



TODAY IN THE **WORD**[®]

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

WALK IN THE LIGHT

A Study of 1, 2, 3 John

FEBRUARY 2023

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“Since I started reading the daily devotionals, I am spending more time in God’s Word. I print them out and, through prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit, I have been encouraged to read them daily.”



One reader writes: “Since I started reading the daily devotionals, I am spending more time in God’s Word. I print them out and, through prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit, I have been encouraged to read them daily. There is so much knowledge to gain from the studies. I don’t remember how I came across your website, but I am thankful. We are to sow where we are fed. I am fed daily on this site. Thank you.”

Reaching Spanish-Speaking Friends



¿Hablas español? In order to reach Spanish-speaking friends with God’s Word, *Today in the Word* has produced *Hoy en la Palabra*. This new Spanish-language version of the daily devotions is currently distributed in audio and on the web. To read or listen, go to hoyenlapalabra.com.

In September, *Today in the Word* was excited to release a new believer's edition of our Gospel of John study in the Spanish language. At the same time, we partnered with Prison Fellowship to translate the *Face to Face with Jesus* Gospel studies into Spanish. Soon they will be distributing this Bible study to men and women in our nation's prisons. Please pray with us that these Bible studies will help many come to know Jesus in a life-changing way!



Until the Whole World Hears

The *Today in the Word* app has been downloaded in 176 countries with a rapidly growing readership in the Philippines, Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria! Rob Costlow, Digital Marketing Director, said, "It has been remarkable to see and experience the

amazing growth of *Today in the Word* mobile app installs that are helping disciple people in these nations and spread God's Word."

Peter, from Uganda writes, "Praise God! *Today in the Word* has been of significant effect in my life. I stumble and fall almost every day and *Today in the Word* reminds of the abundant promise God has for us. I am filled with hopelessness, but *Today in the Word* revives my hope. May God continue to use you powerfully in Jesus' name."

Thank you, dear readers, for your prayer and financial support of the ministry of *Today in the Word*. It wouldn't be possible without you! ■



Whose Child Are You?

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

"Someone once asked, 'If you were charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'"



My brother Bob and I sound very much alike. In fact, our voices are so similar that when either of us calls my mom, she can't tell us apart.

After saying hello, she'll always ask, "Is this Bob or is this Mark?"

Bob and I sound alike because we come from the same family. Children inherit characteristics from their parents. Some are biological while others are learned by example. Maybe you inherited your dad's sense of humor or your mom's passion for gardening. People say about you, "I can sure tell whose child you are!"

Do you and I bear a resemblance to our heavenly Father? Do people say, "I can tell that you're a child of God!" In 1 John 3:1 the Bible says, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" In his letters, John shares his wonder at being God's children and urges us to let that truth transform us.

Contrary to popular opinion, not everyone is God's child. While all humans are created by God, until we repent and follow God, we are not His children (John 1:12; 3:16). Being God's

child changes everything about us. We are given a new name: *Christian*. We are given a new heavenly destiny. We have a new identity and purpose. Ephesians 1:13 declares, "You were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."

In this world, God's children will experience rejection (Rom. 12:2; 1 John 3:1). Someone once asked, "If you were charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" As God's children, we are not to blend in with the world, but to be holy, set apart for His purpose.

The name "Christian" is first mentioned in Acts 11:26. Because the first followers of Jesus were acting so much like Him, people began calling them "little Christs." The same should be said of us today. The Holy Spirit guides our behavior, shapes our thinking, and transforms us into His likeness. We are "being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). As children of God, loved and secure, may we be transformed each day to be more and more like our heavenly Father. ■

Stages of Growth

by Dr. John Koessler

“Growth is the normal experience in the Christian life, and Scripture is God’s primary tool for causing that growth.”

One of the joys of parenthood is watching your children grow up. We remember their first words and cheer for their first steps. In 1 John 2:12–14, the apostle celebrates the spiritual development of those he calls his children in the faith. John mentions three stages of growth in the Christian life: childhood, youth, and maturity.

Spiritual infancy begins with faith in Jesus Christ, as our sins are forgiven “on account of his name” (v. 12). Peter describes this spiritual childhood when he urges believers to “crave pure spiritual milk” so they may “grow up” in their salvation (1 Peter 2:2). Growth is the normal experience in the Christian life, and Scripture is God’s tool for causing that growth.

The second growth stage John describes is youth. Here we experience spiritual vitality as we discover the power of new life in Christ. We learn to be victorious over sin and “overcome the evil one” (v. 13). Our power comes through the Word of God (v. 14). The more familiar we become with Scripture the better we are able to claim its promises.

Not only do we learn that we have been forgiven through Christ, but we discover the power of cross to defeat sin (see Rom. 6:1–14).

The third growth stage is spiritual maturity. Those in this stage of spiritual development “know him who is from the beginning” (v. 14). This is a reference to Christ, “the Word of Life” (1 John 1:1). The knowledge of Christ is always the basis of our relationship with God. In the earliest stages of our spiritual growth, we primarily know what Christ has done for us. But, as we mature, we come to know more about Christ Himself. John’s description of spiritual development emphasizes knowledge of the Father, the forgiveness and victory over sin that comes to us through Christ, and the experience of knowing Christ.

Spiritual growth is a natural outcome of our relationship with Christ. But this does not necessarily mean it’s automatic. Grace and knowledge join with Spirit-empowered effort as we “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:14). ■

For Further Study

To learn more, read *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* by John Koessler (Moody Publishers).

We hope these questions will help you consider (or discuss with others) what God is teaching you through this month's study of His Word. We've left a bit of room to write down your thoughts as well!

WEEK 1: Why do you think following God is compared to walking in the light? How do you know if you are in darkness or light? (see February 2)

WEEK 2: What is the difference between worldly hope and heavenly hope? (see February 11)

WEEK 3: How can you tell that someone is a "false teacher"? What gives them away? (see February 16)

WEEK 4: What did you learn from John's letters? Make a short list (3–5 items) of your takeaways from these letters.

Want more questions? Check out the Go Deeper section on our website or app!

TODAY IN THE WORD®

Walk in the Light

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. —1 John 1:7

If the way ahead sometimes seems dark, you will be encouraged by this month's study of 1, 2, and 3 John. The apostle John's message is filled with life and hope. If I were to choose a favorite phrase, though, it would be this: "The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining" (1 John 2:8).

No matter what we are facing, no matter what we read in the headlines, the Light has dawned, the Son has risen, and the Day is coming! As we study together this month, I pray you will:

- Live out your salvation through love in action
- Discern and resist worldly temptations and false teaching
- Understand the connections between love and obedience

Your devotional author,



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Firsthand Witness

Read 1 John 1:1–4

*We proclaim to you what we
have seen and heard. — 1 John 1:3*

By the time the apostle John wrote these three letters, he was an elderly and revered leader of the church and perhaps the last living apostle. Once one of the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), John was also “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). Though he doesn’t directly name himself in these letters, the early church fathers unanimously agreed that John was the author. In addition, John was an eyewitness of the life of Christ.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., John was living and ministering in Ephesus. He wrote these letters to believers in western Asia sometime between 85 A.D. (when he wrote the Gospel of John) and 95 A.D. (when he wrote Revelation). These three letters focus on the assurance of salvation, love and obedience, and recognizing false teaching.

At the start of his first letter, John stresses the concrete reality of the Incarnation. He had seen

Jesus with his own eyes and heard Him with his own ears (v. 1). The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were not fiction, but historical fact. Ever since then, John and the other apostles had joyfully testified to the fact that Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life (vv. 2, 4; see also John 1:4; 14:6). The “Word of life” brought eternal life for all who believe—this is the good news, the gospel!

Christ is the foundation for fellowship with God and with one another (v. 3). The second Person of the Trinity became one of us, paid the penalty for our sins, and conquered death. Only by believing in Him, can we have peace with God and join His family.

► What will you do to get the most out of this month’s study? Make sure you don’t miss a day by downloading our free app. Start a study notebook (notes can also be recorded in the app). Or, go deeper with discussion questions available on our website.

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, we have not physically heard or seen You, but we know You through personal experience, through prayer, through Your Word. This month please draw us closer to You and help us be attentive to Your guidance.

Light and Dark

Read 1 John 1:5–7

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. — 1 John 1:5

Blackouts make my youngest daughter nervous. She hates trying to find her way in the dark, where anything might be lurking. She keeps a flashlight on her dresser for emergencies and knows exactly where the battery-powered camping lanterns are in my home office.

Light and darkness are powerful images in John's biblical writings: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (v. 5). In this metaphor, "light" means truth, life, holiness, goodness, and purity, while "darkness" means lies, death, unrighteousness, evil, and impurity. Similarly, Jesus had said of Himself: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The next two verses are framed as if/then statements, but not because the "if" is in doubt. Rather, this structure emphasizes the truth or falsehood of the claims made. The point of verse 6, then, is that anyone who claims to be on God's

side but walks in the darkness is lying. "Walking" is a common biblical metaphor that describes daily life activities. How can we discern truth from falsehood? By observing people's actions. No one who claims fellowship with God can at the same time be living in sin.

The opposite and equal point of verse 7 is that those who walk in the light can be confident that they are truly on God's side. We're saved, purified by Christ's blood of our sins and therefore in fellowship with God, as well as and our fellow believers. We're following Christ, who is Himself perfectly "in the light." Claims of knowing God must be backed up by the evidence of righteous lives.

► A flashlight or table lamp can help you teach a child in your life a memorable spiritual object lesson. First, sit together in the dark, then turn on the light for contrast. Explain that Jesus is the light of the world, and that when we follow Him we walk in the light.

Pray with Us

Thank You for bringing us into the light. We would never have wanted You if You had not worked this desire into our hearts. We could never have left the darkness if You had not led us out.

The Wonder of Forgiveness

Read 1 John 1:8–10

He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. — 1 John 1:9

We are all sinners. We all need forgiveness. “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean,” David prayed. “Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice” (Ps. 51:7–8). This psalm shows how God views sin, as well as the joy we experience at His forgiveness. When our sins are forgiven, we are relieved of their weight. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12).

John teaches that, as believers, we walk in the light. But that doesn’t mean we’ll never sin. In fact, we definitely will sin (v. 8). Again, this fact is framed as a conditional for emphasis: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves.” Yes, we’ve been saved from the power of sin, but no, we’re not perfect yet.

What should we do when we sin? Confess and repent (v. 9). Those who walk in the light don’t simply

admit their sin to God. We grieve over it and turn forcefully away from it, hating our sin as He does. When we do so, God is “faithful and just” and forgives us—“faithful” because His love is unconditional, and “just” because Christ has already paid the price. When God forgives, He not only chooses to forget the sin (Isa. 43:25) but also purifies and cleanses us as part of His work of sanctification.

To declare we never need forgiveness would be to call God a liar (v. 10). Notice the repetition of the word “if” in these three verses. It’s a certainty that we will occasionally stumble and fall. To claim perfection shows that “his word is not in us” and that we’re not really part of His family.

► The forgiveness we first received in Christ is the same forgiveness available to us today, whenever we sin. Thank God for this and make confession a daily part of your time with Him.

Pray with Us

Holy Father, thank You for Your unfailing forgiveness and love. Diminish our pleasure in wrongdoing and make us grieve over our sin. In all ways, help us turn away from evil and pursue good.

Paid in Full

Read 1 John 2:1–2

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood.—Romans 3:25

Imagine that you are given an accounting ledger with your name at the top. In the negative column is everything you owe God—your sins carry the penalty of death. You can never do enough good deeds to repay that debt. How can you balance your account? Then you hear about God's offer of forgiveness. Jesus paid that penalty by dying in our place. When we put our faith in Him and accept God's gift of eternal life, our debt is canceled!

In today's reading, John explains three identities of Christ that reveal how this can be true. First, Jesus is our "advocate with the Father" (v. 1). Like a lawyer in a courtroom, Jesus defends us. We are guilty of sin and deserve punishment, but Jesus took our condemnation on Himself. As a result, we are free, if we trust in His name for salvation. On this same basis, we can confess our sins and walk in the light.

Second, Christ is "the Righteous One" (v. 1). He lived a perfect, sinless

life—the only human ever to do so! He did not owe a death penalty but chose to die in our place. Third, He is "the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (v. 2; see also Rom. 3:25). Only someone who is perfect would be eligible to substitute for someone else. Only God could do that. So God the Father sent God the Son to open the way to eternal life (John 3:16).

The Old Testament sacrificial system looked forward to what Christ would accomplish once for all (Heb. 9:12). In theology, we refer to this as "propitiation," defined in one study Bible as "a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it to favor."

► Have you received God's gift of salvation in Christ? There is nothing you can do to cancel the debt of sin. But if you accept this gift, praise the Lord, your debt has been paid! Let today be the day that heaven rejoices in your spiritual rebirth (Luke 15:10).

Pray with Us

Lord, today I am ready to admit my guilt before You. I can do nothing to save myself from Your just wrath, so please wash away my sins with the blood of Jesus, Your Son, and let me become Your child.

Obedience in Love

Read 1 John 2:3–6

*Anyone who loves me will
obey my teaching.—John 14:23*

How do you calculate the cost of something? I usually check the price, do some comparison shopping online, and try to figure out how long we'd have to save to afford it. More thoughtfully, the famous American philosopher Henry David Thoreau said: "I count the cost of a thing in terms of how much of life I have to give to obtain it."

Jesus taught that to be His disciple involved giving up everything (Luke 14:25–33). True discipleship holds nothing back. To love God is to keep His commands (v. 3; cf. John 14:23). One cannot exist without the other.

John repeats this point from two different angles. First, if we claim to know God, but are habitually disobedient, our claim is false (v. 4). That person is a liar and walks in darkness. Second (by contrast), if a person is generally obedient, they do know God and have a close relationship with Him. Their love for God is "made complete" by

their obedience, or in other words, obedience, walking in the light, is a result of God's love at work within them (v. 5). As Jesus taught, a tree is known by its fruit (Matt. 7:17–20).

This is how "we know we are in him," that is, Christ, and have assurance of salvation: Love and obedience go hand in hand. At times, we can overcomplicate the Christian life. James got straight to the point: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). John did the same here: "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did" (v. 6). As followers of Christ, we are to imitate Him, the perfectly "Righteous One." We ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" Then, we walk that way.

► Jesus said that if we love Him, we'll do what He says. Are you following Jesus or headed in your own direction? Take time today to count both the cost and the rewards of walking in the light.

Pray with Us

Lord, search our hearts and show us if there's an area where we have not submitted to You. Are we making decisions based on Your priorities or our own? Do our lives reflect our Savior? Show us, so we can repent.

Loving the Light

Read 1 John 2:7–11

*Anyone who loves their brother
and sister lives in the light. — 1 John 2:10*

The *Phos Hilaron* is one of the oldest hymns we know. As lamps were lit at evening, the early Christians would sing: “O gracious light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

John says that as believers, we need to walk in the light and not in the darkness. This is a helpful way to think about the two spiritual realms or kingdoms: Darkness is known for its lies, death, spiritual blindness, and evil, while light is marked by truth, life, spiritual vision, and righteousness. These distinctions will always be true! Truth is never accompanied by death but always by life. Lies are never accompanied by spiritual vision but always by spiritual blindness.

Similarly, love and obedience always go together. The command to love is both old and new (vv. 7–8;

John 13:34–35). How is it “old”? Not only did Jesus and the apostles teach love, but it was also the greatest commandment from the Old Testament. How is it “new”? Because perfect love is seen in Christ and, by extension, His church. Love is not an abstract quality but a Person. Because of Christ, “the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.” Exactly as Isaiah prophesied: “On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isa. 9:2).

When we love, we prove that we’re walking in the light (vv. 9–11). If we say we follow Christ, our actions must show love for our brothers and sisters in the faith. If we really are in the same family, we’ll act like it!

► Today’s illustration comes from Bryan Litfin’s *Wisdom from the Ancients: 30 Forgotten Lessons from the Early Church*. This book will help you learn more about church history and how it applies to our lives today.

Pray with Us

Even we who love You can still struggle with anger, resentment, or bitterness. Even when we want to forgive and move on, we don’t always know how. Father, teach us how to love and forgive our brothers and sisters unconditionally.

“I Write to You . . . Because”

Read 1 John 2:12–14

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. — 1 John 2:12

When I write letters or emails, I try to put my main purpose near the beginning. “I’m writing to you about . . .” “I need to speak with you about . . .” The apostle John, however, scattered his purpose throughout his letters. It might seem a bit strange to us that today’s reading from chapter two is a series of purpose statements. Why is he stating his main point here?

While yesterday’s reading in verses 9–11 was meant to be affirming, not scolding, the command to love and obey might still have felt overwhelming. Maybe that is why the apostle pauses to offer encouragement to his readers.

In verses 12–13, John encourages believers in general, calling them “dear children” or “beloved” and reminding them of the joy of their salvation: “Your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.” This is the foundational reason we can walk in the light. He also encouraged “fathers,” or church leaders, “because you know him who is from the beginning,” Christ.

To know Him is the key to everything else. Finally, he addressed “young men,” younger or less mature believers (both male and female). Though they’re just starting out on their spiritual journeys, they can be confident that they have “overcome the evil one.” Right from the start, we have victory in Christ.

In the second round of purpose statements (v. 14), John follows the same order. All believers can take heart “because you know the Father.” Christ opened the door to this relationship. Church leaders can stand firm for the same reason. Both the Father and the Son are eternal. And younger believers can faithfully walk in the light because their strength comes from the Word of God living in them. God has provided all the power we need to love and obey!

► Whatever you’re feeling or experiencing today, you can take John’s encouragements to heart! You have a relationship with the eternal God, who has already granted you forgiveness and victory.

Pray with Us

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through [You] who loved us.” (Rom. 8:35–37)

The World and Its Temptations

Read 1 John 2:15–17

*The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes,
and the pride of life.—1 John 2:16*

Lust is an intense desire or craving, not only for sex but for anything: money, power, even food. In 1 John 2:16, we are warned about the “lust of the flesh” and “lust of the eyes.” What exactly does that mean? One commentator says the word “lust” implies that we are in hot pursuit of something. When we lust with our flesh or our eyes, we are seeking satisfaction in something apart from God.

When we chase after ungodly things, we are not living in the light (v. 15). Temptations try to draw us off the path of righteousness. Where do they come from? We experience temptations from outside things and from inside ourselves, the remains of our sinful nature. “Lust of the flesh” includes sins such as sexual lust and greed. “Lust of the eyes” refers to our worldliness. We chase after temporary things like material possessions, beauty, and social status. Covetousness is when we want more of what others have. “Pride of life” is our natural, unredeemed arrogance

and self-sufficiency—we are tempted to believe, in contradiction to the book of Ecclesiastes, that we can find meaning and purpose “under the sun” and on our own.

John’s list of three sources of temptation is not exhaustive, but it does cover a lot of ground. If we are more watchful and alert in these three areas, we will be better prepared to resist temptation. We need to be on our guard because we cannot love both God and the world (vv. 15–16; see also John 15:18–19; James 4:4). These two things are in complete opposition. Light and darkness do not overlap in the slightest.

This world is temporary. It will pass away. But our obedience to the will of God will last forever (v. 17). The wiser investment is clear!

► Examine your own heart. Which kinds of temptation are you most vulnerable to? Do you have biblical strategies for resisting them? Consider memorizing today’s reading to help win the fight (Heb. 4:12).

Pray with Us

We have all been guilty of indulging the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. Expose to us the things we lust for; help us grasp the emptiness of anything pursued without Your blessing. We desire You and Your way.

Liars and Antichrists

Read 1 John 2:18–23

Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. — 1 John 2:22

You may have heard of the Antichrist, a specific end-times figure mentioned in the Bible (see Dan. 9, 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Revelation 13). But John said there will be “many antichrists” (v. 18). What did he mean? An “antichrist” is any person who denies Christ and tries to deceive others with lies about Him (vv. 22–23). Such an individual follows in the footsteps of Satan, whose native language is lies (John 8:44).

Here, John is pointing to those who were denying the Incarnation, the doctrine that Christ came in the flesh (2 John 7). This heresy was called “Gnosticism”, the belief that physical matter is corrupt or evil, while the spiritual is good or pure. A Gnostic believes that Christ, who is completely good and pure, could not have a real physical body. This is in contradiction to what the Bible teaches. God created the physical world, declared it good, and plans to redeem it (Rom. 8:19–22). Jesus existed in the flesh. And, both Jesus

and we will have glorified bodies for all eternity.

The Gnostic teachers had at first appeared to be genuine Christians, but by denying orthodoxy and leaving the church they’d proved otherwise (v. 19). The recipients of John’s letter didn’t need to worry. He was confident they knew the truth and would not fall away. True believers have an “anointing from the Holy One,” are eternally chosen by God, and safe in His hands (vv. 20–21; Eph. 1:11–12).

But this passage serves as an important warning to us today. We need to be on guard against false teachers. We’re living in the “last hour” (v. 18) or the “last days” (2 Peter 3:3), the time between the first and second comings of Christ.

► What false teachings have you seen creep into our world and even our churches today? If we are indeed in the “last days”, how does that change the way we live? What will you do differently today?

Pray with Us

The only way we can be safe from false teachers is by intimately knowing You and Your Word. Bless us with rich relationships with You. Give us discernment to recognize twisted truths. Give us courage and wisdom in confronting deceivers.

Anointing and Abiding

Read 1 John 2:24–29

*Everyone who does what is right
has been born of him. — 1 John 2:29*

“Anointing” in ancient Near Eastern culture was the act of putting oil or perfume on someone, usually on their head. This indicated a special choosing or commissioning, as when Samuel anointed David to be the next king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:1–13). Anointing someone with oil could also signify high respect or honor, as when Mary anointed Jesus before His crucifixion (John 12:1–8).

So what did John mean in today’s reading by the phrase “the anointing you received” (vv. 26–27)? This anointing is a picture of salvation. God chose us, gave us new life, and is transforming us into the image of His Son! Because of this anointing, the believers at that time could resist the “antichrists” and Gnostic teachers trying to lead them astray.

This anointing is God’s choice, not ours. But remaining or abiding in Him is our choice (vv. 24–25). These choices are not equal. Our choice is made in response to His and could *only* be

made because of His. Because of this anointing, we bear a responsibility to obey His commands, an effort that is guaranteed to succeed because of His help (2 Cor. 1:21–22). To stay faithful to the truth of the gospel is to abide with God and to walk in the light.

Because of this—and despite what the Gnostic teachers were saying—we can stand “confident and unashamed” before God when Christ returns (vv. 28–29). In front of the divine judgment seat, we have nothing to fear but can look forward to this day with assurance of our salvation. Having been made righteous, following Him who is perfectly righteous, and doing what is right is incontrovertible evidence that we have been truly “born of him.” This confidence is not in ourselves, then, but in God. His anointing cannot fail!

► The apostle also wrote about abiding in Christ in John 15:1–17. Why not set aside some time soon to study this important passage as well?

Pray with Us

Many believers get excited about Your return. But some of us still doubt our salvation; we aren’t even sure we love You the way we’re supposed to. Lord, we crave intimacy with You. Please, draw us closer!

Children of God

Read 1 John 3:1–6

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!—1 John 3:1*

As a parent of four, I can safely say that I have no idea what my children will be when they grow up. No one knows! Not the parents, not the grandparents, and certainly not the children. What about children of God? John wrote, “What we will be has not yet been made known” (v. 2). The only One who knows our future is God, and He has revealed just enough to excite and encourage us!

Having urged his readers to take confidence in their assurance of salvation in chapter 2, John now continued in chapter 3 to explore what it means to be children of God. The transition in today’s reading, appropriately, is an exclamation of praise: “See what great love the Father has lavished on us!” (v. 1).

As God’s children, we’re destined to become like His Son, Jesus Christ (v. 2). The goal of following and imitating Jesus is not just a dream but a certainty. The world doesn’t understand the journey we’re on, and even we ourselves don’t know

exactly how things will turn out. Yet, in another sense, we do know: “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” John was probably thinking here of the time he saw Christ’s glory revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–9).

In response to this truth, we’re to purify ourselves, meaning we’re to live a life of obedience and love (vv. 3–6). “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning” habitually, though we know we will sin and need forgiveness on occasion. This dimension of salvation is called *sanctification*—the process of making us like Christ. We should therefore treat sin and holiness seriously, but not anxiously. Our perseverance is guaranteed by our new life in Christ!

► Consider the difference between worldly hope and heavenly hope. The first amounts to wishful thinking. The second, though, is marked by certainty. Our future is secure in God’s hands.

Pray with Us

Our hope in You is a certainty. No matter the suffering we endure, the sin we commit, or the doubts we have, Your grace is sufficient and Your forgiveness final. Sanctify us to live lives characterized by obedience and love.

A True Christian

Read 1 John 3:7–10

*No one who is born of God
will continue to sin.—1 John 3:9*

How can you tell if someone is a Christian? John gives a simple answer: “the one who does what is right is righteous, just as he [Christ] is righteous” (v. 7). We shouldn’t listen to anyone who tells us differently, such as the Gnostic teachers in John’s day, for if we do, they’ll lead us astray (v. 7; 1 John 2:26).

Recognizing the difference isn’t rocket science, that is, it’s quite clear who belongs to Christ and who belongs to the devil (vv. 7–8). Followers of Christ walk in the light. They generally obey God’s commands, do what is right, and love one another. Unbelievers, by contrast, walk in darkness. They generally disobey the gospel, do what is evil, and fail to love others. They neither believe correctly about Christ, nor do they act correctly.

Genuine believers in Jesus won’t continue to sin as a way of life (vv. 9–10). In fact, they *can’t* continue. Why not? Because they are not the same person. They’ve been reborn. They’re new creations

(2 Cor. 5:17). In verse 9, “God’s seed” is a metaphor for salvation. Just as a man’s “seed” enters a woman and creates a new life, “God’s seed” enters our hearts by faith. The result is spiritual rebirth (John 3:3–7). And while the start of a new human life might miscarry, the start of a new spiritual life never fails. Regeneration cannot be reversed.

Just as fallen human nature inevitably produces sin, so also does our redeemed nature inevitably produce righteousness. This is how we *know* that we’re children of God. “Only God sees the heart,” we sometimes say. Yes, but John taught that we can discern people’s spiritual conditions, including our own, from words and actions. A tree is known by its fruit.

► We’re not perfect yet, so regular confession of sin is an important spiritual discipline. But let us also rejoice that God’s love is transforming us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29)!

Pray with Us

Father, we are filled with gratitude for the transformation You have wrought in us. We ask that You continue to grow us in grace and truth. Strengthen our faith, increase our spiritual understanding, and intensify our love.

The Necessity of Love

Read 1 John 3:11–15

*We should love
one another.—1 John 3:11*

In this age when instant connection is at our fingertips, loneliness has become an epidemic. About half of all Americans are lonely, according to a recent survey. Forty-seven percent of respondents reported feeling lonely or left out. Thirteen percent said they didn't have even one person who knew them well.

As followers of Christ, we're well-positioned to reach out to people with His love. This doesn't mean we'll never feel lonely. We still, after all, live in a fallen world. But as part of the family of God, the church, we belong to a community that should be characterized by God's love for Him and for one another (v. 11). John has taught us that love and obedience are evidence of spiritual rebirth: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other" (v. 14).

Not loving is evidence that a person is not actually a child of God. Cain, for example, murdered his own brother. Jealous of Abel's accepted sacrifice, he ignored God's warning

and acted based on hatred, thus demonstrating that he "belonged to the evil one" (v. 12; Gen. 4:1–16). Just as Cain hated Abel, the world hates Christians (v. 13). Persecution is to be expected.

The surprise is when someone claiming to be a brother or sister in Christ does not display love to others in God's family. This shows that this person is not really a child of God, and even more, that they're a "murderer" like Cain (v. 15). God's eternal life does not reside in such a person.

Love for our fellow believers is a Christian necessity. This doesn't mean we hate unbelievers; after all, Christ commanded us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43–48). But our love for our brothers and sisters should be a special priority and focus.

► Today, why not pray to make a new friend? Someone at your workplace, in your neighborhood or even in your church might be looking for one. You could be the answer to their prayer.

Pray with Us

It's easy to detect our own loneliness; less so to pick up on others'. Lord, we ask for an opportunity to befriend someone in need of fellowship. Give us this opportunity to share Your love with someone who feels alone.

You Are Loved!

Read 1 John 3:16–18

*Let us not love with words or speech
but with actions and in truth.—1 John 3:18*

Christ “astounds and sustains us with his endless kindness,” wrote Dane Ortlund in *Gentle and Lowly*. “Only as we walk ever deeper into this tender kindness can we live the Christian life as the New Testament calls us to. Only as we drink down the kindness of the heart of Christ will we leave in our wake, everywhere we go, the aroma of heaven.”

Jesus not only gives us a loving example to follow but the strength to do so. While Cain acted in hatred and selfishness (see yesterday’s reading), Jesus acted in love and complete selflessness. John shows that Jesus is more than an example of kindness. He is the very definition of love (v. 16). We most clearly see His love in that He “laid down his life for us.” What Jesus did is the opposite of Cain’s murder in every way: Christ’s action gave life, not took it. He sacrificed His own life, not ended another’s. Jealousy and hatred were entirely absent from His thoughts, words, and actions.

We should do the same, taking up our cross daily in Christ’s spirit of sacrificial love (Luke 9:23–24). What does this mean in everyday life? It might mean, for example, giving material possessions or our time to brothers and sisters in need (v. 17; James 2:14–17). Not to share is selfish; the love of God is not present.

Christian love is not merely a feeling. If words (including social media posts!) are not accompanied with actions, love is not love but rather empty hypocrisy (v. 18). We’re not to love only those who are similar to us or agree with us. We’re to love *all* our brothers and sisters in Christ. How? *In Christ*. He is our standard, our model, and our source of strength.

► On this Valentine’s Day, we invite you to feel absolutely secure in “the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39). Nothing in all of creation, natural or supernatural, can separate you from His love!

Pray with Us

“You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand on me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (Ps. 139:5–6). Knowing us fully, You love us, Lord!

Questions & Answers

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset, Professor of Literature,
Moody Bible Institute

Q In Psalm 51:4, David says, “Against you, you only, have I sinned.” Why would David say these words when he obviously sinned against others?

A Your question is one many have asked. This passage is part of David’s cry of confession and plea for restoration after he took Bathsheba unlawfully and had her husband Uriah killed. David’s sins of murder and rape which resulted later in the death of his child were dark, egregious sins.

I don’t think for a minute David was avoiding his responsibility for these dark acts or in any way ignoring his obvious sins against Bathsheba and Uriah. But in this prayerful confession, he had to get to the core of his sin so that he could be restored in soul, spirit, and mind. Sin holds a posture of defiance toward God’s commands; it is an assault on God’s authority. One Bible scholar notes that sin is primarily about “assaulting the glory of God, rebelling against God . . . a vertical phenomenon.”

Too often we confess our sins toward others without fully understanding our offense against God. Although David failed miserably, he was known as a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). He always returned to his earnest

love for God. He always repented and understood his failure before God and reset his life toward Him. David knew that he couldn’t live long with the separation from God, caused by sin.

So, when David said, “Against you, you only, have I sinned,” he was acknowledging his rebellion against God. He was asking forgiveness for his dismissal of God’s commands. As commentators have noted, when Nathan came to David he said pointedly, “Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?” (2 Sam. 12:9).

David knew that the worst thing he had done was to despise God. He was not minimizing his crimes against others. Rather, he was emphasizing the direct assault on God that he had caused with those acts.

Q I’ve heard it said that God sometimes speaks to us. How do I know if God is speaking to me?

A Some years ago, I was in a Bible study with a group of people my age. Invariably, a number of them said God had spoken to them in audible ways. I could not claim that same level of clear communication from God in my life. One day, I asked earnestly, “What did God say and how did it sound?” I wasn’t trying to be rude; I

“Too often we confess our sins toward others without understanding fully our offense against God.”

really wanted to know. How does God speak to us today?

We know that God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. As 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” That is why it is so important to read the Word regularly, to know it better and better through the years.

Second, God speaks through faithful teachers and preachers who know the Word, who live as the Scriptures command, and who teach with humility. God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit who “will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

You will know if God is speaking to you if what you hear from Him is confirmed by Scripture. God will never contradict His own Word. Beyond that, there are times when you may receive impressions or promptings about things to do, people you should help or call. I think we also hear and see God in His creation. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands” (Ps. 19:1).

Finally, God speaks to us through circumstances, difficulties, and sometimes suffering, to change us, to get our attention, to help us depend on Him.

Q Is it alright to be angry when someone you love dies? Or is being angry a lack of faith in God and His plans?

A It’s not only alright to be angry when someone you love dies, but also appropriate. Though not everyone may feel anger, it is an expected stage in the grieving process.

Jesus demonstrated these human emotions. In John 11:35, when Lazarus died, we are told that “Jesus wept.” The word “wept” is also translated as “deeply moved.” This same term is used when Jesus came to the tomb in verse 38. Other uses of the term in Scripture seem to contain the sense of “indignation” or “rage.” Death is not good; it should not be sentimentalized. Death is the result of the fall, of sin; it destroys and separates. In the incarnation Jesus shared in our suffering. He was not an automaton. And even today, He is present with us in our times of sorrow and anger, reminding us of eternity. ■

Are You a Child of God?

Read 1 John 3:19–24

*God is greater than our hearts,
and he knows everything. — 1 John 3:20*

Children who grow up in Christian homes sometimes pray the “sinner’s prayer” more than once “just to be sure.” That is, they respond to invitations to accept Christ into their heart multiple times because they are not sure if the previous times were “enough.”

The apostle John, however, wanted the recipients of his letter to “set [their] hearts at rest” to know for sure that they were saved (v. 19). He didn’t want the enemy to use anxiety about their salvation as a weapon against them. Ultimately, a believer’s assurance of salvation is a knowledge that is secure within God’s knowledge (vv. 20–21). Even though our own hearts might condemn us or make us question its reality, we can rest on the fact that “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” God’s knowledge (unlike our own) is complete and entirely true. If He knows we’re part of His family, the matter is settled, case closed.

From our perspective, our knowledge can be confirmed as we obey (v. 22; see also vv. 9–10). If we were not saved, we’d still be dead in our sins and unable to behave righteously or please God. The fact that we can love and obey shows His new life at work within us (v. 23). Furthermore, He answers our prayers, which means they align with His will, which would be impossible if we were not “in Christ.”

We have assurance of salvation from the Holy Spirit (v. 24). This puts our hearts at rest in His presence, without fear or worry. As Paul put it: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:16). When Jesus promised His disciples the Holy Spirit, He intended for this to be an important part of the Spirit’s ministry to the church.

► Today, read John 14:15–31 which gives John’s account of Jesus’s promise of the Holy Spirit. Compare that passage to today’s reading. What themes do they have in common?

Pray with Us

You are in the Father, and we are in You, as You are in us. We love You, and therefore we love the Father, and You love us and reveal Yourself to us (John 14:20–21). We share in the mutual knowing and loving of the Godhead.

True or False?

Read 1 John 4:1–6

Test the spirits to see whether they are from God.—1 John 4:1

Good news: About three-quarters of all Americans believe Jesus was a real person, born in Bethlehem. These people will even say He's the Son of God. Less than half, however, according to a recent study by LifeWay Research, think Jesus existed prior to the Incarnation. They don't view Him as coeternal with the Father.

That's a problem because most Americans see Jesus as only human and not divine. This false belief must be rejected. Here John urges believers to exercise spiritual critical thinking skills and "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (v. 1). False teachers and "antichrists" existed in John's time and still exist in our world today (1 John 2:18). In John's day, Gnostics were teaching that Christ did not come in the flesh (vv. 2–3). Those who believed in a real Incarnation were from God, while those who did not were not.

While it's important for us to discern false teaching, we can rest assured that God is "greater" and has

already won the victory over it (vv. 4–5). Many teachings may be popular with the world, but they are not from God. Again John contrasts the two kingdoms: One is marked by light, truth, life, and salvation. While the other is darkness, lies, death, and condemnation.

Being sure of our identity in Christ (assurance of salvation) and discerning true versus false teaching are two sides of the same coin. The Holy Spirit inside us testifies to the truth that we are God's children. The same Spirit helps us determine what beliefs and teachings are biblically true or untrue. When we listen to Him, individually and as a church, we stay on the right path (v. 6).

► Be on your guard. Don't be deceived. There are many false teachers today (2 Tim. 4:2–4). These influential men and women command large audiences and sell many books. Just because it is popular doesn't mean it is biblically sound.

Pray with Us

We are easily deceived, Lord. Teach us to rely on Your Spirit's leading. The better we know Your voice and Your ways, the better we can recognize those who truly serve You and resist deceivers.

Why Love Matters

Read 1 John 4:7–12

Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.—1 John 4:11

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, Germany, launching the Reformation. Five centuries later, many German Christians have been inspired by his teachings to offer safe haven to refugees. Because they have been so loved by God, they want to love others in need. After all, Luther himself was a refugee, fleeing for his life from Catholic authorities.

This is one practical example of how we can put God's love into action. John tells us that love and obedience are characteristics of God's family (vv. 7–8). Love comes from God, and God's children do God-things. We can only do God-things because we've been born of God and know God. That's the cause—love is the result. Those who don't love don't know God, because "God is love." It doesn't get simpler than that.

How do we know God is love? Because He sent His Son for our

redemption, to be the "atoning sacrifice for our sins" (vv. 9–10; John 3:16). We owed a penalty of death, but now we "live through him." Human love pales by comparison. God's love is not an abstract quality or virtue. He *is* love.

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (v. 11). God loved us when we were powerless to help ourselves, when we were still His enemies (Rom. 5:6–8). When we love one another, we make the invisible God visible to the world, that is, we call the world's attention to His glory and the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 12; see also John 1:18). His love is "made complete in us," expressed in our love for one another.

► How will you put God's love in action today? Perhaps you could join in a ministry to refugees, prison inmates, or another group. Ask God to show you a new way you can extend His love to others.

Pray with Us

Your love revolves around life and death. Loving us in our spiritual deadness, You gave Your Son up to death to secure life for us. Turn our hearts to those who are spiritually dead but are ready to respond to Your love.

Love Made Complete

Read 1 John 4:13–18

Perfect love drives out fear.—1 John 4:18

“Love divine, all loves excelling,” begins a classic hymn by Charles Wesley. “Joy of heaven to earth come down, fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art; visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.”

God’s love at work within us is one of the key themes of 1 John. Forms of the word “love” appear 43 times in this epistle! John circles back to this theme again and again. You might feel a bit of *déjà vu* in today’s reading, which begins “This is how we know” (v. 13). What does John want us to know? That we’re truly saved. How do we know? By the Holy Spirit. Again, we are told about the assurance of salvation and the work of the Spirit. So, we know where this is going: As children of God, we can testify to God’s love in sending His Son to be our Savior (v. 14).

We who believe and receive the gospel are born again into God’s

family (v. 15). God gives us spiritual life, demonstrated to be real by our love and obedience. “So we know and rely on the love God has for us” (v. 16). “God is love” is the point at which orthodoxy (truthful beliefs) and orthopraxy (righteous actions) reveal how interwoven and inseparable they are. God, love, life, knowledge, truth, salvation, righteousness, obedience—when we walk in the light, these are all together where and how and why we walk.

As we love like God and imitate Jesus, our love is “made complete” or becomes fully fruitful (v. 17). On the day of judgment, we’ll therefore feel no fear or anxiety but rather joy and peace in God’s presence (v. 18).

► If you wish, sing or listen to the hymn we mentioned in the beginning of this devotional. Or find another song or chorus about God’s love and loving one another. Make walking in the light of God’s love your theme for today.

Pray with Us

It is because of Your love, as much as Your holiness and omniscience, that we trust You. In the darkest circumstances of our lives, we have the security of knowing that it is a loving God who is in control of our lives.

Loving God and One Another

Read 1 John 4:19–21

*We love because he
first loved us.—1 John 4:19*

Do you remember your first crush? Maybe even when you were in grade school? Sometimes children will send notes trying to figure out how the object of their crush feels about them. “Do you like me?” they’ll ask. Before they declare their “love” they want to be sure it will be returned.

John tells us that God loved us first, not the other way around. Today’s reading is the end of a “thought unit” in the epistle and presents three summary truths. First, “We love because he first loved us” (v. 19). We were spiritually dead in our sins, unable to help ourselves in any way. God took the initiative for our salvation. The only reason we can love God and one another is that God loved us first. The implication, then, is that we should love as He loves—not because people earn it or deserve it, but sacrificially and unconditionally. This love is motivated and empowered by God’s love!

The second truth in this passage is that we cannot claim to love God and hate our brothers and sisters in Christ (v. 20). Anyone who does so is a “liar” and a hypocrite. Their words and actions don’t match up. Logically, if they don’t love the people they can see, how can they love God whom they cannot see? If we truly love God, we will love others in God’s family.

The third and final summary truth expressed here flows from the second: We must love our brothers and sisters in Christ (v. 21). God commands it. The vertical (directed toward God) and horizontal (directed toward people) dimensions of love cannot be separated. They must be lived out together. God’s love to us should overflow to others (1 Thess. 3:12).

► Do the people in your life know that you love them? Consider taking time today to write a note expressing your love and care for a person in your life. Doing so on an ordinary day will make it extra special.

Pray with Us

Father, there are believers whom we find it difficult to love. Please forgive us for the hypocrisy of accepting Your love while withholding it from others. Help us love those who are difficult to love.

Keeping God's Commands

Read 1 John 5:1–5

*This is love for God:
to keep his commands.—1 John 5:3*

There have been many songs, in the church and in popular music, written about love. In fact, if you search “love” on the Hymnary.org website you’ll find 59,040 hymn texts. The same cannot be said about “obedience.” That search turns up only 1,342 results. Apparently, we like to sing about one much more than the other!

Yet from the apostle John’s perspective, love and obedience are matching bookends. He uses family relationships to demonstrate why they connect. Because of our salvation through Christ, we’re God’s children. As children, we owe love and obedience to God, including the Father and the Son. We also owe love to one another, as members of the same family. Human families may be marred by sin, but God’s family is transformed to be like Christ.

As John explained, to trust in Christ for salvation is to be born of God (v. 1). No special knowledge is needed. To be born of God is to love God. Even further, to love God is to love His other children. Love and

obedience are in fact how we can be certain that we are born again and members of God’s family (v. 2).

Love and obedience are so inseparable that we can almost regard them as the same thing (v. 3). Obedience to God’s commands is not burdensome. Why not? Because “everyone born of God overcomes the world” (v. 4). How? By trusting in the One who has already overcome the world (v. 5; 1 John 4:4). The victory, then, comes not by any merit of ours but through faith.

As Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30). Spiritually, obedience is true freedom, not in the American cultural sense of doing whatever we want, but in the biblical sense of freedom from sin (John 8:34–36).

► Tell someone today one thing you’ve been learning from this study of John’s letters. Even better, invite them to join our Bible study and request *Today in the Word* for themselves!

Pray with Us

We are awed by the work of sanctification You are doing in our hearts. We ask You to continue transforming us, replacing our selfish desires with desires that align with Your plans, so that we can obey You with joy.

Three Witnesses

Read 1 John 5:6–12

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.—1 John 5:12

In a court case, both sides may call on expert witnesses to explain a complex situation. If the witnesses disagree, the lawyers focus on their credibility. Who has more relevant experience? Who demonstrates the most valid understanding? In other words, who is more trustworthy?

John wrote in today's passage that three witnesses testify that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world (vv. 7–8). The first is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead. The Spirit is at work both within us and out in the world. He testifies to the fact that Jesus came by the water and the blood (v. 6). The verb “testify” means that He calls all to affirm the truth in a spirit of praise and worship. Human testimony, such as that of John and the other apostles, has value but God's own testimony is more valuable, reliable, and certain (v. 9).

The second witness is the water of baptism. When Jesus was baptized, the entire Trinity was present. The

Father spoke His approval from heaven, and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove (John 1:32–34). The third witness is the blood of Christ, which enables spiritual rebirth. His public ministry began at His baptism and ended with His death on the Cross.

Believers accept these three witnesses or testimonies (v. 10). Our faith is not subjective or based on mere feelings. It is reasonable, based on actual events in history. In fact, not to believe the evidence is to call God a liar.

God has given us salvation through His Son (vv. 11–12). To believe this truth is to accept His gift of eternal life. Not to believe is to opt for death. Every person must choose!

► If you have never accepted salvation by faith in Christ, there's no reason to delay! Go to moodybible.org/knowing-christ to learn more. If you're already a believer, give thanks today for this “indescribable gift” (2 Cor. 9:14–15).

Pray with Us

Thanks be to You for Your indescribable gift of salvation! We believe and joyfully confess that Jesus is the Son of God. May we be bold to proclaim this truth to others who have not heard the gospel!

Confident Prayers

Read 1 John 5:13–15

*If we ask anything according to his will,
he hears us. — 1 John 5:14*

Prayers to an idol were often an exercise in fear and bargaining. How could they convince the “god” to do what they want? Maybe if they promised more sacrifices, or gave a costly gift, they would get their wish. The “god” wouldn’t deliver the goods unless he got something out of the deal.

When believers approach God’s throne of grace, by contrast, it’s nothing like that. We can come to our Father with confident, faith-filled prayers, knowing that He loves us and will say “yes” to any prayer asked “according to his will” (vv. 14–15; see Phil. 4:6–7). Our status with Him is not in doubt. We’re members of His family, as our own love and obedience show, and as the Holy Spirit testifies. The principle at work here is that we have a loving Father who enjoys giving good gifts to those who ask (Matt. 7:7–11).

The phrase “according to his will” indicates that we need to align our

will with God’s. This is likely one of the main purposes of prayer! John recorded similar statements of Christ in his Gospel, such as: “Whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you” (John 15:16). “In my name” is functionally equivalent to “according to his will.” When God says “no” to a prayer, we can understand it was not in line with His will.

Verse 13 is often identified as the main purpose statement of this letter—“so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Knowledge of eternal life, or assurance of salvation, is a recurring theme in 1 John. The phrase “this is how we know” occurs eight times, and forms of the verb “know” occur 42 times!

► Are we praying for the right things? How much time do we spend praying for temporal versus eternal matters? God cares about every detail of our lives, but no doubt, He doesn’t want to hear prayers *only* about the details.

Pray with Us

Align our wills to Yours, all-knowing Father. Shape our desires according to what You in Your wisdom and goodness have purposed. Give us grace in letting go of the things You choose not to bestow. We want to trust and obey.

Sinning Siblings

Read 1 John 5:16–20

*We are in him who is true by
being in his Son Jesus Christ.—1 John 5:20*

“We approach God imperfectly,” admitted Gretchen Ronnevik in *Ragged: Spiritual Disciplines for the Spiritually Exhausted*. “We approach him as sinners wearing the covering of Christ. There cannot be any pretense about it. Pretense is in opposition to intimacy. We are who we are, and God is who he is. Don’t flower it up or try to be impressive.”

This is one reason we can and should pray for sinning brothers and sisters in Christ (vv. 16–17). We know where they’re coming from because we’ve probably been there. Our prayer is, of course, that they will confess, repent, and be forgiven (1 John 1:9).

But what is the “sin that leads to death” for which no forgiveness is possible? Within the context of 1 John and the New Testament as a whole, this sin is unbelief in Christ, also called blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31–32). The Spirit, after all, testifies to Christ’s redemption (see Feb. 21). To reject Christ and to reject the Spirit’s witness to redemption are

practically the same thing. To call God a liar in this way is blasphemy.

We can pray for our sinning brothers and sisters in Christ with confidence, because genuine believers don’t and can’t continue sinning (vv. 18–19). If they’re truly members of God’s family, they *will* return to Him. The new spiritual life inside them cannot be extinguished. Christ Himself “keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them.” Even though Satan has dominion over the world, he has no power over the kingdom of light.

True believers “know him who is true,” the Father (v. 20). This knowledge and relationship cannot be lost, for it was given to us by the Son Himself. We are “in” both of them, for both are God.

► Spend some time today praying for any brothers and sisters in Christ you know who have sinned or who are living a sinful lifestyle. We can pray with confidence, knowing that repentance is God’s will.

Pray with Us

Today we pray for once-professing believers who have embraced sinful lifestyles. In Your mercy, convict them of their sin. Remind them who You are and what You have done for them. Restore them to lives that glorify You.

A Final Word

Read 1 John 5:21

*Dear children, keep yourselves
from idols. — 1 John 5:21*

What do I want my last words to be? I'm not morbid, but I've pondered this topic. I'd like to say something profound that would be quoted for generations. Or maybe I'd quote a favorite verse of Scripture. But what if I don't have time to choose? Unfortunately, my last words might very well turn out to be a "Dad joke"!

Especially compared to Paul's letters, the last words of 1 John may seem abrupt: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (v. 21). Period. Stop. End of letter. What is an "idol"? It's anything in which we seek satisfaction apart from God (see February 8). It's anything that rules or takes top priority in our lives, including finances, career, convenience, or power.

An idol can also be anything that corrupts the biblical gospel, such as the "prosperity gospel" or "Christian nationalism." It's anything that's contrary to Scripture, such as the Gnosticism of John's day. Some idols can even be good things that

we mistakenly elevate to the status of the best thing. For instance, we can turn our children into idols. We can turn ourselves into idols, putting ourselves on the throne of our lives.

Idols stand opposed to the true God (v. 20). Idolatry contradicts what God created us for and what He saved us for. It stands in the way of a close relationship with Him. Verse 21 is a very appropriate last word for an epistle focused on assurance of salvation and the outworking of God's saving love in our lives.

Instead of idolatry, we're to worship God alone, in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To "keep yourselves from idols" means, then, in the words of another translation: "Keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts" (NLT).

► At first glance, we may think we don't worship any idols. But do we? What might those watching our life see at its center? Is it clearly Christ? Or something else? Ask the Spirit for an honest assessment.

Pray with Us

We have seen believers who have lost their fervor. We are moved to compassion but also fear, lest we too lose our focus on You. Father, reveal any idols in our lives and help us turn back to You, the Lord of our hearts.

Truth and Love

Read 2 John 1–6

*And this is love: that we walk
in obedience to his commands.—2 John 6*

In the summer of 2022, the U.S. Postal Service’s longest-tenured letter carrier, Johnnie Bell, celebrated 70 years of sorting and delivering mail in Oklahoma City. When he started, the pay was only \$1.81 per hour. “Thanks so much for this recognition,” he said humbly. “This is just something I do because I enjoy doing it.”

We don’t know who delivered the letter of 2 John, but a letter from the revered apostle surely brought joy to the churches in western Asia. The “elder” in verse 1 is of course John himself. The “lady” seems to be a person who was well-known in the church and might have been a house-church host or leader. Some scholars, though, identify “lady” as a metaphor for a particular church congregation. In either case, John loves her “in the truth,” that is, because God’s truth lives in both of them and will do so forever (v. 2). His greeting links truth and love to God’s grace, mercy, and peace (v. 3).

John felt joy to write to believers who walked in truth and obedience to God’s commands (v. 4). “Some” meant not everyone, but he still rejoiced. “Children” meant fellow members of God’s family, perhaps specifically believers who had become followers of Christ through his ministry.

The main topic of John’s second letter echoes the first: “Love one another” (v. 5). This type of love is not merely a feeling or emotion but means to follow in the humility and servitude shown by Jesus. The church had been following this command ever since it was founded by Christ (John 13:34–35). John defined love as walking in obedience, and obedience as walking in love (v. 6; see February 20). You cannot separate one from the other.

► How do you show love to others? In *The 5 Love Languages*, Dr. Gary Chapman identified the different ways we tend to show and receive love. Find out your love language today at 5lovelanguages.com.

Pray with Us

Father, help us not to take Your love for granted. Help us reverently obey Your charge to love one another as we have been loved by You. May we find joy in loving and serving our brothers and sisters in Christ!

The Deceiver and the Antichrist

Read 2 John 7–13

Many deceivers . . . have gone out into the world.—2 John 7

The apostle John lived his later years in the city of Ephesus, in modern-day Turkey. If you visit, you'll find a church built on the place tradition identifies as his burial site. Named St. John's Basilica, it was constructed in the fifth century A.D. by Emperor Justinian.

John's high concern was that the church of his day would identify and resist false teaching. As he mentioned in his first letter, false teachers were denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (v. 7). Gnostics saw physical matter as evil and denied that the Incarnation could have happened (see February 16). John calls them "deceivers" and "antichrists."

To follow these teachers would be to "lose what we have worked for" (v. 8)—not a reference to salvation but to the advance of the gospel and the earning of spiritual rewards. To follow them would be to "run ahead" and not continue in Christ's teaching (v. 9). To Americans, running ahead might sound like a good thing, but to John it meant that the Gnostics thought they knew better than regular Christians.

Following them would mean leaving the path of truth and righteousness.

John warned his readers not to welcome false teachers into their churches (v. 10). Hospitality—supporting itinerant teachers with food and shelter—enabled their teaching and appeared to be an endorsement of its content. Even though the believers had kind intentions, welcoming deceptive teachers would be to share in their wickedness (v. 11). The "benefit of the doubt" was not to be given in this case. Church leaders have a responsibility to stand firm in the truth of the gospel and to protect their congregations. John closed by promising to say more when he visited in person and sent greetings from a sister church (vv. 12–13).

► John's warning is an important reminder for us today. We live in a time when social media circulates many ideas and promotes many false teachers. We need to check everything we read and hear against the truth of God's Word.

Pray with Us

"We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne with confidence" (Heb. 4:15–16).

What Brings Us Joy?

Read 3 John 1–8

*I have no greater joy than to hear that
my children are walking in the truth.—3 John 4*

What brings you joy? I find great pleasure in listening to live music. Last summer, my wife and I attended a concert by the Emerson String Quartet. They played pieces by Barber, Brahms, and Schubert with precision and passion. My wife and I drank it in with great joy.

What brings a person joy reveals something about them. For the apostle John, his joy was hearing that “my children are walking in the truth” (v. 4). In this third epistle (the shortest book in the New Testament!) John refers to himself simply as “the elder” (v. 1). “Gaius” appears to have been a specific person, probably a pastor or other church leader. As in 2 John, he loved him “in the truth” by which they both lived.

John’s greeting showed concern for both physical and spiritual health (v. 2). Most of all, he rejoiced to hear that Gaius was “walking in the truth,” meaning that he was living, growing, and ministering in faithful love and obedience (vv. 3–4; see 2 John 4).

By referring to Gaius as one of “my children,” John might be indicating that he’d been the one to originally lead Gaius to Christ.

The apostle commended Gaius and his congregation for showing hospitality to traveling teachers and missionaries (vv. 5–8). (This was exactly the kind of hospitality he commanded *not* to be shown to false teachers in 2 John.) Hospitality played a key role in the growth of the early church and can be compared to the way we support missionaries today. John praised it as a practical example of faithfulness (v. 5), love (v. 6), honoring God (v. 6), and working together for the truth (v. 8). For their part, the itinerant teachers and missionaries were motivated by the gospel, God’s glory, and the name of Christ (v. 7).

► Does your church support missionaries? Our prayers and gifts are an important part of taking the gospel to every person. Today, pray for a missionary you know!

Pray with Us

Lord, we pray for missionaries and church leaders, knowing that You hold them to a high standard. Give them strength against temptation, courage to proclaim the truth, and gracious words to speak to others.

Imitating What Is Good

Read 3 John 9–14

*You became imitators of us
and of the Lord.—1 Thessalonians 1:6*

Early in the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, Jane is sent to Lowood School, a charitable institution that educated orphans and poor girls. A victim of various injustices, she arrives angry and wanting revenge. At the school, however, she makes friends with a girl named Helen Burns. From Helen, she learns about perseverance, kindness, and forgiveness. She resolves to imitate her friend instead of nursing her grudges.

Imitating good is a biblical principle for Christian behavior. While Gaius would have been a good example to follow (3 John 1), Diotrephes was clearly not (vv. 9–10). John describes him as a person who “loves to be first” (v. 9). He didn’t have a servant attitude but a prideful one. He didn’t practice the hospitality or missionary support described yesterday, but went so far as to forbid it and to excommunicate those who disobeyed him. He’d ignored a letter from John and was spreading “malicious nonsense” about him

(v. 10). In modern terms, he was a “control freak”—a self-centered leader trying to build up power and position rather than working for the sake of the gospel. John would deal with him when he came in person.

We should imitate good examples, like Demetrius, who may have been the bearer of this letter (v. 12). He’d proved by his actions that he was an authentic believer and was affirmed by the testimony of others. “Anyone who does what is good is from God.” Goodness comes from God; evil comes from godlessness. Trees are known by their fruit.

John broke off here, promising to say more when he visited the church (vv. 13–14). He longed to be with these friends in person.

► There are many leaders who fight for our attention, but we need to be careful who we follow. While Christ is always our perfect standard (1 John 2:6), we can also imitate those who imitate Christ (1 Cor. 4:16–17; 1 Thess. 1:6; Heb. 13:7).

Pray with Us

Thank You, Father, for the examples of believers who quietly, humbly exemplify the love and self-sacrifice modeled by Christ. Help us learn from their godly ways so we too may bring glory to Your name through our lives.



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