

*First Epistle of Saint John
Study Guide*

*Saint Paul's Womens Bible Study
Summer 2020*



UNIT 1—The Word of Life / 1 John 1:1–4

Scripture

The Word of Life

1 *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. ²The 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. ³We 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. ⁴We write this to make our^a joy complete.*

^a4 Some manuscripts *your*

Group Questions

Every group meeting has three goals: **(1) To Begin** (15 minutes) to break the ice; **(2) Read Scripture and Discuss** (30 Minutes); and **(3) To Close and Pray** (15–30 Minutes). Try to keep on schedule. The most important time is the prayer time.

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- Where were you living when you were 7 years old?
- What was your house like at age 7? What do you remember about your room?
- Who was a very special person in your life then?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- When have you been part of a group where you enjoyed true fellowship—where there was mutual love and understanding?
- John makes a point of saying that he has heard, seen and touched Jesus. What were your “beginnings” with Jesus like? In what ways have you “seen”, “heard” and “touched” him?
- There was a serious problem in John’s church: a group had split off and were teaching that Jesus did not really die. They also believed they were without sin. What could not be proclaimed if Jesus hadn’t died (v. 2)? Have you ever come close to losing your faith in Christ? What happened?
- What emotion will John experience when he makes clear the truth of Jesus (v. 4)?
- Who has been like the apostle John in your life—a person who has convinced you of Jesus’ love and cared about your spiritual growth?
- Why did you decide to join this Bible study group? What are you hoping to get out of this group?

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- What “season” are you experiencing in your spiritual life right now? Spring—life is beginning to bud? Winter—the days have been cold and dark? Fall—some days beautiful, some with a chill in the air?
- What would you like this group to discuss about the coming weeks together (consider study, prayer, shared leadership, outreach, confidentiality, accountability, etc.)? In order to get the most out of 1 John, what will you put into it?
- Who do you know who might like to join this group next week?
- How would you like this group to pray for you in the coming week?

Notes

1:1–4 John begins his letter with a prologue that is reminiscent of the prologue to his Gospel (John 1:1–18). Both prologues focus on the pre-existent Word of God who has been revealed to humanity. But there are also differences between the two. In the Gospel prologue, the emphasis is on the divine nature of the Word. In this prologue, the emphasis is on the *physical manifestation* of the Word of God. This difference is due to the difference in audiences. In his Gospel, John wrote to Jews who did not believe that God could reveal himself in the person of Jesus. But here, the secessionists presuppose that Jesus is the Son of God. Their problem is that they neglect his human side. This is why John emphasizes the fact that the pre-existent Word has been experienced by auditory, visual, and manual means. Although this prologue is only four verses long, it is a complex piece of writing. In Greek, this is a single sentence which is, according to one scholar, a “grammatical tangle” (Dodd). The structure has a distinct purpose—John focuses attention on the object which is proclaimed (Jesus Christ), rather than on the act of proclamation itself.

1:1 Although this document lacks the usual identification of sender and recipient (as well as the normal greeting and prayer), it is clear that this is not an anonymous tract written to a general audience. Scattered throughout the letter are abundant personal comments and specific references (e.g., 2:19). **which.** John begins with four clauses, each introduced by “which.” The first clause describes who the “Word of life” is. The next three describe how he was experienced. **from the beginning.** The initial clause makes the astonishing assertion that this “Word of life” was pre-existent (see John 1:1). Since only divine beings preexisted, John affirms Jesus’ deity. **heard/seen/touched.** However, John’s emphasis is on the human nature of Jesus. The next three clauses describe how his physical presence was experienced. Notice the progression: in the OT, men and women had *heard* God on many occasions; occasionally they had *seen* some aspect of God (see Ex. 3:1–6; 33:18–23); but no one had ever *touched* God. This was the final proof that the Word of life had indeed been “made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, KJV). In Greek courts, the testimony of two senses was required in order to verify that something occurred (Brown). John offers evidence from a third sense as well. **touched.** This word means literally “to feel after” or “to grope,” as a blind person might do. It also means “to examine closely” (Brooke). **Word of**

life. The message preached by the apostles and by Jesus himself concerned eternal life (i.e., spiritual life). This is one sense of the phrase “Word of life.” But Jesus not only preached this message. He *was* the message. This is the second sense of the phrase (see John 1:4; 11:25–26; 14:6).

1:2 This is a parenthesis in which John declares in unequivocal terms that *Jesus* is the Word he is talking about. **we.** The author is among those who knew Jesus personally. **testify.** This is a legal term describing what an eyewitness does while in court. Such a person makes a public declaration of what he or she has experienced firsthand. **the eternal life.** John focuses on what is so significant about Jesus: he is Life itself. God’s very life has appeared in the historical person of Jesus (see John 1:2).

1:3 we proclaim. This is the main verb of the opening sentence. It clarifies the intention of the prologue. John’s aim is to identify the nature of the apostolic proclamation, which is that Jesus is the incarnate God. **fellowship.** This word means literally, in Greek, “having in common.” It has the dual sense of *participation together* in shared activity or outlook, and *union together* because of this shared experience. John’s purpose is to bring others into participation and union with him and his colleagues, and thus into participation and union with the Father and the Son. **with the Father and with his Son.** Apparently the false teachers were saying that it was possible to have fellowship with God apart from Christ. John’s point is that fellowship with God is possible only through Jesus (2:23), because in him eternal life (i.e., God’s life) is manifested.

1:4 John identifies his second reason for writing. He wants his own joy to be completed. **joy.** This is the profound gladness or satisfaction that comes when one participates in the life of God. It is an important term for John. In this epistle he indicates that the joy which began with the experience of the resurrected Lord is brought to completion via the experience of this full-orbed fellowship between Father, Son, and the children of God. **complete.** Full, lacking nothing.

1 Fellowship & Forgiveness

1 John 1:1–10

Christians everywhere seem to be interested in fellowship. They gather in fellowship halls, attend fellowship dinners and participate in well-organized activities with fellow believers. But what really constitutes biblical fellowship? A covered dish supper? Coffee and doughnuts? Social events and activities? Perhaps more than any other passage of Scripture, these opening verses of 1 John establish the basis of true fellowship that is to be enjoyed and experienced by all Christians. More importantly, they enable us to understand how we can know we have fellowship with God.

1. What normally comes to your mind when you think of Christian fellowship?
2. Read 1 John 1:1–10. John begins this chapter by announcing an apostolic message. What is the content of that message (vv. 1–2)? |
3. What are John's reasons for announcing his message (vv. 3–4)?
4. In light of this apostolic message, what is the foundation of our fellowship as Christians?
5. John provides a test by which we can know if we have fellowship with God (vv. 5–10). What kind of test is it?
6. The basis for this test is God's character (v. 5). What specifically do *light* and *darkness* symbolize (vv. 5–7; see Jn 3:19–21)?
7. The first part of John's test concerns the way we live or “walk” (vv. 6–7). What is the relationship between our conduct and our claim to have fellowship with God?

Is John describing Christians who are either in or out of fellowship with God, or Christians and those who really do not know God at all? Explain.
8. The second part of John's test concerns our attitude toward sin (vv. 8–10). What does our denial or confession of sin reveal about the reality of our relationship with God?
9. Based on your study of this passage, what does it mean to have fellowship with God and each other?
10. Does John's test strengthen or weaken your assurance of fellowship with God? Explain.
11. How can we enjoy a greater fellowship with those who know the Father and the Son?

UNIT 2—Walking in the Light / 1 John 1:5–2:14

Scripture

Walking in the Light

⁵ *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But 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^a sin.*

⁸*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*

2 *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for^b the sins of the whole world.*

³*We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love^c is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. ⁷Dear 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. ⁸Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.*

[Scripture and questions continued on page 14]

^a7 Or every ^b2 Or He is the one who turns aside God’s wrath, taking away our sins, and not only ours but also ^c5 Or word, love for God

Group Questions

Every group meeting has three goals: **(1) To Begin** (15 minutes) to break the ice; **(2) Read Scripture and Discuss** (30 Minutes); and **(3) To Close and Pray** (15–30 Minutes). Try to keep on schedule. The most important time is the prayer time.

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- As a child, were you afraid of the dark? What “monsters” were in the dark that scared you?
- What game did you play as a child where you were blindfolded? What was the experience like?
- Growing up, who was the “realist” in your life—one who helped you understand “the way life really is”?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- What characteristics of light reflect who God is? Has God brought light to your life? In what way? Or do you more often feel like you’re “in the dark”?
- What false claims do John’s opponents make (vv. 1:6,8)? How do you feel about the consistency of your own life? Do you feel more as if you’re living the truth or living a lie? Why?
- What hope does John give when people fail to live in light of God’s love (1:9; 2:1–2)?
- When you know you’ve sinned, how long does it take for you to confess? What is God’s part and what is your part in the confession process?
- How can the command to love God and others (v. 2:7) be new and old at the same time? How is its truth seen in Jesus (think of examples from the Gospels)? Whom have you known as someone who models this behavior?
- What, then, are the two tests given in this passage for determining whether one really knows God (vv. 2:3,10)? How are you doing in each of these areas?
- What three things does John stress again in verses 2:12–13? Which one of these do you most need to hear this week?

Scripture (Continued)

⁹Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him^d to make him stumble. ¹¹But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

**¹²I write to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven
on account of his name.**

**¹³I write to you, fathers,
because you have known him who is
from the beginning.**

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

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

**¹⁴I write to you, fathers,
because you have known 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.**

Group Questions (Continued)

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- If you were to give a spiritual “weather report” on your life over the last six months and over the last week, what would it be: Dark and stormy? Bright and cloudless sky? Partly cloudy? Dull, slate-gray and overcast? Why?
- How do you feel about opening up to this group? How can they help you?
- Did you invite anyone to join the group?
- What would you like the group to remember in prayer for you this week?

Notes

1:5–2:2 John examines the barrier that prevents such fellowship (i.e., sin) and how to deal with it.

1:5 *God is light.* John's second great assertion about God (the first being that *God had come in the flesh*—vv. 1–3). In the Bible, "light" was connected on the intellectual level with truth, and on the moral level with purity.

1:6 *If we claim.* The first of three false claims that John will refute. He will measure the validity of each against the apostolic proclamation that God is light and in him is no darkness. ***to have fellowship ... yet walk in the darkness.*** It is claimed by the false teachers that it is possible to be in union with God and yet habitually sin. But if God is *light*, then by definition, those who walk in *darkness* cannot be part of him. This was a common error. It was felt that since the *body was insignificant, it did not matter what a person did.* The true essence of the person—the "spirit"—remained untouched and thus uncontaminated by sin.

1:7 *walk in the light.* The image here is of a person confidently striding forth, illuminated by the light of God's truth, in contrast to the person who stumbles around in darkness. ***purifies.*** If the first result of "walking in the light" is fellowship with one another, the second result is cleansing from sin. The verb tense indicates that this purification occurs not just once, but is a continuous process.

1:8 *If we claim to be without sin.* The second false claim: that they are sinless. It is one thing to deny that sin breaks fellowship with God (as in vv. 6–7). At least *then the existence of sin is admitted (even if its impact is denied);* but it is another thing to deny the fact of sin altogether.

1:9 *If we confess our sins.* After naming the problem, John states the antidote. Rather than denying their sinful natures, they need to admit their sin to God and so *gain forgiveness.* ***just.*** The granting of forgiveness is not merely an act of unanticipated mercy but a response of justice, since the conditions for forgiveness have been fulfilled as a result of the death of Christ.

1:10 *If we claim we have not sinned.* The third false claim: not only do they say that at the present moment they are without sin (v. 8), they actually claim never to have sinned! The false teachers might admit that sin does break fellowship with God (v. 6) and that all people have an inborn sinful nature (v. 8), but they would still deny that they, in fact, have ever actually sinned. ***we make him out to be a liar.*** By claiming sinlessness they are, in essence, saying that God is lying about human nature and about his claim to forgive people.

2:1 *anybody does sin.* While urging sinlessness as a goal to strive for, John knows that in this present life this cannot be achieved. So the issue then is how to deal with sin. The answer is found in the triple role of Jesus as the *advocate, the righteous one, and the atoning sacrifice.* ***one who speaks ... in our defense.*** Since people have no basis on which to ask for forgiveness, Jesus does so on their behalf. ***Righteous One.*** Jesus is righteous, both in the sense of being an example to follow and, especially, in the sense of not being contaminated by personal sin.

2:2 *the atoning sacrifice.* Jesus, the advocate, bases his plea (that their sin should be forgiven) on the fact of his death to pay for their sin. Such a sacrifice is effective because he himself was without sin, and so could take the place of another.

2:3–11 John now addresses his own flock, exhorting them to follow God's commands. He identifies two "tests" by which people can be certain they actually know God: the test of obedience and the test of love. Those who truly know God live in his way and love as Jesus loved.

2:3 *have come to know him.* Previously John has spoken about *having fellowship with God* (see 1:3,6,7). Now he speaks about the parallel concept, that of *knowing God* (see 2:4,13,14; 3:6,16; 4:16). The verb tense indicates that he is thinking about a past experience ("we have come to know him"). ***if we obey his commands.*** The first test as to whether a person knows God, therefore, is moral in nature: does that person keep God's commands? To know God is to live in his way. The false teachers claim to know God but, as John will show, they live in a way that belies that claim.

[Notes continued on page 15]

Notes (Continued)

2:4 does not do. The emphasis here is on sins of omission (not doing), in contrast to 1:6, where the emphasis is on sins of commission (walking in darkness).

2:6 John introduces the idea of the "imitation of Christ." Christians are habitually to live the way Jesus lived. He is their model. As he walked, so should they walk. **live in him.** The third phrase which John uses to describe union with God. (In 1:3 he used the phrase "having fellowship with God," and in 2:3 he spoke about "knowing God.")

2:7–11 If the first test of whether one is actually a Christian is moral in nature (Do you obey God?), then the second test (given here) is relational in orientation (Do you love others?).

2:7–8 This is not a new command (v. 7), in that it is found in the OT (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5) and taught by Jesus (Mark 12:28–31). It is *new* (v. 8) in the sense that Jesus tied together two previously separate commands (that of loving God and loving others) and broadened their application (Christians are to love everyone, not just those in their own group).

2:9–10 light/love. John here links sets of contrasting images: light and darkness with love and hate. Those who are in the light, love. Those who are in the darkness, hate. In other words, enlightenment goes hand in hand with active care for others.

2:11 hates. "Hate" is not an emotional response to others; it is the lack of loving deeds done on their behalf.

2:12 children. Some scholars feel that John is addressing the whole community by means of this term. **have been forgiven.** The verb tense indicates that John is thinking of the forgiveness that comes at the time of conversion, whereas in 1:9 his concern was with ongoing forgiveness for subsequent sins based on the confession of sins.

2:13 fathers. The spiritually mature in the congregation. **young men.** To be a Christian does not merely entail the enjoyment of sins forgiven and a warm relationship with God. It is also a vigorous battle against evil. **overcome.** In the same way that Christ overcame Satan via his death and resurrection, so too Christians are to overcome the evil one.

2:14 word of God. This is the source of this overcoming power. The "young men" know God's will and have lived in conformity to it. **lives in you.** The word of God is meant not only to be understood, but it is also intended to be incorporated into a person's very being.

2 Talking & Walking the Truth

1 John 2:1–11

Purpose: To realize that we must look beyond what we say to what we do in order to be certain about the reality of our faith.

From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, he emphasized that it is not what we profess but what we *possess* that counts for eternity. In his first major message he declared, "By their fruit you will recognize them." He then went on to teach, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:20–21).

In the same way, St. John emphasizes that our claim to know Jesus must be backed by our conduct; our talk must be matched by our walk. Both are necessary if we are to be certain about the reality of our faith.

1. When people we know say one thing yet do another, which usually tells the truth about them? Why?
2. Read 1 John 2:1–11. Although St. John does not want us to sin, he knows that we sometimes do (vv. 1–2). How does the realization that Jesus speaks "in our defense" provide comfort and assurance when you sin?
3. How does the concept of *atonement sacrifice* (v. 2) help us understand the way Jesus "speaks" for us?
4. According to St. John, how can we tell whether we truly know Christ or merely claim to know him (vv. 3–6)?

What other conclusions does St. John make about those who obey or disobey Christ's commands?

5. Practically speaking, what does it mean to "walk as Jesus did" (v. 6)?
6. In verses 7–11, St. John focuses on one of the commands. How can this command be both old and new (vv. 7–8)?
7. Why would love for our brother rather than love for God serve as a test of being in the light (vv. 9–11)?
8. Compare St. John's statements about love and hate (vv. 9–11) with similar ones made later in the epistle (3:10, 14–15). How do these verses clarify the two types of people St. John is contrasting?
9. In view of the overall context of this passage, what does it mean to live in the light (v. 10)?
To live in Christ (v. 6)?

UNIT 3—Do Not Love the World / Warning Against Antichrists / 1 John 2:15–27

Scripture

Do Not Love the World

15Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Warning Against Antichrists

18Dear 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. 19They 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.

20But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.^a 21I 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. 22Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. 23No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

24See 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. 25And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.

26I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. 27As 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.

^a20 Some manuscripts and you know all things

Group Questions

Every group meeting has three goals: (1) **To Begin** (15 minutes) to break the ice; (2) **Read Scripture and Discuss** (30 Minutes); and (3) **To Close and Pray** (15–30 Minutes). Try to keep on schedule. The most important time is the prayer time.

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- What kind of disobedience do you remember as being the most tempting for you as a child? Lying? Hitting? Saying bad words?
- What was your parents' most common form of punishment when you disobeyed?
- Are you more likely today to err on the side of doing what you shouldn't or not doing what you should?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- What does John mean by "the world" (vv. 15–16)? Is it wrong to love the outdoors, or your pet? Are all human desires contrary to God's will? Why?
- In what areas of your life does love for the world compete with love for God: In your use of money? Time? Priorities? Relationships? Ambitions?
- What is the anointing in verse 20? How does this anointing help a person to know and remain in the truth (vv. 20,24)? How do you sense the Holy Spirit's presence in your life? How do you need a greater sense of his presence?
- In what way are the antichrists in this passage foreshadowing the Antichrist to come? What danger do they pose to the church?
- What criteria can you use to distinguish between: (a) new insights into Christian truths that the Holy Spirit brings to light, and (b) new teachings that undermine the Christian faith?
- Why are there only two options in verse 23?
- What would you say to a friend who is excited about Jesus, but doesn't want to go to church? He claims there is hypocrisy in the church, and besides, he is filled with the Spirit and doesn't need other teachers. He just wants to be out there spreading the Gospel.

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the world and 10 being God, where has your focus been over the last week? What has influenced your focus?
- How can this group support you in seeking the will of God rather than the desires of the world?
- What prayer requests would you like to share?

Notes

2:15–17 John warns his readers about an attitude that could bring them down, should they feel immune to the power of evil. The attitude they are to avoid is “love of the world.” John bases his command on two factors: the incompatibility of love for God with love for the world (vv. 15–16), and the transience of worldly desires compared to the eternal life of those who do God’s will (v. 17). John is attacking an attitude (“love of the world”). He is not attacking “things” *per se*, much less people.

2:15 love. The love which John speaks about is the act of caring, expressed by what a person does. As such, this “love” is appropriately directed toward God (v. 5) and toward others (v. 10), but not toward the pleasures of the world. **world.** That which is alienated from God and is, in fact, contrary to who God is. It refers to pagan culture which has abandoned God.

2:16 everything. Since God created the world (John 1:3), John cannot mean that everything in the world is automatically evil. In this verse, it is evident that what he had in mind are those aspects of the world which stand in opposition to God’s ways. **cravings.** That part of human nature which demands gratification. **lust of the eyes.** Greed which is aroused by sight. A person sees something and wants it. **boasting.** Pride in one’s possessions; an attitude of arrogance because one has acquired so much.

2:18–27 John returns to the question of distinguishing between those who are true Christians and those who are counterfeit. He adds a third test: the true Christian remains firmly committed to the truth of God. This is the doctrinal test (Stott).

2:18 antichrist. The incarnation of evil and Satan—just as Christ was the incarnation of good and God. **antichrists.** John notes that the Antichrist’s coming was not some future threat. Even at that moment, the “spirit of the antichrist” (see 4:3) was loose in the world and active in those who deny Christ and his teachings (see v. 22).

2:19 they went out from us. John now identifies those who are imbued with the spirit of the Antichrist. It is none other than the successionists (false teachers) who left the church and seek to win over their former friends and colleagues to their point of view (see v. 26). **none of them belonged to us.** John distinguishes between the visible church (which consists of those who participate in church activities) and the

invisible church (those who also belong to Christ). The two groups are not necessarily the same.

2:20 an anointing. Just as Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18), so too is the believer. The Holy Spirit is thus the one that guides the Christian into all truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

2:21 John does not offer any “new truth” in this epistle. His aim is to reassure them (in the face of the claims being made by the successionists) that they already have the truth. **no lie comes from the truth.** John’s reasoning is this: true Christians have the Holy Spirit and therefore know the truth (v. 20). Those who know the truth do not lie. Therefore, the implication is that those who are lying (by teaching false doctrine) do not know the truth because they do not have the Holy Spirit, and thus they are not true Christians.

2:22 John now reveals the major lie in the successionists’ false teaching: they deny that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.

2:23 denies/acknowledges. These are the only two options when it comes to Jesus. The idea here is of public confession and public denial.

2:24 remain. John’s point is that when they remain in the truth they will remain in fellowship with God. To “remain” expresses a continuing relationship. The message must continue to be present and active in the lives of those who have heard it. They must continually call it to mind and let it affect their lives (Marshall).

2:27 remains in you. In verse 24, the stress was on the activity of Christians to ensure that they remained faithful to the Word of God. Here the complementary truth is expressed: by God’s grace, Christians remain in this teaching. Human response and divine activity are both part of the Christian life. **teach.** John is not saying that after being anointed with the Holy Spirit, Christians need no more instruction. John is, in fact, instructing them via this letter! What they do not need is instruction by the false teachers. **all things.** This is not “everything that can be known,” but rather “all that you need to know.”

3 Encouragement & Warning

1 John 2:12–17

Purpose: To encourage us in view of our spiritual attainments and to warn us in view of our spiritual enemies.

Pilgrim's Progress is the classic tale of Christian's escape from the City of Destruction to the Heavenly City. It is true to experience because all of us can identify with his encounters along the way. In the Valley of Humiliation he enters into combat with Apollyon, his fiercest foe. At the Hill of Difficulty he meets Adam-the-First and his three daughters: the Lust-of-the-Flesh, the Lust-of-the-Eyes and the Pride-of-Life. In the town of Folly he narrowly escapes its greatest attraction, Vanity Fair.

These encounters are John Bunyan's well-known descriptions of the threefold arena of all Christian conflict—the world, the flesh and the devil. They are the same three foes which appear here in 1 John. In a context of encouragement and warning, the apostle tells us something of the evil one, the enticement of the world and the sinful desires of the flesh.

1. How far did you progress as a Christian before you became aware of these three foes? Explain.
2. Read 1 John 2:12–17. Why would John want to give a word of encouragement at this point in his letter?
Why a word of warning?
3. Who is represented by the three groups being addressed (vv. 12–14)?
How are you encouraged by what John says to each group?
4. What is the source of our victory over the evil one (vv. 13–14)?

On a daily basis, how can that truth help us overcome his tactics and schemes?
5. Compare John's warning against worldliness (vv. 15–17) with what he says about the world elsewhere (2:2; 3:13; 4:4–5; 5:4–5, 19). What is the meaning of the word *world* here?
6. Why can there be no middle ground between our love for God and love for the world (vv. 15–17)?
7. How would you explain each of the three worldly desires John mentions in verse 16?
In what ways do these desires manifest themselves today?
8. What are the reasons why we are to resist such temptations (vv. 15–17)?
9. How does the realization that the world is passing away (v. 17) lessen its appeal in your life?
10. How does this passage help us gain a better understanding of our spiritual battle?

4 How Important Is Theology?

1 John 2:18–27

There is an increasingly popular mindset within the church today which seeks to divorce Christian teaching from Christian living. “We don't want more theology,” we are told, “just more about Jesus.” But how can we learn more about Jesus apart from a proper understanding of who he is and what he has accomplished? The fact is, there is nothing more basic to Christianity than the person and work of Christ. Apart from understanding Christ, there can be no real Christian living. That is why St. John goes to great lengths to protect his “dear children” from false views about Christ and to instruct them in the truth. Right thinking leads to right living.

1. What false views about Jesus Christ are popular today?
2. Read 1 John 2:18–27. What characteristics of false teachers and their teaching is St. John exposing in these verses?
3. All the New Testament authors viewed the first coming of Christ as the event which marked the beginning of the end—“the last hour.” What are some of the signs of the last hour (vv. 18–19)?
4. What does St. John tell us about the relationship between our presence in the church and our perseverance in the faith (v. 19)?
5. Truth is the most effective defense against an onslaught of error. What is the “anointing” that gives us such knowledge of the truth (vv. 20–21; also v. 27)?
6. To deny that “Jesus is the Christ” (v. 22) is to deny that the man Jesus is the eternal, divine Christ—the God-Man. Why is St. John so harsh toward those who believe and teach such a view (vv. 22–23)?
7. Why is remaining in the truth so important in the Christian life (vv. 24–25)?
8. How do verses 18–27 serve to fulfill St. John's purpose for writing this portion of his letter (v. 26)?
9. What can we learn from his approach that will help us not to be led astray by false teaching?
10. Obviously St. John is not suggesting that all human teachers are unnecessary (v. 27), or else he would not have written this epistle. In light of the problem he is addressing, what then is he saying?
11. How does his instruction (v. 27) help us understand what it means to remain in Christ?
12. What does this passage teach us about the Holy Spirit's ministry of *preserving* us from error?
What does it teach about our responsibility of *persevering* in the truth?

UNIT 4—Children of God / 1 John 2:28–3:10

Scripture

Children of God

²⁸And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

²⁹If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

3 **How great is the 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. ²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears,^a we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**

³Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. ⁴Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

⁷Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸He 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. ⁹No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰This 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 a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

^a2 Or when it is made known

Group Questions

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- Who would motivate you to clean your house (or your room)? The President? Your mother-in-law? An old friend?
- Who is the “neat freak” in your family? Are you more of a “neat freak” or a “messie”?
- Whom have you respected because of his or her clean living and high values? What stands out to you about this person?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- What kind of feeling would you have if Jesus returned right now? Excited? Relieved? Ashamed?
- What tell-tale attitudes and actions characterize a person “born of God” (2:29; 3:1b,3,6,7,10)? As you get older, do you find it easier or harder to resist sinful desires? Why?
- What do verses 3:1–3 imply about God? What does this mean for our self-image? How have you experienced God’s lavish love this week?
- How do verses 6 and 10 fit with 1:8? Are Christians sinless? Does John mean that Christians do not sin: At all? Habitually? Deliberately? Inadvertently? Or is he providing a gauge to evaluate teachers? Why do you think so?
- When have you experienced spiritual warfare? How did you deal with it? How can a Christian recognize and deal with our society’s “whatever is right for you” attitude (moral relativism)?
- John says that the main source of tension between the world and Christians is conduct (or sin). Despite this tension, what must go hand-in-hand with obedience for a Christian (v. 10)? When has it recently been difficult for you to love?

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- How clearly has your life mirrored God this week? Like a clear mountain lake? Like a rushing stream with occasional pools? Like pounding waves—no much space for God to be seen? Why?
- What would you like to work on this week in your relationship with God?
- How can this group pray for you?

Notes

2:28–3:3 In the previous unit (2:18–27), John urged his readers to resist the proselytizing of the dissenters and to remain in Christ. In these verses he continues to urge his readers to remain in Christ, but now the reason he gives has to do with the second coming of Christ. If they remain in Christ, when they meet the Lord at the Second Coming they will not be ashamed. Instead, they will be confident before the Lord (2:28). Furthermore, they know that then they will see Christ as he is and be made like him (3:2). The Second Coming is thus a source of great hope for the Christian and an encouragement to holy living.

2:28 confident and unashamed. On the Day of Judgment those who have rejected Christ will feel a sense of unworthiness and shame in the presence of his holiness (see Isa. 6:5), and because of their open disgrace at having rejected Christ. In contrast, Christians will be able boldly to approach the royal presence because they have lived their lives in union with Christ. **his coming.** The Greek word *parousia* was used in secular literature to describe the visit of a ruler to a particular region of his kingdom. It carried with it the idea of great rejoicing and celebration.

2:29 everyone who does what is right. One consequence of spiritual rebirth is right living. It is, in fact, a sign of rebirth as the child begins to display the characteristics of his or her father. **born of him.** Thus far John has described Christians as those who “have fellowship with the Father and with his Son” (1:3), as those who “know God” (2:3,4,13,14), as those who are “in Christ” (2:5,6), as those who are “in the light” (2:9,10), and as those who “abide” in the Father and the Son (2:24,27,28). Now he offers yet another description of what it means to be a Christian. Christians are those who experience “spiritual rebirth.” He thus defines the relationship between the believer and God by means of the analogy of the relationship between a child and a father. (See also 1 Peter 1:3,23; Titus 3:5.)

3:1 The reason the world does not know us. If the world knew God, it would recognize his children. But in fact this is not the case. The world hates God and so hates his children (see John 15:18–25). Such hostility is another sign that these believers are indeed his children.

3:3 Christians purify themselves in anticipation of Christ’s return. **this hope.** Namely, that one day Christ will appear again (at which time they will see him as

he really is and be changed, so as to become like him). **pure.** This is a common word in the Bible denoting the outward purity required of those persons or objects involved in temple worship. In the usage here it speaks of the moral purity (freedom from sinning) that is required of Christians. Such purification is necessary for those who are in union with Christ. The secessionists, in contrast, were not much concerned about sin (1:5–2:2).

3:5 John gives another reason for not sinning. The very purpose for Jesus to come in the first place was to take away sin. So it is obvious that Jesus stands over against sin. Furthermore, there was no sin in Jesus’ life. The implication is that those who are in union with Christ will reflect this same abhorrence of sin. **in him is no sin.** John asserts that Jesus was sinless. His testimony is all the more powerful, since this is not his main point. This is merely an “aside.” John is not trying to prove anything. He is simply stating what he knows to be true. And John was in a position to know whether Jesus was actually without sin because he lived with Jesus for some three years. Those who live with us know us best. Yet John says—after having seen Jesus in a variety of situations over a three-year period—that Jesus is *without sin*.

3:6 John appears to be saying here (and in vv. 8–10) that a Christian *cannot* sin. Yet in other passages in this letter, he points out that Christians can and do sin (e.g. 1:8,10; 2:1; 5:16). Some scholars feel that what John has in mind here is willful and deliberate sin (as against involuntary error). Other scholars stress the tense of the verb that John uses: a Christian does not *keep* on sinning. In other words, Christians do not habitually sin. Still other scholars feel that what John does here is to point out the ideal. This is what would happen if a Christian abided constantly in Christ.

3:10 John here spells out in clear, unequivocal terms the moral test, although he casts it in *negative* terms: a person “who does not do right is not a child of God.”

5

Like Father, Like Son

1 John 2:28–3:10

1. Read 1 John 2:28–3:10. Based on John's emphasis at the beginning and the end of the passage (2:28–29; 3:9–10), what test is he using to validate a person's claim of being born again?
2. Why is our continuance in Christ the basis of our confidence at his coming (v. 28)?
3. Throughout this passage John teaches that God's children resemble their Father. In what ways does he reinforce this principle (2:29–3:10)?
4. How does the realization that we are God's children help us grasp the greatness of his love for us (3:1)?
5. How does the hope of Christ's appearing (vv. 2–3) serve as a purifying influence in your life?
6. How does John's definition of sin (v. 4) compare with some of the viewpoints people have today?
7. Although Christians can and do sin, how does knowing Christ change our relationship to sin (v. 6)?

What do you think John means by “keeps on sinning” and “continues to sin” (v. 6)?

8. What specifically is the deception John warns against in this passage (v. 7)?

UNIT 5—Love One Another / 1 John 3:11–24

Scripture

Love One Another

11This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12Do 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. 13Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. 14We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

16This 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. 17If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 19This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 20whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

21Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. 23And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 24Those who obey his commands live 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.

Group Questions

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- Who was your first “true love” growing up?
- What has been your most romantic moment?
- What one person has taught you a lot about Christian love? How?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- What do you think Christians in the first century were encountering from the non-Christian world? From each other?
- What is the heart of John's message?
- Read, or recall, the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis 4:1–8. Why does John use the story in this passage? Where do you see “Cain-like” attitudes in yourself? Do you ever resemble the Peanuts character who said, “I love mankind; it's people I can't stand”?
- What is John's definition of love (vv. 16–18)? How does this definition differ from contemporary definitions of love? From some of your own previously held definitions? Who is the supreme example of love? Why?
- What are we assured of through loving others (vv. 14, 19–20, 24)?
- How would you like to consciously practice “Jesus-like” love this week? With your family? A friend? At church? In political or social issues? A difficult person? A person in need?
- How are answered prayers and obedience connected (vv. 18–22)? Will obedience affect what we pray for? How have you seen this to be true in your life? What area of your life do you need to examine regarding the link between obedience and the thing you are praying for?

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- How did you receive Christ-like love during the past week? How will you need it in the coming week?
- How has this group shown the love of Christ to you?
- What prayer needs would you like to share?

Notes

3:11–24 In part one of this section (vv.11–18), John states the second test: true Christians love one another. Part two (vv. 19–24) is a parenthesis in which he comments on assurance and on obedience, both in the context of prayer.

3:11 *This is the message.* In 1:5 John used this phrase to introduce the great truth that God is light. Here he uses this phrase to introduce a second basic insight: love is at the center of the Christian life.

3:12 *Cain.* Cain was a farmer, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. God was pleased with his brother Abel's offering, but not with his (Gen. 4:3-4). ***belonged to the evil one.*** The killing of one's brother is a specific example of the evil that Satan inspires (3:8). ***why did he murder him?*** Cain knew that unlike Abel's gift, his offering did not arise from the desire to do right. Therefore, because of his anger, Cain slew Abel (Gen. 4:6–7).

3:14 *from death to life.* The implication is that all people start out "dead." Satan is their father. They live in his realm. But by means of the rebirth process (2:29–3:2), it is possible to pass into the kingdom of life and become a child of God. ***we know ... because we love.*** Love is evidence that one possesses eternal life.

3:16–17 John offers a positive example of love: Jesus' sacrificial love for the human race. Cain's act sprang from hatred and *took* the life of another, while Jesus' act sprang from love and he gave his own life for others.

3:16 *This is how we know what love is.* Love is defined not by means of an intellectual proposition, but by a practical example. Jesus demonstrated love by giving his life for others.

3:17 While only a few Christians will be called upon to make the supreme sacrifice of their lives, *all* Christians can and must constantly share their possessions in order to relieve the material suffering that abounds in this world. ***brother.*** John asks his readers to consider the needs of a particular individual ("brother" is singular). "Loving everyone in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular" (Lewis). ***pity.*** Such self-giving love is not without emotion, even though it is primarily an action. John calls for genuine concern in the face of the plight of others. ***how can the love of God be in him?*** "As life does

not dwell in the murderer (v.15), love does not dwell in the miser" (Stott).

3:20 *whenever.* It is not an unusual experience for the conscience of a Christian to be troubled. ***he knows everything.*** The human conscience is not infallible, but God is. The implication is that God—who knows a person's innermost secrets—will be more merciful than the heart of that person.

3:22 Once again, John states a truth in a stark, unqualified way: if we ask, we will receive. Later, however (in 5:13), he will add the stipulation that people must ask "according to [God's] will." ***obey.*** Obedience is not the cause of answered prayer; it is the condition that motivates Christians to pray. Obedience is the evidence that they are moving in accordance with God's will, that they are in union with him, and that they will want to pray.

3:23–24 In these verses John shows the interconnection between obedience (the moral test), love (the social test), and belief (the doctrinal test), and how these relate to the question of union with God.

3:23 *to believe ... and to love.* John makes explicit what has previously been implicit: that at the core of Christianity there are two concerns—truth and love. In 1:5 he pointed out that the apostolic message is: God is *light*. In 3:11 he adds that the apostolic message is also: *love one another*. John clarifies that Christianity is not just a set of theological truths (though it is that). It is also a life of active self-giving to others. Neither belief nor love is sufficient without the other. These two themes will dominate the rest of his letter.

3:24 *those who obey his commands live in him.* Obedience and union are connected. Obedience to God's command to believe and love brings union with Christ. The outward, objective side of the Christian life (which is active love for others in obedience to the command of God) is connected to the inner, subjective experience of being in union with God. ***he in them.*** The Christian dwells in God; God dwells in the Christian. ***how we know.*** The Holy Spirit is the source of the believer's assurance that God does live in them (see 4:13).

6 Blessed Assurance

1 John 3:11–24

1. Read 1 John 3:11–24. St. John begins this passage by talking about love and hate. How do Cain and Able illustrate the two basic categories of humanity (vv. 11–15)?
2. Why is Christ's death on the cross the supreme example of love (v. 16)?
3. In verse 17 St. John mentions one specific way we can follow Christ's example. How have you and those in your church sought to love those with material needs?

In what other practical ways might we “lay down our lives” for each other?

4. How can St. John's assurances in verses 19–20 help us deal with times of doubt?
5. Why would our obedience to God's commands affect our confidence in prayer (vv. 21–22)?
6. Why do you think St. John reduces the commandments to a single command to be obeyed (v. 23)?
7. Both outwardly and inwardly, how can we know Christ lives in us (v. 24)?

Why are both types of assurance important?

8. What specifically is the deception John warns against in this passage (v. 7)?

UNIT 6—Test the Spirits / 1 John 4:1–6

Scripture

Test the Spirits

4 *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. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but 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.*

⁴You, 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. ⁵They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We 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^a of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

Group Questions

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- How did (do) you study for tests in school? Crave the night before? Pace yourself? Skim your notes? How did (do) you usually perform?
- What test can you remember causing you the most stress? A school exam? SAT? Driver's test? Performance test at work?
- How do you stay informed on current events? How confident are you of the accuracy of the sources you use?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- What does John command in verse 1? Why? What else has he said about these false prophets (see 2:18–19)?
- How can a Christian distinguish a true prophet from a false one (see also 2:20–23)? What affirmation does the true prophet make?
- What do you believe about Jesus' nature? What difference does it make whether he was truly divine or not? Truly human or not?
- What "power" equips you to overcome, or stand against, false prophets? Why do people from Christian backgrounds get involved with cults? What helps you to find your way between being closed-minded to new theological insights, and being so open-minded that you lose your foundation?

CASE HISTORY: A college freshman returns from his first year at college with an obviously heightened awareness of spirituality. He has had contact with a number of Christian, Eastern and "New Age" groups and is attracted by the sincerity and depth of commitment he sees in each. However, he is bothered by how the Christians reject the others' teachings whereas the others absorb Christian teaching into their own. What do you say when he asks you what you think?

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- How has this group helped you to work through some of your spiritual struggles or questions?
- How has God been moving in your life to help you know him better?
- What would you like this group to remember as they pray for you this week?

Notes

4:1–6 In the final verse of the previous unit, John describes how Christians can know that God lives in them. They know this because the Holy Spirit bears inner witness to this fact (3:24). But the problem is that the secessionists make this same claim! They say that God's spirit speaks to them too. In fact, such private revelations are the source of their new doctrine. So, how can one distinguish between spirits? What is the difference between God's Spirit and false spirits? Is there an objective basis on which to accept or reject subjective claims? The answer relates to doctrine. That spirit which acknowledges that Jesus the Messiah came in the flesh is a spirit from God. Likewise, the opposite is true. Those spirits that do not acknowledge Jesus in this way are not from God (see also 2:20–23). Thus in this unit John expands on the doctrinal test—the third way by which to distinguish between true and false Christianity. There are two parts to this test. The first question is: to which spirit does one listen? Unless that spirit acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah come in the flesh, it is not of God (v. 2). The second question is: are you in submission to apostolic doctrine? Unless individuals acknowledge the truth of the Gospel (as taught from the beginning by apostles such as John), they are not following “the Spirit of truth” (v. 6).

4:1 do not believe every spirit. Having just claimed that Christians know God lives in them because the Holy Spirit bears witness to this fact, John hastens to qualify what he means. Not everything a spirit says is automatically of God. In fact, it is dangerous to accept uncritically everything that is said “in the name of God.” Not everyone claiming inner revelation is hearing God's voice! **test.** The test by which to distinguish between spirits that John suggests is doctrinal in nature. It has to do with who Jesus is. False spirits will not acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth (a fully human man) is the incarnate Christ (the divine Son of God). Notice that the focus of this test is upon the *spirit* who is the source of the prophecy—not upon what is said. In other words, true prophecy is not distinguished from false prophecy by the content of the prophecy itself. The question is: is the source of this prophecy divine or diabolical? (See also 1 Cor. 12:1–3; 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19–22.) **spirits.** The issue is not whether supernatural spirits exist and actually inspire prophecy. This was assumed to be the case by almost everyone in the first century (see, for example, Mark 1:21–28,32–34). **prophets.** Prophets are those men and women who claim to speak on God's behalf. They allow the Holy Spirit—or another spirit—to speak

through them. John does not deny the reality or the value of prophecy. He simply warns against false prophets, much as Jesus did (see Matt. 7:15; Mark 13:22–23).

4:2 To deny that Jesus, the Messiah, was truly human is incompatible with divine inspiration. Prophets who will not affirm this confession of faith are not of God. **acknowledges.** What John has in mind is not mere recognition of who Jesus is—since even the demons know him (Mark 1:24). Rather, what is called for is an open, positive, public declaration of faith in Jesus. **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.** This is the second of three places in this epistle in which John touches upon how the secessionists view the person of Jesus. In 2:22–23, John says that they deny that Jesus is the Christ (i.e., that he is the Messiah). Here he asserts that they deny that Jesus, the Messiah, came in the flesh. In 5:6 (the third and final place where he deals with the question of Jesus' nature), John gets to the heart of the matter. What the secessionists are denying is that Jesus—as the Messiah—could have died.

4:4–6 John turns from his focus on prophets (true and false) to a consideration of those who follow each type of prophet. In verse 4 he directs his word to “you” (the Christians in Ephesus), in verse 5 he talks about “them” and “they” (the secessionists), while in verse 6 he talks about “we” (the apostles, of whom John is a representative).

4:4 overcome. The Christians to whom John writes have successfully resisted overtures by false prophets (the secessionists) to get them to believe new doctrines. They have not been deceived. **the one who is in you.** It is not by means of their own unaided strength that they are able to resist these false prophets. The source of their power is the Spirit of God who resides in them.

4:6 In contrast to the “world” (which stands in opposition to God, God's truth, and God's people), there is the church (which both believes God's truth and seeks to live it out). **recognize.** Those who respond positively to the apostolic preaching are those who are led by the Spirit of truth.

UNIT 7—God’s Love and Ours / 1 John 4:7–21

Scripture

God’s Love and Ours

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son^a into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for^b our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸There 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.

¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

^a9 Or his only begotten Son ^b10 Or as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away

Group Questions

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- What personality trait or strength did you get from your father? Your mother?
- What family event or experience stands out as an example of your family at their closest?
- How would you finish this sentence, “Love is like ...”?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- Is the love discussed in this passage an action or a feeling? Why? What does this tell you about love?
- What is the source of human love? How can God’s love be expressed through humans? In our motives? Our actions? Why is it a lie to say you love God but do not show that you love your “brother”?
- From verses 8–15, what do you learn about the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit? About their relationship to us?
- How does the message that God’s love drives out fear (v. 18) fit with the teaching that God is light (1:5)? In your life, when has “love” held too much fear? When has God’s love cast out fear?
- If you want to do a better job of loving others, how should you go about it? What is the only way to improve (see vv. 15–16)?
- How do you want to love sacrificially this week? At home? At school? At work? In a difficult relationship? In how you plan your time? Your budget?

CASE HISTORY: Jim has tried, but he simply cannot get along with his 16-year-old son, Al. Jim is a task-oriented, success-minded driver. He is hard on himself. He is hard on his son. Al, by temperament, is just the opposite. His room is a disaster. His school work is never done on time, and he won’t go out and get a job. Jim is at his wit’s end. ADULTS: What advice would you give Jim? YOUTH: What advice would you give Al?

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- Next week will be the last session in your study of 1 John. How has God spoken to you most clearly through this study and time together?
- What “serendipity” (unexpected blessing) have you received as a result of your time in this study?
- How would the group like to celebrate when the study is completed? A party? Dinner together?
- How has God moved in your life because of the prayers of others in this group? How can the group pray for you this week?

Notes

4:7 love one another. John will use this phrase three times in the next five verses (vv. 7,11,12). Each time, however, he uses it in a slightly different way. Here he urges his readers to love others because love originates in God. **everyone who loves.** Since “love comes from God,” all acts of love are reflections of God’s nature.

4:8 whoever does not love does not know God. To claim to be a Christian without living a life of love “is like claiming to be intimate with a foreigner whose language we cannot speak, or to have been born of parents whom we do not in any way resemble” (Stott). **God is love.** This is the second great assertion that John makes in this epistle about the nature of God. (His first assertion is that God is light.)

4:10 Love is initiated by God. Love is his posture toward the human race, and this love is given substance by the incarnation of his Son. It is not the other way around. People do not reach out to God with warm feelings or acts of devotion and thereby trigger his love for them. God is the primal lover. It is his action that draws out their response. Love begins with God. **an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** By this phrase John describes the saving work that Jesus did on behalf of the human race. The issue was sin. All had sinned. And sin had blocked fellowship with God. (A God who is light, by definition, can have no fellowship with darkness.) Human beings were unable to do anything to rectify their own situation. On the contrary, as sin did its corrupting work, they were drawn further and further away from God. Thus they needed help. They needed someone to take away their sin and so open up the way back to fellowship with God. This is what Jesus did. He came to earth as a man. He lived a perfect life. Because he had no sin of his own, it was possible for him to stand in the place of another and suffer the consequences of that person’s sin. Because he was divine, it was possible for him to bear the sin of not just one other person but of all persons. So when Jesus died, it was not for his own sin, but for the sins of the world. He became “the atoning sacrifice for our sin.” The idea of atonement is tied up with the Old Testament concept of substitution and sacrifice. In the Old Testament, sin was dealt with when a person symbolically placed his sins on an animal that he had brought to the temple. This animal had to be perfect—without spot or blemish. It was then sacrificed in place of the sinful (imperfect) person. Such substitutionary sacrifices were a picture of what Jesus would one day do once for all men and women.

4:11 love one another. This is the second time John uses this phrase. The basis for his exhortation this time is the demonstrated fact that “God so loved us.” Jesus’ sacrificial death on behalf of the human race assures people that God loves them, and thus releases in them the ability to love others. Because they are loved they can love.

4:12 love one another. In the third use of this phrase, John states that although God cannot be seen directly, his life can be experienced by people as they love one another. Since God is love, they know him when they love. **his love is made complete.** “When we love others, God’s love for us has reached its full effect in creating the same kind of love as his in us” (Marshall).

4:13–16 John first elaborates on the phrase “God lives in us” (vv. 13–16), and then on the phrase “his love is made complete in us” (vv. 17–21)—both taken from verse 12.

4:18 no fear in love. The reason for the confidence believers will have on the day of judgment is that they know God to be their father in whose love they have dwelt. People cannot love and fear at the same moment; i.e., it is impossible to approach God with a heart filled both with servile fear and with an overflowing sense of his love for them and their love for him. The love casts out the fear. **fear has to do with punishment.** This is the root of the fear: they think God is going to punish them. They forget that they are his forgiven children.

4:19 The love believers exhibit is a response to the prior love of God for them. Love begets love.

4:20 Love for God is not merely warm, inner feelings. Love is not love unless it finds concrete expression via active caring for others. Furthermore, since it is far easier to love a visible person than to love the invisible God, to claim success in the harder task (loving God) while failing in the easier task (loving others) is an absurd and hopeless contradiction.

UNIT 8—Faith in the Son of God/Concluding Remarks / 1 John 5:1–21

Scripture

Faith in the Son of God

5 *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.*

²*This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

⁶*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. ⁷For there are three that testify: ⁸the^a Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

Group Questions

TO BEGIN / 15 Minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

- In the Aesop's Fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, are you more like the steady, persistent tortoise, or the fast-starting, easily distracted hare? How so?
- Did you say a bedtime prayer as a child? What kind of prayer? Did Mom or Dad join you?

READ SCRIPTURE AND DISCUSS / 30 Minutes

- What kind of love comes along with our new birth (vv. 1–3)? Why are God's commands not a burden? Is obedience ever a burden for you? Is there a difference between something being difficult and being a burden?
- How are you doing at loving God? Using the "love test" from verses 1–3, how are you doing at loving others? How does your obedience to God affect your love for others?
- What is the power source for overcoming the world? How have you seen faith (belief), love and obedience (vv. 1–3) to be interconnected in your life? What lie is John combating (remember the group who had split off from the church)?
- What are the three witnesses to Jesus Christ (v. 7)? What do water and blood refer to (see Note 5:6)? What happened at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9–11)? Why is it important to emphasize Jesus' death and resurrection? How does the Spirit testify to Jesus?
- What has convinced you that true life is found in Jesus? What further "proof" do you need?
- What is the condition for prayer to be answered (vv. 14–15)? What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? How often are you prompted to pray for someone you see struggling with sin in their life?
- What might be the sin that leads to death (see Mark 3:22–30)? Why do the very fears of those who worry about having committed this sin prove that they have not done so?

[Scripture and questions continued on page 28]

^{a7,8} Late manuscripts of the Vulgate testify in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.

⁸ And there are three that testify on earth: the (not found in any Greek manuscript before the sixteenth century)

Notes

5:1–4a Here John ties together the three tests of faith. “The real link between the three tests is seen to be the new birth. Faith, love and obedience are the natural growth which follows a birth from above” (Stott).

5:1 believes. The tense of the verb indicates that belief is here seen as the *result* of new birth, not its cause. Belief on the part of Christians is clear proof that they have been born of God. Elsewhere, John points to faith as the *condition* of the new birth. The two emphases are complementary: faith enables the new birth to happen, and faith is the sign that it has taken place.

5:2 John states another complementary truth. In 4:20–21, he pointed out that in order to love God, one must also love his children. Here he points out that one loves the children of God by loving the Father. **carrying out his commands.** Love for God involves moral obedience. Love and obedience are inexorably linked (John 15:10–12).

5:3 burdensome. Obedience to the thousands of often picayune rules and regulations promulgated by the scribes and Pharisees was indeed a heavy burden. But obedience to God does not exasperate the Christian, since God’s laws are of quite a different character (e.g., they are life-giving), and the faith of Christians provides the power for obedience.

5:4–12 John has one last statement to make before he concludes his letter. The crucial issue in this whole matter of orthodoxy versus apostasy hinges on one’s view of Jesus. If faith is rightly directed at the historic Jesus, then (by implication) correct lifestyle and loving relationships will flow from that commitment. But if not—if the Jesus who is honored is more a product of fancy than fact—then quite a different world view will flourish (as the secessionists demonstrate). So John ends where he began—with his testimony to Jesus.

5:4b our faith. This is the source of the overcoming power of the Christian—confidence and trust that Jesus is the Son of God (see 5:5).

5:6–9 How is it that one comes to faith in Jesus? By means of reliable witnesses, John answers. He names three such witnesses: the water, the blood, and the Holy Spirit.

5:6 by water and blood. By these two phrases, John is referring to Jesus’ baptism and death. These events are crucial in understanding who Jesus is. At his baptism, Jesus publicly identified himself with the sins of the people (even though he himself was without sin). At his death, Jesus died to take away those sins. Water and blood would also remind John’s readers of the ordinances of baptism and communion. **not ... by water alone.** Both the baptism and the crucifixion are crucial in understanding Jesus. **it is the Spirit who testifies.** John has already stated the fact that there is an inner witness given by the Holy Spirit as to the truth of who Jesus is (see 3:24; 4:13; 1 Cor. 12:3). **the Spirit is the truth.** The Holy Spirit is the third witness, and is qualified to be such because the Spirit is, in inner essence, truth itself.

5:9 John clarifies the authority behind these three witnesses. It is God himself. He makes explicit the object of the three-fold witness. It is Jesus his Son. **greater.** In a law court, testimony is accepted when it is corroborated by two or three witnesses (Deut. 19:15). How much more substantial is the three-fold testimony of God!

5:10 The purpose of this testimony is to produce faith. To accept the testimony is synonymous with believing in Jesus. **believes in.** It is one thing to *believe* Jesus. It is another to *believe in* Jesus. To believe Jesus is to accept what he says as true. To believe in Jesus is to accept who he is. It is to trust him completely and commit one’s life to him. **a liar.** To reject this triple testimony is to disbelieve God (who is the essence of truth). It is to attribute falsehood to God (see 1:10).

5:11 eternal life. In receiving the testimony and thus receiving the Son, one also receives eternal life. The Greek word which is here translated “eternal” means “that which belongs to the coming age.” But since that age has already broken into the present age, eternal life can be enjoyed even now.

5:14 assurance. By this word John refers to the bold confidence Christians have—that they can approach God in prayer and freely speak their minds. **according to his will.** In 3:22, John says that the condition for answered prayer is obedient behavior. Here John adds another condition: what we ask must be in accord with God’s plans and purposes (see also Matt. 26:39,42).

[Notes continued on page 29]

Scripture (Continued)

Concluding Remarks

¹³I 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. ¹⁴This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

¹⁶If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him 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 he should pray about that. ¹⁷All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

¹⁸We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. ¹⁹We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. ²⁰We 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—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

²¹Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

Group Questions (Continued)

- If 1 John were dropped from the Bible, what would be missing from the story of God's redemptive work in history?

CASE HISTORY: Your two closest friends are not Christian. One says that he was a Christian once, but he would "rather have his fun." The other openly ridicules the Christian faith as a "bunch of myths." How should you pray for these friends?

TO CLOSE AND PRAY / 15–30 Minutes

- As you reflect back on your time with this group, how has your experience impacted you in the greatest way?
- How have you appreciated each individual in the group? Focus on one person at a time and give everyone a chance to share what they've appreciated about this person.
- Would you like the group to continue? If so, what would need to change? What should stay the same? (See also page 4.)
- How would you like this group to continue praying for you?

9 Faith Is the Victory

1 John 5:1–12

1. What are some of the more popular ways the “victorious Christian life” is being portrayed today?

2. Read 1 John 5:1–12. What are some inevitable results of the new birth (vv. 1–2)?

How are these results related to each other?

3. Why is obedience to God's commandments not burdensome for Christians (v. 3)?

How then can we explain the struggle we sometimes have to obey?

4. Reflect for a moment on the two major characteristics of the world described earlier (see 2:15–17; 4:1–6). What then does it mean for us to “over come the world” (vv. 4–5)?

When and how does this victory take place (vv. 4–5)?

5. The heretics of John's day taught that the divine Christ descended on Jesus at his baptism but left *before* his death (v. 6). What is wrong with this view?

6. How does the fact that Jesus Christ came by water (symbolizing his baptism) *and* blood (symbolizing his death) refute that heresy (v. 6)?

7. The Old Testament law required two or three witnesses to prove a claim. Who are John's three witnesses, and what do they testify (vv. 7–8)?

9. Why should we accept this threefold testimony concerning God's Son (v. 9)?

10. How does your own experience confirm the truth that eternal life is found in Jesus (vv. 10–12)?

10

What We Know as Christians

1 John 5:13–21

1. Verse 13 is a summary statement of purpose for the entire epistle. What then are those “things” which assure us we have eternal life?

How would you respond to those who say it is presumptuous to claim we *know* we have eternal life?

2. How can we be assured that our prayers will be answered (vv. 14–15; see also 3:21–22)?

3. How can we get to the point where we want what God wants?

4. Verses 16–17 provide one illustration of the kind of prayer that can be made with confidence. For whom should we be praying? Why?

5. In light of the whole context of this epistle, what might be the distinction between the sin which does not lead to death and the one that does?

6. Why would John not encourage prayer for a person involved in the sin that leads to death?

7. Another New Testament author writes: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). In light of this danger, how are you encouraged by John's assurance in verses 18–19?

8. How do we know we belong to God's family and not the world's (v. 19)?

9. How does the coming of God's Son enable us to know the true God in contrast to the false conceptions of God that continually surround us (vv. 20–21)?