



Reflections 1, 2, 3 John

Don Merritt

Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

What I've done is to adapt a series of blog posts into a collection, and then added questions for either reflection or discussion. I can easily envision someone using this in daily devotions and then reflecting on the questions. I can easily see a group doing the same, and I really can't see why a group of any size could use it; there should be quite a bit of discussion!

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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1 John

The Word of Life

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

1 John 1:1-4

John has a way of telling the story of Jesus from a lofty, heavenly viewpoint, and this is surely one of those instances. His Gospel begins in a similar way, (see John 1:1-4) it provides a perfect parallel passage in fact. Of course, in Revelation, John's vantage point is so lofty that most misread it entirely. Here in this short letter, John is setting forth two basic and wonderful facts: First, that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed One of God. Second, He is setting forth the fact that he, himself, is an eyewitness of Jesus, and Apostle who lived and walked with Jesus for over three years, consequently he is able to give eyewitness testimony about Him.

In verse one, John is letting us know that he saw this Jesus with his own eyes, touched Him with his own hands, heard Him with his own ears, and that now he (John) is proclaiming as the Word of Life, the Word that was with God and that was in fact God from the very beginning, a beginning that predates time itself.

I hate to be crass after such lofty statements, but to put it in the simplest possible modern American terms, John is saying something like: Hey! I'm about to tell you something important; listen up. Hey dummy, I know what the heck I'm talking about here!

Back to lofty: In verse two, John takes a step further, as he did in John 1:2. This Word of Life really appeared, and John saw Him, John was there. This eternal life that came from the Father Himself John is now going to proclaim to us! John will proclaim this great news of the Word of Life so that we may have fellowship with John and with Jesus, the Son as well as with the Father. And in doing so, our entry into fellowship will make John's joy complete.

Fellowship is an interesting word, from the Greek word *koinōnia* meaning “association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse; the share which one has in anything, participation.” This participation is not only in relationship, but in purpose, for we really cannot separate the Person of Christ from the purpose of the Father. John's joy will be complete, because by the proclamation of the Word of Life, we will be in relationship and purpose with John, our fellow believers, and with the Lord Himself.

Well dear reader, this is the introduction, I can't wait to get to the proclamation itself, but that will have to wait until next time...

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God telling us about the reliability of His Word in these verses?
2. What do these verses reveal about the relationship between the Word of God and Jesus Christ?
3. What does this passage reveal to us about Fellowship?
4. What areas of your life can be said to involve fellowship with God and with other believers?

Come Into the Light

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1:5-7

Earlier we looked at the introduction to this letter, and here, we enter the first section of the letter which begins at verse 5 and continues through 2:14. This section is given context in verse 5: *God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.* Thus, this section is all about John's declaration of light versus darkness, and it contains comparisons and contrasts.

Before we take a look at it, keep in mind what John wrote in John 1:4 "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." All through the Gospel story, John used "light" as signifying the presence of Jesus, contrasted with "darkness" denoting His absence. Keeping this in mind, let's take a look at our text. After proclaiming that God is light, John gets down to his explanation claiming that if we claim to be in fellowship with God, but walk in darkness, we lie, and are not in the truth. This is a rather easy statement to understand, for if we are in darkness, then we aren't in His presence, and if we aren't in His presence, we couldn't possibly be in fellowship. There is no half-way!

The contrast is that if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship... because we are with Him in the light. If we have this fellowship in the light of His presence and truth, then His blood purifies us from all sin. The reality of the statement is that we can't be in fellowship with Him until our sins have been forgiven by His sacrifice on the cross.

Sometimes, we may walk a ways in darkness, and by this I mean that we may stray from time-to-time. John doesn't suggest that our errors kick us out of fellowship as we will see a little farther through this text, but that there is a way to return to the light of His presence, by confessing our sins., as we see in the next paragraph:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

1 John 1:8-10

I think we all would agree that a claim by any one of us to have never sinned would be little short of crazy. John seems to think it's worse than that! All have sinned, but take heart, for there is a way out, confess your sins and He will forgive; this is our covenant promise. There is simply no need for us to wring our hands and carry around a burden of guilt and shame before God, for when we confess our sins (acknowledge them) He will forgive; we have His Word on that!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is the relationship between John's use of the word "light" and Jesus?
2. Why is this relationship important to us?
3. What is God revealing to us about his nature in this text?
4. What is God saying to YOU about your relationship with Him?

My Dear Children

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—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.

1 John 2:1-2

Here at the beginning of the second chapter, John restates what came at the end of chapter one about the forgiveness of sins, although here, he adds a different vantage point. Rather than simply saying that if we acknowledge our sins God is faithful to forgive them, thus putting forgiveness in a covenant context, (faithful being a covenant term) now John reminds us of how this is accomplished. It is because of our "advocate" Jesus Christ.

He has also spoken as the Elder, starting out with the words "my dear children." John is the last of the Apostles of Christ remaining alive in the body, and his writings in this vein are filled with truth, grace and love for his "children." His desire is that we shouldn't sin, thus he compares and contrasts light and darkness that we might clearly understand the difference as we journey through this life. Knowing that we will all stumble, he gives us the reassurance that all will be right, thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ... and this is always a comfort to me, I don't know about you, for I am prone to stumbling.

I also would mention that at the end of verse two, John tells us that Jesus has paved the way for our sins to be forgiven, just as He has for the sins of the entire world. Sometimes, I think that many of us might have the feeling that Jesus has enabled us to have been forgiven, and then we look at the world, and the forgiveness of the world. We share this with others that they too can be forgiven, and then we stumble ourselves again and forget that our new sin is forgiven also, just like our previous sins. In fact, I have watched many faithful followers struggle with this concept, and if this is ever our plight, take heart with John's words here in verse 2.

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

1 John 2:3-6

I read with interest, and sometimes sadness, when people write that we need ever do anything as Christians, because there are no conditions in the New Covenant. They seem to suggest that since grace is free, we need accept it, and then we're set for life, so to speak, with no obligation to ever do anything or behave in any particular way. Most of the time, I conclude that they are probably just wording things a little bit wrong, and don't really mean to go quite that far, but sometimes, I think they entirely misunderstand the Christian walk. John makes it quite clear in these verses that we are to obey the commands that Jesus gave us. In fact, Jesus commanded that we should teach others to obey Him also. (Matt. 28:18-20)

The overriding standard in this obedience is to live our lives as Jesus lived. How is that? Love your neighbor; serve others by putting their interests ahead of our own. Spread the Good News to the lost. Love God, and place His priorities above our own, and to love our brother. John

seems to me to be pretty clear, that we must live as Jesus did, and if we are not willing to do so, we may have a serious problem.

As John continues, he will elaborate on this theme further, and we'll see where he takes it when we get together next time...

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us here about forgiveness?
2. What does God reveal to us in these verses about His faithfulness?
3. How do you think keeping God's commands related to your relationship with Him?
4. What is God telling us about the way we live in these verses?
5. What can YOU do today, this week and in the weeks ahead to live more like Jesus would live in your place?

Love and Hate; Light and Dark

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

1 John 2:7-11

In these verses, John gives one more comparison and contrast. This time it is love and hate, light and darkness. If we are in Christ, then we must love our brother and sister. If we claim to be in Christ, yet we hate our brother or sister, then we cannot be in Christ; I think this is a fair summary of John's point.

You will recall from the last few posts that John made the point that if we are in Christ, we must live our lives like Christ. In fact he has made this point several times in various ways, but recall in particular 2:3-6. Where in the Gospels can we find any indication whatsoever that Jesus ever hated anyone? Far from it! We see Him showing love in all cases, even when He let the Pharisees have it with the seven woes. Remember, right after that, Jesus is lamenting the fact that despite all that God has done, they insisted on turning against Him; Jesus was clearly grieved by this. (Matt. 23:37 ff.) When you reduce the Christian faith down to its simplest form, and I am a fan of doing this, its central idea is love God; love your neighbor. There is no room for hate in that formula.

Our brother may irritate us now and then, he may also let us down. In truth, our brother may well be every bit as imperfect as we are, but we are to love him anyway, just as he is to love us anyway, just as Jesus loves all of us anyway. Remember that love means that we put the interests of the other person ahead of our own.

To this message from John, I'd like to add my own observation: How much damage do you suppose has been done over the years to the Gospel by people calling themselves Christians, who fail to demonstrate His love to others? How many thousands have said "no" to Christ because of some so-called believers, who show an attitude of hatred for other people? How many have left the faith because of this behavior in the church?

Those who hate rather than love can call themselves whatever they like, they may fool many people, but they cannot fool God, and I would respectfully suggest they repent, and do so quickly.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us about His nature in this passage?
2. What is God showing us about the role of love in our lives?
3. How can we love others who behave in an unlovely way?
4. What is God saying to YOU about your inner motivations in this passage?
5. What can You do today, this week, in the weeks ahead to put the lessons of this text into practice?

I Write to You Because...

Today, we have an amazing text, one that I have never really appreciated until about 10 minutes ago. It just hit me: Wow!

I must have been a victim of my training, because this is a transitional passage between John's introductory section and the rest of the letter. In verses 1:1-2:11, John has been going through this comparison and contrast that shows his readers who is and who is not in Christ. Great section, lots of insight! Now, he is giving the reasons he has written the letter, and after this he gets into some very deep thoughts. We often just blow by this little transition and wade into the content that begins in verse 15, but hold on a minute; the transition is amazing!

*I am writing to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.*

*I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.*

*I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.*

*I write to you, dear children,
because you know the Father.*

*I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.*

*I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.*

1 John 2:12-14

Do you see what this is? It isn't so much the "who" John is addressing, it's the "why" that is important, contrary to so much that has been written and discussed over the years! Let's restructure these verses:

If you are in Christ, John is writing to you BECAUSE:

1. YOUR sins have been forgiven on account of His name.
2. YOU know Him who is from the beginning.
3. YOU HAVE OVERCOME THE EVIL ONE.
4. YOU know the Father.
5. YOU know Him who is from the beginning.
6. YOU are strong.

7. The Word of God lives in YOU.

8. YOU HAVE OVERCOME THE EVIL ONE.

Did you notice the tense used here? Each of these "because" statements is either in present or past tense, indicating that they are facts at this very moment, not something to come in the future. I'm sure that I need not mention that there are no "buts" in any of these statements. Now, as for the "who," there are three "who's" in the passage, "dear children," "fathers" and "young men."

"Dear children" as we have already seen is one of the ways that John addressed the community of believers; it is an inclusive term. "Fathers" can either be literally a father of children, or it can refer to the head of the household, and in Scripture this is often the case; certainly it is when referring to a patriarch. In those cases, something that is true of the father is true of the household. It seems to me that here, because of the inclusive reference at the beginning, the inclusive meaning is also true of fathers, particularly since there is nothing in the text that would indicate specificity of intent. "young men" are the heads of households yet to be born, and I think we can take this reference to mean that not only are these things true in believing households of today, but they will also be true of future generations of believing households.

You might wonder about a household of one, but remember that in John's day, households of one were extremely unusual if not non-existent; they are actually quite a modern development. Looking at the list of statements again, it seems that we can take them to refer to all of us who are in Christ. That is also the context of the previous and following sections...

Notice that there is some repetition. Numbers 2 and 5 are the same, but 2 comes after a reference to the Son, while 5 comes after a reference to the Father. If you know Jesus, then you also know the Father. Having overcome the evil one is mentioned twice also, numbers 3 and 8. Both are directed to young men, and it seems to me interesting that it is repeated the second time in a series of three statements made to young men. Now if we have an accurate understanding of "young men," then let's consider these future heads of household. They are the future, but they are also young. They are the ones who need encouragement and the mentoring of the Elder Apostle the most, and so they, who will bear the spiritual battle in the future need a little more instruction than those who are experienced, the veterans we might say.

Here, John gives an extra assurance that they are strong, filled with the Word, and have overcome. I would guess that this is as much comfort to John's "young men" in their day, as this whole list should be to us in our day. This is particularly true when we get into the rest of this letter; John is getting his readers prepared for what is coming.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Take another look at the list of statements:

1. Would accepting these statements as the facts they are, with no "buts" attached, alter your view of the challenges you face in life?
2. Is God speaking to you in this text?
3. If so, what is He saying?
4. What will you do about it?

What About This World?

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17

Now that we are clear on who we are, and what the realities of life in Christ are, John turns to the world around us. John isn't referring to the natural world, he's referring to the world of Mankind; the culture, society, the impulses, the way things are here... in this I don't mean "culture" in the sense that John is speaking against literature or music or opera or culture in that sense, but instead the impulses and ways of men and society. If we were to say that we live in a "dog eat dog world," we would be referring to the impulses and ways of this world; that is more like what John is getting at. John is telling us that we are not to love the world or anything in it and if we do, we have a spiritual problem for sure.

The "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" are often cited as the three main categories of sin. Clearly these do not come from God, for as John puts it, they come from the world. If you think about it, so much of what people consider important has more to do with impressing others than with anything else. Why are we so often driven by career advancement? Why do we need so much stuff? Why is your living room fancier than your bedrooms? Why do you need the fancy car instead of the economy car? Must I spend \$100.00 on a tie? Why do we want what somebody else has? Our knee-jerk answer to these kinds of questions might be sin. John goes deeper than that; this comes from the world. Jesus nailed the thought down when He said that we "prefer the praise of men."

In the final analysis, this world, its ways, and everything in it will pass away, but the love of God endures forever. Our Lord showed us a life that was lived for the love of God. Isn't that where our love should be? I've heard people say that we are here to fix the world, but I must state clearly that this is a mistake. We were never commanded to fix the world, no! The world is passing away! We are commanded to share the love of God through Jesus Christ with people, so that they may be saved from the world's fate.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us about our relationship with the world we live in, in these verses?
2. What is God telling us about our attitudes toward this world?
3. What is God showing us our attitude should be about the things of this world?
4. What is God showing YOU about your lifestyle in this passage?

A Warning

Today's Text: 1 John 2:18-27

So far in this letter, John has given us a reminder of the supremacy of Jesus Christ; who He is, what He is and His nature. John gave us a comparison and contrast of what the "Light" is, and who is and who is not "in the light." Then John reminded us of who we are in Christ and how amazing that is. In the previous section, John warns us not to love this world, and now John is taking us to the front lines on a battlefield, where it becomes plain why he has taken us on this journey to show us just who we are, and just who "they" are.

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

1 John 2:18-19

This is the first mention of the term "antichrist" in the Bible. It means someone who is against or in place of the Messiah. In these verses, John mentions twice that we are in the "last hour," which is interesting when you consider that many will suggest today that there are more hours to come. Whoever these antichrists were, or are, they appear to have been hanging around us, and then to have gone rogue. If nothing else, in these two verses, we can be sure that these rogues were hanging around, but they were never "us." Recall the descriptions of in the light and in the darkness in vv. 1:5-2:11... These characters were the ones in darkness.

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1 John 2:20-23

Now we have a little more information: The rogues John is talking about deny that Jesus is the Messiah. That is a bald-faced lie, and those who are in the truth would never make such an assertion, so these guys were not in the light. No person who denies that Jesus is the Messiah is in the Son, and if a person is not in the Son, they are also not in the Father. They are antichrist, and there are many of those in the world.

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life.

1 John 2:24-25

These two verses are the warming: Make sure that you hang on to what you know about Jesus Christ. If you do, you will remain in Him and inherit eternal life. Do not listen to the rogues. By the way, this is why I said above that John has taken us to the front lines on a battlefield. It is a

spiritual battlefield in a spiritual war, where the antichrists in our midst will attempt to pry you away from the Truth. Resist, and do not listen to their lies!

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

1 John 2:26-27

John invokes the anointing of the indwelling Holy Spirit in urging us to remain in Christ in these verses. Consider this: Here is a warning that there are those who try to lead us astray, to turn our backs on our Lord. They are fighting against us in a spiritual war, and this can sound really scary. Oh it's great in the movies, when their innocent victims are lured into evil by magical powers, having no way to resist. Take heart! John is pointing out to you and me that we have within us, at our disposal greater firepower by tenfold! It is the very Holy Spirit of God, the third Person of the Godhead! If we are focused on our relationship with our Lord, and we take these "battles" to Him, there isn't even a contest, for "greater is He who is in me, than he who is in the world."

One final thought and that'll be it for now... You know all those stories and books and movies about evil forces that lead the righteous astray? "The Exorcist" "The Omen" etc., etc...? They really freak people out, which is why they make so much money, right? People become afraid, and being afraid becomes a distraction for some. At the same time, you have in these verses a very simple way to discern who the liars and antichrists are; a third grader can understand it. You also have a solution to defeat the lie that a third grader can understand: stand on the truth of the Word of God, and reject outright the lie.

As simple as this is, many will be so creeped out by the stories and the idea of spiritual warfare, that it almost makes me wonder if these stories of myth, legend and popular fiction are actually part of the lie itself, so that we won't fight back, and our superior firepower will never be brought to bear on our foe. Hmm... do you think we need to have a healthy relationship with the Lord?

I do!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God revealing to us in these verses about our relationship with Him?
2. What is God showing us here about spiritual conflict?
3. What role does the Holy Spirit play in spiritual conflict?
4. How can we easily discern antichrist?
5. What is God telling YOU about the strength of your relationship with Him?

Continue in Him

And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

1 John 2:28-29

I don't know about you, but sometimes I sit back and think about everything involved in following our Lord and it all just seems a little overwhelming. Thinking about who He is, what He is, His love for us, His call to us... and all of the implications of these things... Wow!

I don't want to mess this all up!

Oh sure, I'm confident in forgiveness for sins, and I understand that He is loving, merciful and not interested in a "gotcha" moment, no that isn't it at all; I don't want to grieve Him or let Him down. In the text we've been looking at, John seems to sense the same kind of thing. He's taken us through all of these amazing attributes, and he's taken us through the facts of life in a spiritual battlefield, and now suddenly, he seems to take a little step back to survey the scene, and just as though he were reading my mind, he writes these two verses.

Wow! What do we do now? John's answer is "continue in Him." Yes, that's right; continue in Him so that when He appears we may be confident and unscathed by this world of ours. By "continue in Him," I think John means that we should simply keep on living in Christ's image, as He taught us, doing what He did, following His Father's purpose and not being distracted. We do know that He is righteous; so then, we do know that everyone who does right is born of Him. By "right," John must mean that they do the things that He would do, so while Jesus is the Model for all of us to follow, when those around us follow His model, we have someone to show us the way when we are confused.

Wow! Once again, the answer is simple, if not always exactly easy.

Yes, dear reader, let's just continue in Him...

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What can we learn about God's priorities when He tells us to "continue in Him"?
2. From what John has written here, what should we do if we are living in the "last days"?
3. What do you think God is saying to YOU in these verses?
4. What are YOU going to do about it?

Children of God

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

1 John 3:1-3

It's really an amazing thing to read this text and give it a chance to sink in; this is a text to read slowly, prayerfully...

While we were dead in our sinful rebellion against God, He loved us so much, even in spite of our mindset against Him, that he went to extraordinary lengths to redeem us to Himself, and once reborn, we are now His children. There are moments when we may not feel like it, but when God looks upon us, He sees His own children... what more is there to say?

None of us really can appreciate exactly what that entails. It's like being asked what heaven is like... I've been asked this many times, but I must admit that I don't really know. People repeat certain Biblical passages about heaven, and act as though they know all, but they are kidding themselves, for they are quoting non-literal passages that give indications of certain aspects of heaven, but not details, and do you know how I can say this so boldly? It's easy; human language does not, nor could it ever, contain the vocabulary to describe fully, accurately and completely those things which no man has ever seen and reported directly - we have no reverences to comprehend. The same is true for being children of God. Much remains "hidden" for there is simply no vocabulary to convey the full meaning. When we see Jesus Christ face-to-face, we will see all! What a glorious hope! It is only natural and proper for us to respond to this by setting aside the old life, the old ways, and to be pure as He is pure to the best of our ability, and according to His leading.

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

1 John 3:4-6

John highlights the point made above about purity in these verses. For us to disregard everything He has done for us, to reject His love and His grace and remain in the old ways is simply inconceivable! That isn't to say that we will never struggle or make mistakes; it isn't to say that we are suddenly perfect. He came to take sin away, after all, not to catch us messing up. John is once again pointing out the contrast between the follower of Jesus Christ and the one who rejects Jesus Christ. He doesn't appear to be referring in any way to a follower who had a bad day!

Before I conclude this, dear reader, what is it that really jumps out at you here?

For me, the thing that jumps out is that not only is God's love for us amazing, boundless and tremendous, but that it holds implications that go far beyond anything that we can even begin to

comprehend in our current mortal state, and that our hope for eternal life is not only assured, but far more amazing than anyone has ever understood it to be!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God telling us here about how He views our relationship with Him?
2. Would you say that being God's child is more conceptual or more actual in your life?
3. How does the fact that we have become God's children increase your desire to live as He would want us to live?
4. What can YOU do today, this week and in the weeks ahead to live more in line with what God would like from His children?

Doing What is Right

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

1 John 3:7-10

This is an interesting passage with which to begin any day. Don't let anyone lead you astray! There are many, who would do so, and they may try by appealing to our pride or vanity, they might appeal to greed or lust, they might even appeal to our intellect with attractive arguments or curious reasoning, but have you ever asked yourself why they would bother?

John gives the reason in this passage: They are sinful, of the devil and doing the devil's work, because the devil has been in rebellion against God since the beginning and is looking for allies... or at least to separate us from Christ. It is really important that we get this point. It is the work of the devil to separate us from Christ, because in Christ we are part of His work, and His work is to destroy the works of the devil. Actually, this is so simple we might miss it! In Christ, we are a threat, so there will be opposition.

Within this context, John speaks of doing what is right as opposed to doing what is sinful, and in this context doing what is right means following Jesus Christ, and doing what is sinful means not following Christ and trying to lead His followers astray. So far, this is very straight forward, and then John throws us a curve at the end, a curve that leads us to the next section. Doing right means that we love one another, doing wrong means that we don't.

Wait! I thought you just said that doing right was following Jesus, and doing wrong was not following Jesus! Where did all of this love stuff come from?

Simple answer: If we do not love one another as He loved us, then we can't possibly be following Jesus Christ, because loving one another is where He is leading!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God telling us about the connection between doing right and doing wrong in this section?
2. In telling us this, what is God revealing about what it means to follow Him?
3. What does this section show us about those who would try to separate us from Christ?
4. What is God saying to YOU about your walk with Him?

What we have Heard from the Beginning

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

1 John 3:11-15

Well, we *have* heard this message from the beginning, that we should love one another. A quick look through Christian blogs will reveal that everybody writes about it at one time or another... or every day. Why does it take so long to sink in for so many?

John takes us right to the story of Cain and Abel, an interesting choice. He tells us that Cain murdered his brother because Cain was following the evil one, that his actions were evil and Abel's actions were righteous; murder was the result. Now to be fair to Cain, I've never heard this mentioned as a motive for murder on a detective show before. The usual motives for murder are hatred, greed, fear of exposure, jealousy... wait! Maybe that's the one; jealousy! He was jealous because Abel was righteous and Cain was evil, and that led to hatred, which led to murder. I wonder if Perry Mason or DCS Foyle would see it that way....

It would seem that John is suggesting that evil will oppress the righteous. Then he takes another interesting step, adding linkage that we should pay close attention to, because it takes the old story from Genesis and brings it starkly to life: Do not be surprised if the world hates you.

I never cease to be amazed when Christians act all horrified and indignant that certain elements in society oppose us at every turn. What is surprising about that? Certain elements in society murdered God's prophets and opposed the Lord Himself to the point of death, not to mention the early church, and evil regimes all through the ages. There is nothing new in any of this. No, it is not a sign that the end is near, it is a sign that we are in the last age, just as John said his readers were...

We must love one another, because we have passed from death into life. We must love one another because God first loved us and He also loves our brother, and we love our brother because we love God. This, too is nothing new. How will the world know that we are in Christ? Because we love one another. Will the world hate that? Yes, but many will also want it and be attracted to it, because once you separate individuals from the society in which they live, they want what we have in Christ. Therefore, loving one another spreads the Gospel and accomplishes God's purpose.

Oh, sorry, I've gotten a little ahead of the text. That's coming...

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God revealing about the Body of Christ in these verses?
2. What is God telling us about the history of the last 2,000 years in these verses?
3. What can you see about our testimony as Christians in these verses?
4. How will people of this world react to the love within Christ's Body when confronted by it?
5. What is God telling YOU about your relationship with Him and other believers in this passage?

Love is Active

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:16-18

We now come to an amazing text regarding love and what it really is. The concept of Christian love, love of our brother or sister, is not merely an abstract idea; it is a reality of life that requires action. John gives us the model of Christ as the example of what love looks like in action. Jesus loved us, and so He set His own life aside so that we might live. In the same way, John calls upon us to set aside our own lives for the sake of others. This may not necessarily require our physical death, for there is more to the teaching of Christ than that. It will most certainly require that we set our interests aside to serve others.

John uses the specific example of one who has material resources giving them to a brother or sister who is in need in these verses. How can we possibly sit by and let our brother or sister suffer when we have the means to bring relief; to do so is not showing the person love. We can think of other circumstances in which we may have what a hurting person might need, and we must not withhold aid, even though giving aid can be quite inconvenient. Very often these days, we may come across a brother or sister who has emotional pain, and we must be ready to give whatever comfort and relief that we can.

Whatever the particular case may be, we must understand that loving one another doesn't simply mean to be nice, it means to put others first in thought, and deed as well as in words. This is what it means to follow Jesus Christ; this is what it means to love one another!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What can we discern about God's love from this passage?
2. What is God showing us about His nature here?
3. What is God showing us about human nature here?
4. What is God showing YOU about your nature here?
5. What will YOU do today, this week and in the weeks to come to show God's love at work in your life?

Do You Really Know for Sure?

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

1 John 3:19-24

Chapter 3 of John's first letter ends with the assurance that we can know for sure where we stand with God, but it isn't the answer that most of us give if we are asked "how we know"...

John's answer is that we know by the Spirit within us.

Well steady on there, isn't that the Spirit that so many are waiting for...until "it" decides to move...? Yes, that one, the one that we say we can't hear.

Yes, that's the one John is referring to!

John takes a little different tack that we often do. He says that we will notice whether or not the Spirit within us condemns us, we know that God is greater than our hearts and knows all. I think that many of us today use slightly different terminology for this by saying that we "feel convicted" about something. When this happens, we have something to seek forgiveness for and have the need to alter our behavior or attitudes in some way. When we are not condemned by our hearts, we are confident in his presence. We know that in saying these things, John is making reference to the work of the Spirit in our lives because he says so in the last part of the passage. Now, the remaining question is whether or not this is really true in our lives.

Over the years I've noticed that many people will tell me about their active prayer lives. They will tell me all about the countless hours they spend with God and all the rest. On other occasions, they will tell me that they never notice the Spirit working within them, and that's how I know for sure that they don't have any of this great prayer life they like to go on about. The reason is that seeking His presence is how we are able to discern the Spirit that is within us! Notice that John linked the two in verse 21 and 22:

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask,

You should notice something else here. Here's verse 22 in full:

and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

Yes, we will receive anything we ask in prayer, if we "keep his commands and do what pleases him." As always in John's writings, asking and receiving are mentioned firmly within the context of doing His will, and not in doing our will.

So, can you really know for sure where you stand with God?

YES!

Seek His presence and you'll find out!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us about our relationship with Him in this text?
2. How is it that John tells us we can know where we stand?
3. How is our prayer life connected with our confidence in our faith?
4. What can YOU do to ensure that your prayer life meets God's requirements?

Test the Spirits

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

1 John 4:1-3

Oh my word, what a timely text! With the previous chapter ending by saying that we can know that Jesus lives in us because of the (Holy) Spirit He gave us, now John takes another step forward in our experience. How can we tell who is right and who is not?

Simple! Test the spirits!

Well, it is actually simple, but at first it sounded a little creepy to me. On closer examination, however, it isn't creepy and it isn't hard. Does a teacher or commentator acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? Do they acknowledge Him at all? If they do, they are from God; if they don't they are not from God. If they don't acknowledge Jesus, they aren't from God, they are antichrist. If this is so, would we consider them a reliable source of insight? Well, you can decide that one...

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

1 John 4:4-6

John finishes this thought in these verses, making his point even clearer. We have overcome the spirit of antichrist, because the Holy Spirit within us is greater by far than the spirit of antichrist could ever dream of being. Interesting point to bear in mind when reading commentaries, blogs and books! These false teachers speak from the viewpoint of the world, not from the viewpoint of God, and the world will listen to them. Yes, and while the world will listen to the false teacher, the spirit of antichrist, the world will not generally listen to us, for they simply can't fathom what we are talking about, so let's not be surprised by this.

I've spoken with many Christians who fear that they might be tricked and led astray, and I always tell them that they will not be tricked and led astray if they have a strong relationship with Christ. That is precisely what John is asserting here. It's so simple to tell the difference, and when you were little, your mother or father probably told you how to recognize who is credible and who is not, for I'll bet they told you to "consider the source." To put it another way, I wouldn't recommend that we take spiritual advice from an atheist, nor would I suggest that we should take Bible instruction from a non-believer.

See how simple this stuff is?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God telling us about discernment in this text?
2. What is God telling us about “antichrist”?
3. What is God telling us about where our information comes from?
4. What is God telling YOU about the information you believe?

This is Love

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 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 4:7-10

We are now beginning the central core of this letter, and this core runs from verse 7 to the end of this chapter. It is not only the central core of the letter, but it is also the central core of Christian theology. All of those comparisons at the beginning of the letter, and all of the discussion of evil, antichrists and the testing of spirits comes back to this theme, for without it, the rest of the theology of our faith is rendered meaningless. In short, what is written in this section is the one thing that gives Christianity its power and authority, and against which the gates of Hell itself cannot, and will not stand.

The last sentence in this text is the key: God loved us. In fact, he loved us while we were lost, and not loving Him at all. Yet God loved us anyway! He loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us. Yes, you're right, this has already been pointed out in this letter, but here it is again, as the core of everything else; that is how important it is that we grasp this simple concept!

How could God love us so much and in spite of everything? Because God is love.

That being the case, we are to love one another, just as God loved us. Nobody can do this unless God is in that person, which is to say that person is in Christ. Loving one another as God loved us runs counter to every teaching of this world, as it also runs against our natural human inclinations. Therefore, if a person does not love, it is because God is not in him or her.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

(and the answers)

How will the world see Christ in you?

It will see that his love is in you, *and working through you.*

How can the lost be won for Christ?

By seeing His love in you, *and working through you.*

More Love

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:11-12

John is continuing his thoughts that we looked at in vv. 7-10, and as I mentioned last time, this is the central core of Christian theology, the part that everything else is built upon. Simply stated, this love core flows like this:

1. God loved us while we were still sinners.
2. God sent His Son to die for our sins.
3. We loved God and responded to the Gospel.
4. God loved our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Therefore, so do we.

We see this pattern at work once again in verse 11. God loved us, so we should love each other. Then John, as was his custom, takes one more step. Since no one has ever seen God, and since God loves all of us and we love Him, if we also love each other, God's love will be complete in us and visibly expressed within His Body, the Church. This is as far as John has gone so far...

At this point, we can infer that there is another step. The other step is implied in John's mentioning that "no one has seen God." OK, why did he choose to write that? Think...

No one has seen God, but if we love one another as God loved us, then His love will live amongst us, *and though us all will see it.*

The other evening there was a debate about Evolution and Creation. These kinds of discussions usually have at their core, an assumption that if we cannot observe some "evidence" that God exists, then we can determine that He does not exist. I'm no scientist, but this seems to be a natural inclination on the part of people who are educated with regard to the Scientific Method. Remember that one from your school days? It was the one about observations, and testing theories with observable evidence?

Back to John. Have you ever thought that it would be nice if you could find the positive "proof" of God's existence? Yes, something that can be observed and studied?

Are you sitting down?

John just gave it to you! The proof is God's love at work in our lives and within the Body of Christ. At least it should be! Maybe if we started taking these verses to heart and putting them into our everyday manner of living, like we are commanded by God to do, more people would

notice that the greatest "proof" of God, the observable evidence is right there in front of us all: Love for one another as Jesus has loved us, and gave His life for us.

Let's wrap up for today with a question to think about: Do you ever wonder if it is a coincidence that the whole concept of Godly love has been corrupted and demeaned in our culture? After all, doesn't society use the word "love" to mean just about anything *other than* Godly love?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What has God shown us about Himself in these verses?

2. What can we see about the nature of love here?

3. How can all the world see God's love?

4. What is God telling YOU about His love in action?

God is Love

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:16b-18

This short text is tricky; we need to be sharp to get the full benefit of it. "God is love." OK, so far, so good, this part is easy. Then John says, *Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.* For us to live in love is to also live in God, and when we do that, God lives in us **because God and love are the same thing.** They are inseparable. Here comes the curve: John is building again. Because of the inseparable nature of God and love, living our lives in love will make love complete, and ensure that we will be confident on the day of judgment: *This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment:* OK, this one is really interesting... John finishes this way:

In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Did you catch that? If we live in love, we live in God, and God lives in us. This is because love and God cannot be separated. If we live this way, we live like Jesus lived. Jesus did not fear death, why should He? He knew exactly where He was going! When we live in love, we need have no fear of judgment, for that love drives fear of judgment out of our lives.

When a person dies, the next step is judgment. You might believe that we die and immediately go to judgment, or you might believe that we die and sleep until judgment day, but to be honest, it doesn't matter. Judgment is the next step either way. Just as Jesus knew exactly where He was going, so do we, we are going to be at His side.

So what really happens?

When we go to judgment, there are two sets of books. There is the Book of Life and there is the Books of Deeds. If your name is in the Book of Life, that's it, you're in! If not, the other books are consulted, and you are judged by your deeds. You don't want to be involved in those deeds books! The judgment is not a horrifying ordeal if you are in the Book of Life. Your name is read and that's it, "welcome home." What John is telling us here is that living in love means that our names are in the Book of Life.

Let's put it another way: We read about this day in Revelation 21:11 ff. If you are in Christ, living in love (they are the same thing) your name is in the Book of Life. That being the case, you are not being put on trial or accused of anything at all, for your sins have been taken away entirely; they are as far from you as the east is from the west. There is no sin to even discuss: Period. That is why John can say here, that perfect love drives out all fear. The love God has always had for you terminated all discussion and your appearance at judgment is a welcoming ceremony, you might say.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us about His nature in this text?
2. What is God telling us about the relationship between Himself and love?
3. How does this relate to being without fear?
4. How do these facts relate to your relationship with Jesus?

We love because He first loved us

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

1 John 4:19-21

This just about sums it all up, don't you think? God so loves us that He went to extreme measures in showing it, sending His Son to die for us... because so great was God's love. (John 3:16)

If God loves us, and we in turn love God, then we must also love our brother or sister. As you can see from these verses, there is no negotiating to be done. In fact, John says that it is a command from God that we love our brother. End of discussion!

Well... almost. It may strike some as odd that God has commanded love. It is really a fair question to ask if someone asked it... How can I be commanded to love? I see my brother or sister, and I *don't feel anything for them*. As I've written before words are funny things; they mean stuff. In English, we only have one word: "Love." John wrote in Greek. Greek has five words for our "love" and they mean different things. The word that John used here is *agapaō* which is the word used in the New Testament for God's love. It is not the word for romantic love. When we are commanded to love one another, this command has nothing whatsoever to do with emotions. Instead, it has everything do with attitude.

To love your brother or sister in Christ means to put their interests ahead of your own. If your brother or sister is in need, we are to take care of their need before we take care of our need. We are to be willing to set aside our cares and hurts to see to the needs of others... just like Jesus did. If we see our brother or sister hurting, we do something about it. Jesus saw us hurting from sin and death, so He did something about it, setting aside His own personal needs... that is unless you'd claim that He really needed to be tortured and murdered, or that it was His idea of fun...

This is the attitude that makes the Body of Christ possible. If we were to approach the Body (church) as our little plaything or as our chance to be important, or in the way humans often approach things, then the Body will fight and divide. Hmmmmm, we might think about that one! If we approach it as people who love one another and put others ahead of ourselves, the Body is the most amazing and awesome thing this side of Heaven, as they say.

So, can we do it? Sure we can! We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. It begins with a commitment to follow Jesus, and it carries on when we are more satisfied in His presence than when we are any place else. Need help or guidance in this? No problem, seek Him, and follow where He leads. You'll know what to do.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us in His command that we love one another?

2. What does this teach us about God's nature?

3. What does this mean in YOUR life?

4. What steps can you take today, this week and in the weeks ahead to bring this love into your life?

Keep His Commands

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 5:1-5

As we begin the final chapter of John's letter, John continues to tell us that we must love God and love each other. He's been doing this for dozens of verses now; for some who read this, John is going to throw you another curve!

The curve is in verse 2: *This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.* I've never heard anyone argue with the loving God part; that seems easy, almost abstract, but carrying out His commands is often a sticking point. As we have stated many times going through this letter, God's commands can be summed up very easily. We are to love God, and love one another.

Oh, hold on, did I forget one? Yes, thank you for reminding me, it's love God, love one another and *make disciples*. That's the one many people get stuck on... There are all kinds of criticisms for this, as though I (or someone else) made it up or something, but that is simply not the case! What was Jesus' final command?

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

No, dear reader, I didn't make this up! Since I have blogged on this so many times already, rather than to explain it again, let's just try a new approach. First, how can we ever say that we love God, but we won't follow His command to share that love with others? How can we say we love others, and not share the love of God with them? Come on now, that wouldn't even make sense, would it? God first loved us, so He sent His Son to die for our sins. So if we don't share God's love with others who are lost, are we not sharing because God really didn't love them as much as He loved us?

OK, fine. We share with the lost and they enter into relationship with Jesus Christ; now they are our brother or sister in the Lord. So what then? Will we just stand by and watch them struggle with their new faith, or will we help them along their way? Which choice demonstrates love in action?

John goes on to mention that obeying His commands isn't burdensome because in Him, we have overcome the world. Ever wonder what that has to do with anything? What is it that would hold us back from making disciples? Go ahead and make a short mental list of what might hold

you back. Got it? OK, good. Does it have things like being afraid they'll say no? How about not wanting others to think you're weird? Maybe you're afraid that you won't know all the answers. Yes, there are other possibilities, but in my experience, these are the kinds of things people usually say. In Him, we've overcome the world, and these are thoughts of the world, not His thoughts. Was Jesus ever afraid of rejection or embarrassment or afraid of anything this world could do to Him? No. Why would we be concerned about such things? We have overcome the world! We have overcome the world because of our faith! Sometimes, like you, I need to remind myself about that!

To carry out God's commands is not burdensome, because it is a joy! I can tell you from my own experience that there is no greater joy in this life than to see a person I have mentored, grow in their faith, and step up to serve God because of their love for Him. Yes, it is by far the greatest joy there is!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us here about the role of love in our lives?

2. What is He showing us about the connection between our love for Him and our love for one another?

3. What is God telling YOU about your love for others in this text?

4. What can YOU do today, this week and in the weeks to come to better share your love?

Haves and Have Nots

This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:6-12

What an interesting text! Do you remember John's warning about antichrists in chapters 1 and 4? John was warning the people of his time against the false teachings of the Gnostics, who denied that Jesus came in the flesh, and that He was "from the Father." John is taking aim at them again in this text when he speaks of the testimony of three witnesses. In our time, while this is still a very important point, we tend to get into arguments about the water and blood part, with various interpretations regarding John's meaning. For our purposes, I'll give you my idea on this point, but I'll spare you the lengthy dissertation on it, since I'd prefer to focus on application rather than systematic theology, and you probably would as well.

One of the main points of contention between Christian teaching and that of the Gnostics was whether or not Jesus came in the flesh; in a human body. The Gnostic approach was that He came more in a spirit form and not in physical form, since everybody knows that the physical body is evil... or so they said. It is always interesting to me to hear Christians who maintain this, since the notion of the human body being evil or dirty is a Greek impulse, not a Biblical teaching... but alas, I digress! That the Spirit testifies that Jesus is from the Father is obviously a reference to the Holy Spirit who testifies about Jesus. The water, in my view, is a reference to His baptism. To be baptized is a physical activity, in which an actual body is needed; a spirit would be rather impossible to immerse in water. The blood, as I see it, is a reference to what Jesus did on the cross, since it would be a difficult thing to nail a spirit to a cross and have it bleed. The water as a giver of testimony seems to me to refer to the baptism of a new follower of Jesus, who is immersed as a testimony of dying and raising again a new creation. The blood is declared when we partake of Communion, where we declare for all time the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When you put these three things together, you have an ongoing testimony about Jesus from the Holy Spirit, from millions of baptisms, and from our observance of Communion that Jesus came in the flesh from the Father. You might also note that the Old Testament Law requires the testimony of two or three witnesses, and John is providing three. If your reading of this is different from mine, that's fine, for the larger point for us is what follows...

Let's pick up John's discussion here in verse 9:

We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not

believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (9-11)

His point that we will readily believe a human testimony, but not God's is a warning to all of us. There are all sorts of human teachings about Jesus, many of which are designed to convince us that He never even existed, and the difference between life and death is whether or not we will accept God's testimony, given not only by his Word, but by the Spirit. just think about how crucial this is!

Then comes the most important, bottom-line statement of all in verse 12:

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Please take a moment for this to sink in... and recall our discussion last time about keeping His commands.

Yes, this is what I think we need to consider. Some of John's writings are a little cryptic; he has a way of meandering around in a circle, and his meaning is vague... until he drops the bomb at the end, and this is one of them. It's one thing for us to say that life is in Christ, but the other side of the proverbial coin is that outside of Christ there is only doom!

Jesus has commanded that we make disciples, and that begins with leading the lost to Him. There is a great deal at stake with this process, and John has made that abundantly clear in verse 12, wouldn't you agree? Maybe there was a time when you could share the peril and doom with a person who didn't know Him, but if there was such a time, it is long gone. I am aware that many Christians have been impressed with this, and out of their misguided love, they have run out and shared the warning... and driven off those whom they had hoped to save. The world around us, our culture, and our society has picked up on this, and rather than be flattered that someone cared, they became enraged at the affront of it all, causing no end of trouble.

When Jesus Christ is involved, there is always hope! In this case, there is a simple, if not always easy, answer: Share His love in grace. In loving relationship, many will respond to His love. We must be sensitive to the fact that so many have a negative image of Christianity, whether it is fair or not. Approaching people in love means that we bother to actually care about them, it takes time, and it is a kind of investment in people, without judgments, without threats, without doom. Even the most hardened hearts can be mended by the love of God... and I think it is especially important to bear in mind that it is God's love that we must display in sharing with others.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God telling us about the gospel in John's three testimonies?
2. What is the role of love in sharing the gospel with others?
3. How might someone get the wrong idea about the nature of God if we share the gospel as a story of doom?
4. What is God saying to YOU in this text about sharing the gospel?

His Will

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. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

1 John 5:13-15

These three simple verses are encouraging ones, for they assure us of two wonderful things. First, we have eternal life. Second, anything we ask for in prayer will be done, if we ask in God's will. This is our focus here: God's will.

The whole idea of tacking "in Jesus' name, Amen" has always struck me as trying to work the system just a little bit. Of course, we do that because Jesus is recorded three times in John's gospel telling His disciples that anything they ask for in His name will be given them. Never mind that all three times were firmly within the context of doing God's will, all we need to do is tack on the magic words... Only it doesn't work like that!

Yeah, I hate to be the one who has to tell you that God thought of that one already.

Our prayers that are outside of God's will aren't guaranteed to be answered, because God is all about His purposes, and we are His servants, not the other way around. So, the question really is what is within God's will? It isn't always in God's will that nice things happen, that the sick are always healed and that the bad guy loses the game. In fact, it can be quite difficult to discern His will in some situations, especially when we are emotionally invested. There are some things that are always within the scope of God's eternal purpose, can you guess what they are?

Yep, that's right, you got it! Things that pertain to saving the lost and making disciples are always within His will. Not things that just make it easier for us, or that make us look like heroes, but things that get those "Kingdom things" done. In this area, prayer is so powerful it can be scary... in a good way.

We must pray big prayers, with boldness, and with the sure expectancy that God will do great things with them, but we need to ensure that our prayers are to advance God's priorities, according to God's ways of doing things.

OK, here we go... big bold "God's will" prayers and no more little "me" ones. Just watch and see what amazing things He can do!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is God showing us about His will in this passage?
2. What is God showing us about His nature in this passage?
3. What is God showing us about the power of prayer?
4. What can YOU do today, this week and in the weeks to come to increase your effectiveness in prayer?

Thrill-packed Ending

If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

1 John 5:16-17

As we move along through this letter, we think we have John all figured out, and then we come to these two verses, so near to the end of the letter. At first, they don't seem to belong, what is John talking about? Where did this come from?

So let's see if we can follow him... if a brother sins, we are to pray for him, and God will give him life. OK, I think I get it; God will forgive the sin, and straighten the guy out. Hold on, that is if the sin isn't a sin that leads to death; but I thought death was the price of all sin! John's making it sound like any sin can be forgiven, except one; and this one sin can be committed by our "brother or sister." Obviously old John needs to brush up on his Calvinism!

All kidding aside, John could have at least mentioned what that sin is... leaving that little detail out makes this hard to follow, at least for me. I wonder why he would do that. Maybe he didn't think he needed to mention it, maybe he thought he'd already covered that somewhere; could that part have been lost over time or something? Let's think.

What was the letter about? Oh, yes, it was about false teachers, in fact it was about a certain kind of false teacher, Gnostic false teachers, who claimed that Jesus didn't come in the flesh. Hold on, John came up with a special word to describe them: Antichrist! Aha! Now this is beginning to make sense, the antichrist is not to be forgiven; you don't need to pray for this. When your brother stumbles, pray for him, when you stumble ask God and He will forgive. Stay away from the antichrist.

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

1 John 5:18-20

John is winding up the letter now, as he recounts some basic facts of Christian life. A follower of Jesus is not to continue in the old ways. He or she has been buried with Christ, and arisen again as a new creation, leaving the old behind. The "One who was born of God" which is to say the Lord Jesus, keeps us safe from the evil one. This is a pretty important statement for us to keep in mind, especially when we are looking for somebody to blame for our mistakes. John points out that the whole world is under the control of the evil one, and you will no doubt recall that he has already warned us not to love the world, now you know why.

Now, John drops in a comforting and powerful thought: Jesus has given us understanding so that we may know who is true; it is Jesus who is true. If we have the understanding to know

who is true, we can also discern who is not. Maybe this is why the arguments and understanding of this world can be so attractive to the world, and appear so idiotic to a follower of Jesus... and vice-versa. Hmm, might want to ponder that for a bit. God is the one who is true, and the giver of eternal life.

Lastly, John reminds us in verse 21 to stay away from idols, and the letter closes.

2 John

A Curious Letter

It begins by referencing its recipient as a "chosen lady" without ever mentioning a name. Some have voiced speculation over the years as to who that lady might be, but since the text doesn't say, I will leave it alone. The rest of the first six verses read much like 1 John, but verse 7 begins a particular warning that is the purpose of the letter.

John is warning the lady about antichrist! As in the previous letter, he describes the antichrist as one who "does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh."

Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.

2 John 8-11

This is a very stern warning indeed! It seems to me that John is telling the lady that if we allow ourselves to be deceived by these antichrists, we run the risk of losing what we have in Christ. Now I realize that many who are from the Calvinist point of view will disagree with me, but that is how I read it. You might recall John's teaching about "sins that lead to death" as opposed to "sins that do not lead to death." However you might prefer to explain this passage, John is clearly talking about a danger of being deceived into "sin that leads to death." He even goes so far as to say that we mustn't welcome or allow into our homes such an individual, or we will share in their wicked ways.

You just don't see things like this very often in New Testament Scripture!

Apparently, these antichrists bring with them a clear and present danger to a believer with their ability to deceive. I think it's particularly interesting that John notes at the end of the letter that he has more to say on the subject, but wants to speak to this lady in person. He wants to do some disciplining, it would seem.

You might recall that in 1 John, we had assurances that by the Spirit within us, we can overcome this "spirit of antichrist." What I am taking away from all of this, is that as mature believers, we should have no problem identifying antichrist, but as less than mature believers, we might be vulnerable. I could be wrong of course, since John hasn't said that explicitly, but it seems likely. With that said, what shall we do? In discussing the first letter, much was said both in posts and comments about "making disciples." I've pointed out many times here, that there are a few facets of this making disciples business. First, for the maker of disciples, there are two aspects: First is to lead the non-believer into relationship with Jesus Christ. Second is to lead the new Christian to maturity in Christ so they may also make disciples. But there is a third aspect, and that is for those of us who are not yet mature believers to make ourselves available to be led, nurtured and guided through this process of growth.

We must remember that Jesus' first command to His disciples was to follow Him. His last command was to Go and make disciples. In between these two commands was three years of training, teaching, relationship and learning. They didn't skip from following to leading overnight. If you consider the example of Paul, he encountered Jesus of that famous road to Damascus, but he didn't jump right in to a leadership role. After that, he went home to Tarsus and remained for several years. It is likely that he grew into maturity in that time.

When I was a very young Christian, I was sure that if I ever ran into a demonic situation, or a face to face with the devil, that I could easily recognize and handle the situation. Lucky for me, God knew better and kept me from such things. If He hadn't, I would surely have been consumed by my immaturity and folly! With some maturity and experience, not to mention growth in my faith, I'm not so easy to deceive as I once was. Even so, John's warning is one that I take to heart, and I hope the lady he sent the letter to, and all of you will do the same.

3 John

Some Things Never Change

John's last letter. So short, so telling. John is writing to his friend and brother Gaius. He seems to have been a leader in the church, and even though there are other mentions of men with this name in Scripture, it was a very common name; we can't be sure if he has other mentions or not. Gaius was obviously serving others, and sharing God's love with them. He was hosting a group of missionaries, apparently, and these workers were people he didn't know.

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

3 John 2-8

Gaius is the kind of Christian who is worthy of imitation. He is serving in love, he is putting others first, he is doing the kinds of things we should be doing. But there is another guy who comes up in the letter...

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

3 John 9-12

This dude Diotrephes is all too common in our day, and obviously they had this sort of nonsense going on even in John's day. Did you catch what John said about him at the beginning? He said that Diotrephes "loves to be first." Well that about sums it up! Do you know others who love to be first? They are the important ones, they are the ones who can't be inconvenienced, they are the ones who always have the last word, who always get their way, and who must always be in charge. They want to be the bride at every wedding, and the corpse at every funeral. No doubt you are reminded here of the words of Jesus when He said the first will be last and the last will be first!

This Diotrephes won't welcome the Apostle to the church, and kicks others out for welcoming the strangers that Gaius has taken in. Diotrephes seems to have much to say about others. A bunch of nonsense (or gossip) is being spread about people like John himself, who should be given the respect they are due. I wonder if Diotrephes is doing this because he must be in the spotlight, and just can't handle it when someone else gets attention.

Maybe we'll never know the exact motivation, but I think we recognize the person, and John is telling us not to emulate them or their behavior. Who can argue with that advice?

Finally, another good guy is mentioned: Demetrius. So there you have it, two brothers who are serving faithfully, and one bad apple. It seems that the bad apple makes the most noise, but the faithful servants are making a difference for the Gospel. I'd say there might be a lesson in this for us!