATIONSHIP TO SIN (v. 18)

The opening “We know” (ο δαμεν), which links these three verses, suggests intuitive knowledge rather than the activity of acquiring it. In this epistle the verb is always in the plural, in the first or second person, and thus relates to the corporate knowledge of true believers as over against the spurious claims of the heretics. The fact of human sin, touched on in each chapter of the epistle, creates a moral problem for the believer. John asserted the believer’s relation to sin (v. 18a), pointed out the keeping work of Christ on his behalf (v. 18b), and asserted the devil’s failure again to bring the believer into his clutches (v. 18c).

The believer's relationship to sin (v. 18a). Born-again believers collectively know "that no one who is born of God sins" (πῶς γεγεννημένος κτὸ θεοῦ οὐ χμαρτάνει, literally, "that every one having been born of God not is sinning"). John's construction (πῶς with the singular participle) puts emphasis on the individual but insists that there should be no exceptions. Each individual in the group has permanently received a new birth from God and as such does not continue in the practice of sin. His new birth was not a transient experience but has produced an abiding change in him; he continues as a born-again believer (2:9; 3:9; 5:1, 4). In 3:9 John accounted for the change in the believer's conduct as due to the fact that God's "seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." In both 3:19 and 5:18 the present tense portrays characteristic practice. John had just said that if a brother sins, his Christian brother will intercede for him (5:16); now he stated that "no one who is born of God sins." In 5:16 he realistically dealt with the possible but exceptional facts; now he referred to the habitual state. "A child of God may sin; but his normal condition is one of resistance to sin."⁴²

The believer's protection by Christ (v. 18b). John continued with the strong adversative "but" (ἀλλ'). The solution to the believer's dilemma of sin is found in the operation of the supernatural in his life. The answer lies in the fact that "He who was born of God keeps him" (γεννηθεὶς κτὸ θεοῦ τηρεῖ αὐτόν). This rendering in the NASB (see also RV, ASV, NIV, NEB, etc.) contains two changes from the KJV rendering, "he that is begotten of God keeps himself." The first change depends on the interpretation of the aorist passive participle (γεννηθεὶς), while the second change depends on whether the original used a personal or a reflexive pronoun.

The intended person in view in the statement "he that is begotten of God" (γεννηθεὶς κτὸ θεοῦ) is not immediately obvious. The King James rendering interprets the aorist participle as denoting the believer, but numerous scholars insist that it is more natural to understand this aorist participle as a reference to Jesus Christ. Having just used the perfect tense of the believer's birth in the preceding clause, the change to the aorist here strongly suggests that a change in meaning is intended. To insist on the same meaning for both terms is arbitrary and confusing. Both in his Gospel and in this epistle John always used the perfect tense to denote the born-again believer. Plummer notes that in "the Nicene Creed, 'begotten of the Father' (τὸν Πατέρα γεννηθέντα) is the same form of expression as that used here for 'begotten of God' (γεννηθεὶς κτὸ θεοῦ)."⁴³ Burdick points out that "the concept of the believer keeping himself is not taught elsewhere in Scripture; in fact, it is quite contrary to what the Bible teaches on the subject."⁴⁴ The truth that Christ keeps the children of God is found in John 17:12; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24; and Revelation 3:10. The view that the reference is to Christ keeping the believer establishes a striking contrast between the activities of Christ and the "evil one" in the following clause. This interpretation demands that the pronoun denoting the one being kept cannot be the reflexive pronoun (αὐτόν). While the manuscript evidence for the two pronouns is divided, the internal evidence favors the personal pronoun αὐτόν. When the scribes understood the aorist participle as a reference to the believer, the personal pronoun was naturally changed to the reflexive.⁴⁵

Smalley suggests that when John used the same verb root (γεννάω) he "may have wished to emphasize the identity of God's Son with his disciples," yet the change in tense "marks an ultimate difference in the two sonships."⁴⁶ The aorist used in reference to Christ may be taken as a timeless aorist to denote Christ's eternal relationship to the Father as His Son. On the other hand Smalley holds that the aorist has reference "to the specific event, in the past, of the birth of Jesus."⁴⁷ If the reference is to His birth at Bethlehem, then it involves the fact of His divine-human nature, which enabled the incarnate Christ to become the believers' Savior as well as their heavenly Intercessor (Heb. 4:14–16). The fact that He now "keeps" (τηρεῖ), protects, and preserves them, assures their security. "Our security is not our grip on Christ but His grip on us."⁴⁸

The believer's security from the evil one (v. 18c). The added clause, "and the evil one does not touch him" (καὶ πονηρὸς οὐ χπτεταί αὐτό), sets forth the fact of Christ's protection for the believer. With "and" (καὶ) John set side by side the two supernatural realms contending for possession of the individual human being. The title "the evil one" (πῶς) underlines the malicious, evil-minded nature of the devil as the active enemy of the believer. The words "does not touch him" declare the comforting assurance that the devil will fail to recapture the Christian. The verb "touch" (πτεταί) denotes more than a superficial touch: it means to "lay hold on or fasten on to" for the purpose of harm or injury. The middle voice pictures his effort to fasten himself to a believer, while the present tense denotes the devil's persistence. He will assail the believer but will never regain an abiding grip on the redeemed soul. The security of the saint, even when he is tempted and sins, lies in the intercessory action of Christ on his behalf (cf. Luke 22:31–32).

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND THE WORLD (v. 19)

John's second certainty proclaims a decisive spiritual contrast: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." As an independent declaration, it challenges the readers more vividly to demonstrate the reality of the contrast.

Believers have an abiding inner assurance concerning their spiritual origin: "We know that we are of God" (οἱ ὄμεν τι κτὸ θεοῦ σμεν, more literally, "that out of God we are"), thus stressing the source of their new life. The verb "we are" declares this relationship as a fact, not a mere inference. The general principle stated in verse 18 is now expressed as a personal reality. The word "we" unites John with his fellow believers in this stirring assurance.

"And" adds the antithetical relationship that characterizes the world: "and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (καὶ

κόσμος λος ν τ πονηρ κε ται). The position of the adjective “whole” (λος) notes that this is true of all humans who belong to the world in its estrangement from God. Alienated from God by the deceptive activities of the evil one, the world now “lies” (κε ται) passively in his power.⁴⁹ John did not say that they are “of” (κ, “out of”) “the evil one” for he is not the source of their being; he did not create them. He holds control over them as a usurper. Because of Satan’s domination over the world Jesus portrayed him as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, KJV; the NASB has “the ruler of this world”). For John there is no middle ground between the two spiritual realms. Man is free to choose his master, but he is not free to be without a master.

THE CERTAINTY CONCERNING CHRIST’S MISSION AND IDENTITY (v. 20)

John began this third certainty with the particle δ (“now, moreover”), implying that something further and most fundamental is being added. The opening clause, “We know that the Son of God has come” (ο δαμεν δ τι υ ς το θεο κει) declares the summit of these Christian certainties. The title “the Son of God” reasserts His true deity while the verb “has come” points to His incarnate historical appearing among men. The verb (κει, a present tense with the force of a perfect) declares the abiding reality of His incarnation. “Faith rests on the permanence of the fact and not upon the historical fact alone.”⁵⁰ The reference is not to His abiding earthly presence but to the abiding fact of the Incarnation as essential for His present heavenly ministry (Heb. 2:17–18; 4:14–16).

With another “and” (κα) John added that the Christian faith is not only historically based but also impacts personal experience: “and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true.” In the words, “and has given us understanding” (κα δέδωκεν μ ν διόνοιαν) the perfect tense verb again points to the permanent gift. The noun “understanding” (διόνοιαν), which occurs only here in the Johannine writings, is a compound term (διά, “through,” and νο ς, “mind,” hence “a through mind”). This denotes the ability to pass beyond the external to discern and understand reality. John treasured this ability to discern truth from error as a precious gift that enables believers to see through and refute the heretical claims of false teachers. The Spirit as God’s anointing (2:27), works this understanding in believers.

This gift for believers enables them to realize God’s purpose for their lives: “in order that we might know Him who is true” (να γινώσκωμεν τ ν ληθινόν). Manuscript evidence is divided on whether the mode of “know” is indicative (γινώσκομεν) or subjunctive (γινώσκωμεν).⁵¹ Evidence seems to support the indicative, but the context suggests a subjunctive purpose clause. Lias well concludes, “If we read γινώσκομεν, we must interpret in order that we may know, as in fact we do, implying that the knowledge is both present and future.”⁵² This knowledge is not impersonal but centers in the Person whom John designated as “Him who is true” (τ ν ληθινόν, “the true or real One”).⁵³ It designates Him as the God who is genuine or real as opposed to the spurious gods of the heretics.

With a further “and” John indicated that knowledge of God is experiential as well as intellectual: “And we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.” “We are in Him who is true” (σμ ν ν τ ληθιν , “we are in the true One”) reaffirms the mystical union with God that John repeatedly asserted (2:5, 24, 27–28; 3:24; 4:4, 12–13, 15–16). The relationship expressed by “in Him” refers back to fellowship with God referred to at the beginning of the epistle (1:3). John portrayed God as the “light” in whom is no darkness (1:5).

The designation “in Him who is true” seems naturally to refer to God the Father (cf. John 17:3), but the intended connection of the following phrase, “in His Son Jesus Christ” (ν τ υ α το ησο Χριστ) is understood in various ways. The KJV rendering, “and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ,” refers the whole expression to Christ. Against this appositional identification is the use of the expression “His Son.” It seems better to accept that the words explain the preceding phrase, indicating how this mystical union is brought about. Removing the comma and uniting the two phrases gives John’s explanation of how believers are in the true God: “and we are in the True One in His Son Jesus Christ.” “We are in the true God inasmuch as we are in His Son Jesus Christ. The deepest level of awareness of God is achieved only in intimate communion with the Son.”⁵⁴

John ended this third certainty with the emphatic assertion: “This is the true God and eternal life” (ο τός σπιν ληθιν ς θε ς κα ζω α ώνιος). Grammatically the pronoun “this” (ο τός) may refer either to “Him who is true” (God the Father) or to Jesus Christ. Proponents of the view that “this” (ο τός) refers to the Father advance varied arguments: (1) The pronoun need not refer to the nearest antecedent but appropriately refers to the Father as “the leading subject of all that follows ‘understanding.’ ”⁵⁵ (2) The repetition involved under this view is characteristic of John. (3) John 5:26 states that the Father is the source of the life that is in the Son. (4) John 17:3 supports this view.

Proponents of the view that the pronoun refers to Jesus Christ also offer supporting evidence: (1) It is most natural that the pronoun refers to the nearest antecedent. (2) To make the clause refer back to the Father makes it repetitious and superfluous. (3) In this epistle (1:2; 5:12) as well as in the Fourth Gospel (11:25; 14:6) Christ is called the life. (4) Lenski, a strong advocate of this view, insists that John 17:3 and 5:26 do not prove the former view. He notes,

Neither the Father nor the Son is called “the eternal life” in John 17:3, for “the eternal life” is the life which we have (John 3:15, 16) and not a designation for God or for Christ Himself. A complete exegesis must go back to ζω and to τ ν ζω ν τ ν α ώνιον in 1:2, and must combine these designations of the Son of God with the

predications made in 5:11–12; for when Jesus, too, calls himself “the Life” (John 14:6; 11:25; compare 1:4) he means that he in his person is the Life, the fountain of life for us.⁵⁶

(5) This was the view held in the early church. Athanasius (ca. 296–373) in his controversy with Arius insisted on this interpretation, compelling Arius to maintain that the pronoun referred to the Father rather than to Jesus.

Though evangelical scholars disagree on the meaning of this passage, that fact does not undermine the biblical teaching concerning Christ’s deity. “That S. John teaches the Divinity of Jesus Christ both in Epistle and Gospel is so manifest, that a text more or less in favour of the doctrine need not be the subject of heated controversy.”⁵⁷ In view of the two possible interpretations here, Smalley suggests that “it is possible that the writer is once again being ambivalent in his confession.”⁵⁸ Perhaps Bennett is correct in suggesting that the reference may be “to the Godhead generally.”⁵⁹ If the “anointing” mentioned in 2:27 may be connected with the gift of “understanding” in 5:20, then all three members of the Godhead appear in this verse.

The Final Warning against Idols

John abruptly concluded the epistle with a warmhearted warning: “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (v. 21). The personal address, “little children” (τεκνία), last used in 4:4, is an affectionate reminder of John’s concern for his beloved readers in view of the dangers they confronted. His terse command, “guard yourselves from idols” (φυλάξατε αὐτὰ πνεύματα ἰδῶλων) sums up his concern for their safety. The exact phrase does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. The aorist imperative carries a sense of urgency, “effectively guard yourselves,” while the active voice with the reflexive pronoun “yourselves” stresses their personal responsibility in assuring their safety. The verb “guard” (φυλάξατε), occurring only here in 1 John, stresses the thought of the danger to be guarded against. In verse 18 John assured his readers of Christ’s keeping activity on their part; now he used a different term to stress that they had a part in assuring their security. God works in and through the efforts of His saints in keeping them from harm (cf. Phil. 2:12–13).

The express warning is to guard themselves “from idols” (πνεύματα ἰδῶλων, “from the idols”). Because this is the only direct reference to idols in the epistle, views are sharply divided on the intended reference. One view is that “the idols” refers to the literal idols that held such a powerful place in the life and culture of that day. So understood, John warned his readers against intimate associations with the paganism around them. Proponents of this view point out that elsewhere in the New Testament “the word is invariably used literally: Acts 7:41, 15:20; Rom. 2:22; 1 Cor. 8:4, 7, 10:19, 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 9:20.”⁶⁰ In support of this literal meaning Burdick asserts, “John gives not the slightest hint that he is using the term in a figurative sense. It is only reasonable, therefore, to take the term literally.”⁶¹

Others hold that here the phrase “the idols” has a broader connotation in view of the contents of the epistle as a whole. Westcott notes that for Paul “idolatry” (Col. 3:5) and “idolater” (Eph. 5:5) have a wider sense and so “the context here seems to require a corresponding extension of the meaning of the term.”⁶² Since an idol was anything that represented or took the place of God, it is held that the term here need not be restricted to literal idols but includes any false conception of “the true God” as set forth in the apostolic message. Since throughout this epistle John had been warning against and refuting perversions of the true Christian message, it seems strange that now at the very end he would warn against literal idols. John well knew that the false views of God which the heretics espoused were in reality “false deities.” He recognized that the devil whom these “antichrists” (2:18) served was linked with the false gods of the pagan world. While the false views may not have been bound to material images, they were false conceptions of God. John realized their fatal nature, since “any conception of Him that is at variance with His self-revelation in Christ is an idol.”⁶³ So understood, by using the loaded word “idols” John castigated the heretical teachings he had been refuting.