

*30-Day
Devotional
Study of the
Letters of John
(1, 2, 3 John)*

ESV Edition

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How to use this booklet:

God's Word is awesome!

The Lord promises that if we will diligently study the Bible, He will use it to increase our faith. Romans 10:17 says "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

The first thing you need to do to make this study be everything it can be for you is to **commit yourself to becoming a student of God's Word**. You're going to need to find at least 30 minutes each day to study and pray.

Don't cop out and say you can't do that! How much time do you spend on your smartphone each day checking your social media? How much time surfing the internet? How much time watching TV? You can find 30 minutes for God! Why not commit to looking at those other things **ONLY AFTER** you have had your devotional time with the Lord!

Next you need to begin each session in prayer, asking God's Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth. Then read the passage for the day. If you use the English Standard Version (ESV), you will be able to fill in every blank in this devotional correctly. Follow the study guide for each day, which will guide you through the Letters of First, Second, and 3 John.

Be sure to end each devotional time in prayer also, using the things you've learned that day as a launching pad into praying for all the things going on in your life and that God calls you to pray for.

God bless you as you study God's Word!

Dr. Danny Campbell <>

Day 1- Read 1 John 1:1-4

There really is no doubt that the same John the Apostle who wrote the gospel of John also wrote the letter, or epistle we are reading now. Below are set the first four verses of both books side by side, as well as John 1:14.

Circle or underline the words and thoughts that occur in both books as they begin.

John 1:1-4, 14	I John 1:1-4
<p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.</p> <p>And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son[a] from the Father, full of grace and truth.</p>	<p>That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.</p>

From that comparison, it is easy to see that John the Apostle wrote 1 John the Epistle!

Perhaps like me you sometimes have wondered what it would have been like to walk with Jesus as one of His apostles. John never got over that Jesus loved Him and had a purpose for his life. When he wrote 1 John, it had probably been sixty years since John had physically walked with Jesus on earth. But these first 4 verses show how fresh it all was in John’s mind and heart!

From your own remembrance of the gospels, write down:

Something John heard Jesus say: _____

Example: “...unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”-John 8:24

Something John saw Jesus do: _____

Example: Raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11)

John also says he had handled the Word of life. Undoubtedly here he is referring to touching the scars left in Jesus' hands, feet, and side due to His crucifixion. One of the false teachings 1 John addresses is the mistaken belief that Jesus only appeared as a 'ghost' after His resurrection. "No," John says, "I felt the scars of the actual body of Jesus risen from the dead." John reports that it was the same Jesus he had walked with for 3 years: the fully human, fully divine Jesus. John had spent his entire life declaring Jesus to a lost world, and inviting people to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life instead of the condemnation their sins deserve.

According to verse 3, when a person does believe in Jesus, who can they now have fellowship with?

As we go through 1 John, we will see John describe what it looks like for Christians to make the most of their fellowship with God and with each other.

As an author, John liked to tell people why he was writing to them. Look up John 20:31 and fill in the missing blanks from the verse –

"...but these are written so that you may _____ that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have _____ in his name." -John 20:31

So John's gospel was written to help non-believers become believers in Jesus. One of the main purposes of 1 John is to help believers have ASSURANCE of their salvation and continue to GROW in their faith.

Write I John 5:13 here:

Circle the words KNOW and HAVE in what you just wrote. A key theme of 1 John is KNOWING what you HAVE in Christ. Both words occur about 20 times in I John's 5 short chapters! John the Apostle, writing with a Pastor's heart, wants us to know what we have in Christ, and continue to grow in our relationship with God and other believers!

According to 1 John 1:4, what does John want each of us to experience as we grow in fellowship with God and each other?

Fullness of _____

As you pray today, ask God to give you fullness of joy as you continue to fellowship with God and your fellow believers!

Day 2- Read 1 John 1:5-10

Yesterday we noted how similar the first four verses of John’s gospel and 1 John were. We see the same thing when we compare verses 5-9 of each book.

Circle or underline the words and thoughts that occur in both books.

John 1:5-9, 8:12	1 John 1:5-9
<p>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John [the Baptist]. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.</p> <p>...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.</p>	<p>This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.</p>

Write down a couple of the problems you have when you walk around in the dark:

Back when I was in college some of us would go to a Bluff overlook area, build a fire, sing songs together and share our hearts about how we hoped God would use us in the future. Usually we would arrive at the parking lot before dark and walk under the remaining sunlight down the narrow path to the bluff. There were thirty foot drop offs along that trail, so it was good to have that light. But it was always dark on the way back to the parking lot. Usually several people had their flashlights with them, and little groups walking together would use their flashlights to get back to the cars. But one very memorable time, there was only one flash light among about 20 of us. We had to be very careful about following the one whose light made clear the way to go!

If any one of us had refused to “walk in the light” that evening, it could have resulted in lots of cuts from thorny tree limbs and even potential life-threatening falls. When any professing Christian refuses to “walk in the Truth” of God’s Word, serious problems arise.

Before we go any further, let's compare the Book of 1 John to a state car inspection.

When you turn the keys or press the ignition button, it is wonderful to be able to drive the car. That does not mean the car is free from problems! The state inspection goes over a specific checklist of items to make sure they are functioning as a healthy car should.

The same thing is true for you as a believer. Many times 1 John reminds the believer that they are saved by their belief in Jesus alone. Yet John calls the believer to inspect the key areas of their Christian life to make sure their faith is in alignment with God's Truth.

Sometimes when you get a state inspection, they put a red sticker on the car, indicating that this car should not be driven until a particular matter is addressed. It's not that the car is unable to be driven, it's that there is a serious problem that needs to be fixed before it's prudent to drive.

Many Christians go through their Christian life ignoring 'red-sticker' concerns that God is very serious about us addressing now! First John is the Christian's inspection book!

The first matter of inspection for John is our posture towards agreeing with God about the sin in our lives and turning to Jesus for forgiveness.

According to 1 John 1:6, if we insist that we are Christians in good standing with God, but consistently walk in untrue ways (darkness), what is really true of us? Fill in the remainder of verse 6 to know:

We _____ and do not _____ the truth.

If God's Word calls something sin and I engage in it instead of repenting of it, I am breaking fellowship with God. I can't just proclaim that "Jesus and I are doing fine!" John says that if we refuse to deal with sin in our lives but proclaim ourselves okay, we are liars.

John was in part dealing with False Teachers who rejected the seriousness of sexual sins. They were like those in our day who minimize the seriousness of the sins of fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and other uses of sexuality outside of the marriage bond of a husband and wife.

In verse 8 John makes clear that such people have rejected what the Bible says about sin. When they declare that they are not sinners, they are self-deceived and the truth is not in them.

According to verse 10, WHO is the person who rejects God's Word ultimately calling a liar?

In our generation, as in John's, many false teachers and 'Christians' are calling God a liar because they reject His commands as untrue and/or refuse to use God's Word as their standard. If that describes you, you have failed God's inspection!

In contrast to those who reject God's Truth, true believers are committed to God's Word as their standard. When we walk in its light, in the light of Jesus, verse 7 says we have fellowship with one another!

As you and I both agree in the centrality of God's Word, we have a basis to know when we are acting rightly and wrongly! Obedience to Christ's commands is not optional for either of us if we are going to have proper fellowship!

If you are anything like me, here is where I start to get very nervous as I think about my sin. The false believer says they have no sin, the true believer has no problem instantly recalling the many ways we sin and fall short of God's glory.

The false believer compares himself to other people and thinks he is doing okay. The true believer compares himself to Jesus and realizes how dim his light is compared to the light of the world.

John knew true believers would be feeling this way, and instantly brings in the great hope provided by 1 John 1:9. Write 1 John 1:9 here:

The Greek word for confess is *homologeō*. It means "to say the same thing about." When you and I stop trying to justify our sin and instead humbly agree with God that it is as bad as He says it is, then He can do something about it. The word confess goes along with the word repent.

The Greek word for repent is the word *metanoio*. It means "change of mind." You used to see your sin as no big deal. Now you agree with God that any sin against God is rebellion against His will for your life. Now you are throwing yourself at the feet of Jesus and begging Him to deal with your sin. Verse 9 says when we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Notice he does not say God forgives us based on our faithfulness and just actions – we are admitting our unfaithfulness and shady actions. He forgives us based on who He is alone, having nothing to do with our own goodness. Thank God for that, or else we could never be forgiven of any sin before or after salvation.

As you pray today, ask God's Holy Spirit to bring to your mind any areas of sin in your life that you have been minimizing lately. God's inspection is meant to help you turn to Jesus to get rid of the muck and the dirt before you get back out there on the road!

Day 3- Read 1 John 2:1-2

In verse 1 John affectionately calls his readers, “my little children.” I guess everyone is a child to you when you are in your 90’s, which John probably was when he wrote this!

Today’s verses really completes the thought presented in yesterday’s verses, but we will look at them separately for emphasis.

According to verse 1, what is a key reason John wrote 1 John?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a wonderful thing to know that when we believed in Christ we became a child of God and received eternal life. It is wonderful to know that the penalty due our sins has been transferred timelessly to Christ on the cross. We have a reserved place in Heaven, and God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in our hearts.

But let’s never use any of those truths as a justification to sin in the present moment we find ourselves in. To remove any doubt, John emphatically states that he has written to us that we **MAY NOT SIN**. For each of us to experience the best that God has for it, we need to be constantly vigilant against the old nature’s drawing us toward sin.

When we choose God’s truth over any sin, we are putting ourselves in a position for God to bless us. When we fall into any sin, we become like a derailed train that has been put off the track of God’s perfect plan for us. And any time we do sin, we will experience the built-in consequences each sin has until we get “back on track.”

This may be easier to understand if you have ever tried to perfect an athletic or musical skill. As a soccer player my coaches taught me skills for the game, and we worked on them diligently in practice. I tried particularly hard to master hitting a “banana” shot. I would strike the outside of the ball with the inside of my foot, and it would make the ball arc toward the goal in a “banana” type motion.

I knew what I needed to do to perfect the shot, and I became very good at it. But I often miss-hit the ball and felt like a failure. Did my failures to get it right make me give up? No way! I learned from my mistakes, kept working at it, and kept improving! I had a goal and keep working toward it. I am glad my coaches kept pushing me to do the things that at one time seemed impossible as I became a better and better player.

As believers our goal should always be to become better and better Christians, and that means fighting against anything the Bible calls sin! We don’t view any command of Christ as beyond our reach but we understand that we can do all things Christ has commanded us to do through His strength! We may not get it right the first time, but we never give up!

Fortunately, God doesn’t give up on us! Look again at 1 John 2:1b and fill in the blank:

But if anyone does sin, we have an _____ with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. -1 John 2:1b

You may have noticed I used the word ‘but’ there instead of ‘and.’ The Greek word there is *kai*. It can be translated AND or BUT depending on the context. Here ‘BUT’ seems appropriate. John says, “I write so you won’t sin, BUT if and when you do, remember you have an ADVOCATE!”

The word advocate is *parakletos*. It means “One who comes alongside.” In John 16:7 Jesus used it of the Holy Spirit, the Helper who would come to believers after they receive Jesus.

Here it is used of Jesus Himself, who comes to believers when they sin and says, “Let me help you get this right. Confess it as sin – let Me forgive you and cleanse you and get you back on track!” Oh what a wonderful promise from a wonderful Savior!

Yesterday we compared the things 1 John addresses to a car inspection. Think of Jesus our Advocate as being like the car inspector who comes to us and says, “As it stands right now, I have to fail you on the car inspection – but let me help you get your problem fixed, and you will leave here with a ‘good to go’ sticker rather than a failure sticker – just say the word and I will make it happen!” To which we say, “Make it happen, Jesus!”

In verse 2 the Apostle John shares a wonderful truth about Jesus’ death on the cross. He says that Jesus is the propitiation for not only our sins, but the sins of the whole world!

To say that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins is to say that His sacrifice on our behalf is the only way to have our sins dealt with, covered, forgiven, and taken away forever, and in their place receive right standing with God.

These wonderful verses make clear that everyone in the entire world could get in on Christ’s salvation if they will turn to Him.

Christ’s work on the cross is SUFFICIENT to save everyone who has ever lived; but Christ’s work on the cross will only be EFFICIENT in your life if you receive Him as Lord and Savior.

Look up and write John 3:36 here:

If you have never turned to Jesus for salvation, say this prayer now directly to the Lord:

“Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and have rebelled against You. I deserve Hell as punishment for my sins. Thank you Jesus for your love making you willing to take the punishment my sins deserve on Yourself at the cross. Thank you for Your perfect life making You able to actually take my place of judgment. I believe in You and what You did for me. Please forgive me based on what You did for me on the cross, not for anything in me. I receive you as my Lord and Savior, and pledge to follow You the rest of my days. In Your name I pray Jesus, amen!

If you just prayed to receive Jesus, welcome to the family of God! Contact us and let us know so that we can rejoice with you!

Now as everyone prays today, give God thanks that He comes alongside of us as we seek to live lives that please Him!

Day 4- Read 1 John 2:3-6

Today we come to the next item on John's Christian 'inspection' list – following the example of Jesus.

In verse 3 John makes clear again that a person that claims to know Jesus will be absolutely committed to keeping God's commands. He drops another hammer blow in verse 4 – Anyone who says they know God and does not keep His commands is a liar without the truth in him.

As a Pastor I have known many fine Christians over the years that are tormented by verses like this. They often come from a legalistic church background where verses like these were used like a club, often in isolation of the doctrine of salvation by God's' grace alone. These folks often spend their entire Christian life beat up and discouraged because of their failures to live up to the "thou shalt not" verses.

Now we have already seen that for the believer no command of the Lord is optional. Part of our growth as a believer is going from having a negative view of God's commands to a positive one. A negative view of God's commands is one that says "God is out to get me by insisting that I not do such and such – He doesn't want me to have the nice things I see that others have." A positive view of God's commands is one that says "God is out to bless me by these instructions for life – if I do what God says I will be blessed in the long run and kept from getting side-tracked by sin!"

With that in mind, circle the answer in the following multiple choice question that best reflects what John is calling for in verses 3-4 –

- A. I know Jesus but I will do what I want to do in the area of sex**
- B. I know Jesus but I don't have any problem with cutting ethical corners at work**
- C. I know Jesus but I do not like people of other races**
- D. I know Jesus and try to obey all His Word calls for, although I fail some**

Brothers and sisters, we know the only legitimate answer there is D. The true believer has a 100% commitment to doing ALL that the Bible commands, even though all of us fall short of a 100% track record in living out those commands. When we do sin, we draw encouragement from what John has already told us about confessing our sin to Jesus our Advocate and going forth with renewed commitment to following Jesus.

Now here is where 1 John begins to get really helpful for us as disciples of Jesus if we let it. In verse 5 John states what he did in verses 3-4 in a more positive way: those who keep God's Word are seeing the love of God perfected in themselves.

According to verse 5, what will be increasingly perfected in us as we keep God's ways?

I sure want to see the love of God perfected in my life, don't you? DO NOT MISS that John is helping us understand things we are commanded to do and not do from God's perspective. ALL of God's commands relate to better loving God and loving people. They are there to help me become the best possible lover of God and the people that cross my path! What great instructions we are getting from John, the apostle of love, who never got over that he was "the one Jesus loved" (see John 21:20). The love of God he had received from Jesus overflowed into love for others in the name and power of Jesus!

An owner's manual for a car tells you how to care for the car and get the best out of it. The Bible does the same thing for us humans! The owner's manual for the car tells you to put gas in a car tank. You can put sugar in it, but that would be a sin against the designer's intent and lead to many problems in the running of the car. At inspection time, the inspector would bring this to your attention!

That brings us to the second item on the Christians inspection list. It is not a "Thou Shalt Not" but a "Thou Shalt" command! Write verse 6 here:

If you know Jesus, 1 John 2:6 says you will walk as Jesus walked! In other words, the second inspection item is your commitment to following Jesus' example. You may remember a few years back many Christians wore bracelets with the letters W.W.J.D. What did they mean? Fill in the blanks:

W_____ W_____ J_____ D_____

Of course we must remember that the power source to do what Jesus did is living by faith in Him and trusting the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us do what He has called us to do. But when we remember our power source I have found it helpful to ask "What Would Jesus Do?" John calls us to follow the example of Jesus!

Paul did the same thing. Look up and write down 1 Corinthians 11:1 here –

From now on as you go through life, make it your ambition to do and say what Jesus would do and say if He was living your life. But also do serious reflection on how He lived. For instance, we are commanded to "speak the truth in love." Jesus always told people what they needed to hear from Him, never shying away in the name of being nice. But He told them what they needed to hear the right way, with love in His heart and hope that they would change.

As you pray today, ask God to help you show your love for Jesus by walking as Jesus walked!

Day 5- Read 1 John 2:7-11

So far in 1 John, the Apostle John has spoken of the treasure we have in Jesus, the Word of Life. John wants us to experience the fullness of joy that Jesus had brought him. And he wanted us to know that Jesus is always accessible to those who humbly turn to Him, and back to Him.

We have also been comparing 1 John to a car inspection. So far we have two clear items of evaluation for our Christian lives. First, we must have a 100% commitment to obeying the commands of God. Second, we should make it our aim to follow Jesus' example. Today's passage gives us the third item on the list – loving our Christian brothers and sisters.

I think I understand what the Apostle John is doing in verses 7-8. If I am right, he is actually counting on the reader having familiarity with the teachings of Jesus and reflecting on them in a very clever way. He refers to a “new commandment” from Jesus that by now was an “old commandment” to them, but becomes “new again” each time they obey it!

Look up and fill in the missing blanks from John 13:34-35 –

**A _____ commandment I give to you, that you love one another:
_____ I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people
will _____ that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. -Jn. 13:34-35**

Jesus Himself had referred to the clear commands in the Old Testament to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Since the command to love in John 13:34-35 wasn't really new, what was the 'NEW' part of Jesus command? What do you think?

Since the call to love wasn't new, the “new” part must have been in loving others AS Jesus had loved them. In other words, we are to follow Jesus' example of love as we love others. If this is what John is thinking in 1 John 2:7-8, it would make sense, because in verse 6 he had said that the one who abides in Jesus will walk as Jesus walked (and love as Jesus loved!).

If I am correct, then John is having fun by saying that Jesus' command is now old, but becomes new again when we love others like Jesus has loved us! In verse 8 he says the thing (love) was true in Him AND IN YOU. I like that a lot – the love Jesus modeled showed why He was here is now being shown by us in new situations every day!

Remember that John is writing these words to Christians gathered in their churches. John had been a part of a small group of 12 that at one time didn't do a good job loving one another and instead argued about which one of them was the greatest. In the letter of 3 John he will deal with a fellow that was selfishly bullying his church and who didn't even honor leaders sent from the Apostle John!

John was well aware that when you get a group of people together it's as easy to see hate and negative behavior flourish as it is to see the kind of love Jesus modeled when He washed His disciple's feet.

I did not grow up going to church. I was saved when I was 17 years old, and almost immediately saw BOTH – church members at their best and at their worst. At their best, they saw in me a new believer that they could help grow in Christ, and they came alongside me in love. At their worst, they saw in me how different I was than what they were, and seemingly went out of their way to make me feel like an unwelcome “yankee threat” who had invaded their little southern paradise.

It didn't take long to realize that people go to church for lots of different reasons, and for many love for Jesus and love of fellow Christians is not at the top of their list. Maybe at one time it was for them, but for far too long now these carnal Christians had made church about themselves rather than about Christ and His purposes for HIS church.

For 35 plus years now as a believer I have seen this same mixture of love and hate in the churches I have served. Where spiritual Christians love like Christ loved, it brings a sense of light and newness to the church. Where carnal Christians hate like Satan hates, it envelops the church in darkness.

Let's bear down on this a little before we pray.

Besides each statement below, circle whether that action demonstrates love or hate:

Inviting a new neighbor to church...	Love	OR	Hate
Not welcoming someone because they are a different race...	Love	OR	Hate
Willingness to move seats to make a visitor feel welcome...	Love	OR	Hate
Holding on to past grudges rather than work through them...	Love	OR	Hate
Irritation when someone sings songs you don't like to hear...	Love	OR	Hate
Helping meet the needs of a single parent	Love	OR	Hate
Writing someone off who posted something online you disagree with	Love	OR	Hate
Sharing news about someone that will present them in a bad light	Love	OR	Hate
Writing a note of encouragement to someone you see trying	Love	OR	Hate
Including someone in lunch after church you wouldn't ordinarily	Love	OR	Hate

As you pray today, ask for help applying Jesus' new 'old' commandment in your life in ever new ways!

Day 6-

Read 1 John 2:12-14

I love this passage!

I find it so helpful that John presents the growth journey each Christian is on as they develop as being like the journey each living person has as they develop in life.

We start as “little children.”

We progress to being “young men and women.”

We are moving toward being mature adults: “fathers and mothers.”

We do not expect little children to be as mature as their fathers and mothers.

Indeed, we think of ourselves as responsible for helping the “little children” grow, and equipping the “young men and women” for the heat of life’s battles.

What would our churches be like if we ALWAYS kept that in mind? Share your thoughts:

I think if we always kept those things in mind our churches would be a lot more like the design Jesus had for us as His churches!

Now let’s take these developmental milestones one by one and see what John said should characterize each part of the disciple’s journey.

Where we start: Developmental stage one, “Little children.”

Fill in the missing blank from verse 12 –

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are _____ you for his name’s sake.

Fill in the missing blank from verse 13b –

I write to you, children, because you know the _____.

What are the two things that John wants baby Christians to know?

That their sins ARE forgiven based on trusting what Christ has done for them and that they have now entered into a relationship with their Heavenly Father.

Look up and write down John 1:12 –

When a baby is born, they get cleaned up and are ordinarily placed in the arms of the one who birthed them. Their eyes adjust to the light and look into the eyes of the one(s) who they will know and grow in relationship with from now on.

John wants new believers to know that their sins are forgiven, they are now children of God, and that eternal life means growing in relationship with their Heavenly Father.

Look up and write John 17:3 here –

Where we are going: Developmental stage three, “fathers and mothers.”

We will look at the middle stage in a moment. But let’s see what the purpose of our faith is.

Fill in the missing blank from verse 13a –

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

Fill in the missing blank from verse 14a –

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

Did you catch that John writes the same thing to them both times?

Did you catch that John writes to them the same thing he wrote to the little children starting out?

Years have passed, and the mature Christian has grown in their relationship with the Triune God. God has been with them through the battles of life, and abiding in Him has come to be what life and eternal life is all about. At times their eyes were more on the battle than on the Lord, but not now that they have matured. They know whatever they face, “God’s got this!”

Look up and write John 15:5 here –

When a Christian reaches the mature level, they know that God will continue to be with them as they finish their earthly life well. They live to help the “little children” in their midst get established in the basics, and to encourage and equip the young men and women in the heat of the battle. This is where God is leading each of us, even as we are thankful for the fathers and mothers in the faith who came before us!

Developmental stage two, “young men and women.”

Fill in the missing blanks from verse 14b –

I write to you, young men, because you are _____, and the word of God _____ in you, and you have _____ the evil one.

Later in 1 John 4:4 the apostle will write that “ he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

Satan and his demons are formidable opponents, but they are no match for Jesus and Christians obediently following God’s plan for their lives.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said the gates of Hell would not prevail against His church. We often take that wrong. We think of how we will be protected from what Satan does in his advances toward us. But gates are for keeping unwanted others out. Satan is the one who fences people and areas of cities off, hoping God’s people won’t take the light of Jesus through Satan’s gates.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus pictures demons as the ones who are afraid because they know the gates they have put around people and parts of cities are no match for the gospel of Jesus Christ shared by the people of Jesus Christ!

John writes as a “father” in the faith, but for 60 years he had gone forth in the strong armor of the Lord (See Ephesians 6:10-20) as a “young man” overcoming the evil one. Like the other apostles, John had scars from the fight, but God had used him to advance Christ’s gospel.

We too will have battle scars as we engage in spiritual warfare, brothers and sisters. But God will be with us, and God will use our efforts to bring others to Christ! Don’t shy away from fulfilling the ministry God has for you! Don’t hide in gated Christian enclaves, content that Satan isn’t messing with you very much where you are. Take the gospel to where demons are cowering behind their gates hoping you won’t change the history inside those gates!

As you pray today, if you are still at the “little children” stage, take up the armor of Christ and do battle for the Lord. If you have been fighting the battles for years, go from the “young men” stage to the “fathers” stage. Don’t have your eyes on the battle but on your ever-growing relationship with the living God, and being one who encourages and equips the next generation of God’s sons and soldiers!

Day 7- Read 1 John 2:15-17

Yesterday we ended with the verse that says believers have overcome the evil one. The evil one was an obvious reference to Satan. The Spirit of Christ indwells believers, and helps us use the truth of the Bible to defeat the lies of Satan, the evil one. Today's passage tells us not to love the world system that Satan dominates, characterized by the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

You will notice that I supplied the word "system" after the word world. John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He gave His One of a Kind Son Jesus, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Obviously in John 3:16 when it says God loves the world it means that God loves the people of the world. Here in 1 John 2:15 the world refers to the world system that opposes God, led by the evil one, Satan.

The Apostle Paul gives a good description of this present world system dominated by Satan in Ephesians 2:1-3. Fill in the missing blanks from Ephesians 2:1-3 –

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the _____, following the _____ of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of _____— among whom we all once lived in the _____ of our flesh, carrying out the _____ of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. -Ephesians 2:1-3

The Apostle Peter also addressed how committed Christians are turning away from the way they used to live. Fill in the missing blanks from 1 Peter 4:2-5 –

...so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for _____ but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not _____ them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. -1 Peter 4:2-5

The word debauchery Peter uses is a word that means squandering, like the story of the prodigal son who squandered, or wasted the early part of his life before turning back to his father.

Back in 1 John 2, we see that John is giving us our next checklist item in the believer's inspection: the believer is seeking not to love the anti-God world system and its ways.

Then John describes three ancient tools Satan uses in his anti-God temptation strategy:

The lust of the flesh

The lust of the eyes

The pride of life

Those three things are the temptations Satan used with Adam and Eve and was SUCCESSFUL, bringing in original sin.

Beside the temptation of Eve and Adam listed below, write which of the three areas of temptation Satan was using, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life:

The woman saw that the tree was good for food

It was pleasant to the eyes

It was a tree desirable to make one wise

You may remember that Satan engaged Eve in a conversation in which he twisted God’s Word and then rejected that their choices would have consequences. Then he said – “In the day that you eat of it your eyes will be opened, **and you will be like God**, knowing good and evil.”

At the heart of Satan’s world system is the call to reject the authority God has over our lives and for us to become the authority over our own lives. Adam and Eve did not understand that in giving in to the temptation they were setting the Devil up as the real authority in their lives, and their original sin made it so that each of us was born and remains as a “son of disobedience” unless Jesus saves us. In our own lives, the Devil still uses the lust of the flesh/body, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life to get us to commit sins both large and small.

Those three things are the temptations Satan used with Jesus the Second Adam, but was UNSUCCESSFUL, meaning Jesus could be the perfect substitute for sinners and return, reclaim, and refurbish the “world” at the time of Heaven’s choosing!

At each temptation from Satan, Jesus answered him with an appropriate passage from the Bible. At the end of that time, Satan left a defeated foe. Where Adam and Eve had failed, Jesus had succeeded, and kept on succeeding throughout His earthly life! Through His perfect life, substitute death for sinners, and glorious resurrection Jesus defeated the power of Satan, sin, death, and Hell for all who identify with Him and His victory in faith! It reminds us of what happened when David defeated Goliath. All Israel won that day because their champion had defeated the Philistine champion.

John sums up a key reason not to love the world in verse 17 – the sinful world as it is now is passing away, so don’t be on the losing side! The one who does what God wants because they have turned to God will abide with God forever!

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. -Acts 3:19-21

Day 8- Read 1 John 2:18-19

John starts by reminding us that there is a distinction between the “BIG A” Antichrist to come and “little a” antichrists that live throughout this “last hour,” a reference to this entire church age we are in between the Day of Pentecost and the Rapture of the church.

The “Big A” Antichrist will be used of Satan during the 7-year Tribulation period before Christ’s Second Coming. John wrote much about that time and that man in Revelation chapters 6-19.

But “little a” antichrists are with us throughout this church age, and many of them start out with some involvement in or exposure to sound churches and preaching, but go on to teach things that set them up as false teachers: “little a” antichrists.

The word antichrist simply means AGAINST Christ. We are called to be for Christ and for what the Bible teaches. When a person is against Christ and against what the Bible teaches, they have imbibed the antichrist spirit.

The leaders of many churches fit this description today. Their teaching is not FOR Christ and biblical teaching, but is AGAINST Christ and biblical teaching.

Examples of this are those that deny teachings such as that Jesus is God, that He is the only way of salvation, that the Bible is inerrant, that human sexuality is reserved only for a husband and wife within the marital bond, etc... Those who deny those teachings are “little a” antichrists. Throughout the letters of the apostles we see them dealing with these false teachers who rose up from among them.

In verse 27 John gives a specific example of an antichrist view. Write it here:

1 John will go on to list several other false beliefs they must avoid. Here he starts with the false teaching that says Jesus is not Israel’s Messiah. That is an antichrist view!

I love how honest the apostles are about how these false teachers and views will arise from even good solid churches like the one in Ephesus. Turn to Acts 20:28-32.

Write several things Paul says about false teachers in Acts 20:28-32:

These words agree with Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:15-16. Fill in the Missing Blanks –

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in _____ clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their _____. -Matt. 7:15-16a

From Jesus' words we learn that false prophets/ false teachers can actually look and sound very smooth and appealing as they teach. But their teaching inevitably will not square with orthodoxy (correct doctrine) or orthopraxy (correct practice).

Ironically, false teaching often veers toward one of two extremes, both minimizing Jesus. Legalistic false teaching places all the emphasis on trying to obey God in your own strength, often adding extra, burdensome rules and not speaking enough about God's grace. Licentious false teaching places all the emphasis on God's forgiveness, and often excuses sexual sin and all manner of selfish behavior, presuming on God's grace.

And then there are cults like Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, who completely reject the Bible's teachings about Jesus, although they often use the same words Christians use with different meanings.

Back in 1 John, John gives a very simple way of understanding all of this in verse 19.

Yes, they went out from us (we taught them correct doctrine and practice).

But they were not of us (because they didn't continue in correct doctrine and practice).

If they had been of us, they would have continued with us (in correct doctrine and practice).

That they might be made manifest (their false doctrine and practice clearly contrasts with ours).

That none of them were of us (who teach correct doctrine and practice).

Regardless of how sound a teacher appears to be, the people of God are called to be diligent in holding their leaders accountable to stick with the Bible. If their "fruit" is false teaching and practice, John the Apostle would say, "those are false teachers" and "they didn't learn that here!"

These words go beyond our home churches to evaluating the preaching we hear on television, radio, the internet, and podcasts. If you are not careful, listening to false teaching can make you a false listener! Paul warned about "last hour" false listeners this way:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. -2 Tim. 4:3-4

As you pray today, ask God to give you ears, heart and mind for Bible preaching and teaching that assists you in believing correct Christian doctrine and engaging in correct Christian practice.

Day 9- Read 1 John 2:20-23

These verses start with the intriguing statement that all of us who are believers in Jesus have an anointing from the Holy One! What do you think that means?

I think the “anointing” from the Holy One means (Circle all that are true):

- **True believers can miraculously speak in tongues**
- **True believers can bring forth new revelation from God equal to Scripture**
- **True believers have been set aside by God to minister to others**
- **True believers have God the Holy Spirit living inside of them**

Some false teachers use these verses to say things like A and B, but those are not supported by a study of the words “anoint,” “anointed,” and “anointing,” whereas statements C & D are.

In Old Covenant/ Testament days, people like priests were set apart to minister to others and many times oil was poured on their head in a consecration ceremony.

These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests. -Numbers 3:3

In Psalm 2:2, the Coming Messiah is called “his [God's] Anointed.”

In Luke 4, Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 about Himself –

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.
-Luke 4:18-19**

In these New Covenant/ Testament days, when a person becomes a believer, God the Holy Spirit takes up residence in their heart, and they go forth to use their spiritual gifts in ministry for Jesus.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as[a] the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. -John 7:37-39

Now that Jesus has been glorified and returned to Heaven, when someone turns to Christ in belief they are born again, and the Holy Spirit indwells them.

Look up 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 and fill in the missing blanks:

And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has _____ us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a _____. -2 Cor. 1:21-22

This understanding squares perfectly with the CONTEXT of the passage we are in. Around us are false teachers, 'little a' antichrists who depart from the truth of the Scripture and bring forth lies based on what they think rather than the Word of God.

In verse 21, the Apostle John reminds Christians that they know the truth, and they know that no lie is of the truth. The Holy Spirit inside of them makes them resonate with the truths of the Bible and reject lies that comes from false teachers. Jesus had identified this as one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in John's gospel.

Look up and write down John 15:26 here:

I am so thankful that God the Holy Spirit is inside us as true believers and helps us distinguish between biblical truth and the error of false teachers.

John ends this section by giving two specific examples of false teaching.

Yesterday we saw from verse 22 that denying that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah (Christ) is false teaching. In the eyes of Christians Jesus is Israel's true Messiah and needs to be received as such. We pray for our Jewish friends to receive Jesus as Israel's Messiah and the Savior of the World, the One who has and will fulfill ALL the Old Testament prophecies.

In verse 23 John identifies another false teaching. Sum it up in your own words below:

Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses are among those who deny the full biblical teaching about Jesus. John the Apostle makes clear that to deny either Jesus full deity or his full humanity is false teaching coming from the spirit of antichrist.

I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins. -John 8:24

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. -John 14:6

As you pray today, thank God for putting His Holy Spirit inside of you at salvation!

Day 10- Read 1 John 2:24-27

So far in 1 John we have seen John the Apostle reaffirm that the only way anyone becomes and stays a Christian is through belief in Jesus and relying on what He did for them on the cross.

We have also seen John give something similar to a “car inspection” to believers to evaluate how we are doing, Should we happen to be failing in any of the areas, we need to prioritize getting that area straightened up with the Lord’s help.

The areas of inspection John has covered so far are:

1. Having a 100% commitment to God’s Biblical commands.
2. Dealing with sins as they come through confession to Jesus.
3. Having a commitment to following Jesus’ example as we obey those commands.
4. Loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, and dealing with any hate in our heart.
5. Not loving the world system characterized by the lust of the flesh, eyes, and the pride of life.
6. Identifying and rejecting false teachers and false teaching with our God given resources.

Which areas in your life above are true struggles for you? Write the number(s) below:

If going over that discouraged you some, remember the promise John gave in I John 1:9. Go ahead and confess what you are struggling with now and receive His forgiveness afresh! Remember that God’s purposes in all of His commands is to help you experience the fullness of abundant and eternal life with Him! And that’s what today’s passage reinforces!

Look through verses 24-27 again, this time counting the number of times some form of the word “abide” occurs.

How many occurrences of the word “abide” did you count? _____

Hint: there are 3 in verse 24, 0 in verses 25-26, and 2 in verse 27.

The Word “abide” means to “live in,” or “dwell.”

These verses are both a challenge and a promise!

John has been going over basics about believing in Jesus and developing your personal relationship with Him. If you are doing it right, you will follow Jesus' example and be characterized by love.

Look at his fun challenge in verse 24: Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

Verse 25 states the promise that He has promised us is eternal life.

How would you define eternal life?

Now look up John 17:3 to see how Jesus Himself defined eternal life. Fill in the blanks:

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

It is probable that your definition of eternal life above focused in on getting to spend eternity with God in Heaven instead of Hell. It certainly does include that. But too many people stop there, with what I would call a transactional understanding of eternal life. The problem with stopping there is it misses the main way Jesus views eternal life. To Jesus, having eternal life means having a transformational relationship with the Triune God that grows and grows as we abide in Him. Do not settle for anything less!

Now according to verse 27, what will fuel this growing, abiding relationship with God the Father and God the Son?

The anointing from Him that abides in us already. And WHO is that referring to?

God the H_____ S_____.

Did you catch that? As we continue to abide in the basics we learned as a new believer, God the Holy Spirit abiding WITHIN us will help us grow in the abiding relationship we have with God the Father and Son ABOVE us in Heaven. That is so awesome!

One Puritan's tombstone read, "Heaven was in him, before he was in Heaven!"

That's what I want others to say about me because my love for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was so evident. As you pray today, make that your ambition as well!

Day 11- Read 1 John 2:28 to 3:3

These verses are a wonderful interlude in 1 John reminding believers that we are children of God, and based on that wonderful truth, John gives us a challenge, a reminder of our privileged position, and a promise to inspire us.

As for the comparison we have been making in 1 John to a car inspection, there really won't be any new items for our inspection to consider in the second half of 1 John, just repetition of the basics that are expected of us as children of God.

Look up John 1:12 and write down how it says we become a child of God –

When you and I believed in Jesus and prayed to receive Him, we became a child of God! That we are children of God through faith in Jesus is one of John's favorite themes. The word children as in 'being a child of God' occurs 13 times in this letter. We have already seen it in 2:1, 12, 13, 18, and 28. It also occurs at 3:1, 2, 7, 10, 18, 4:4, 5:2, and 21. Only Matthew's gospel (with 19 occurrences), and Luke's gospel (with 16 occurrences) has the word more. But certainly 1 John has the greatest density of occurrences, with it appearing once out of every eight verses!

Now if I am a child of God through faith in Jesus and you are a child of God through faith in Jesus, what does that make our relationship to each other?

My parents had four children. My two sisters and one brother are siblings! Every time someone receives Jesus as their Savior, they are children of their heavenly Father with lots of brothers and sisters in Christ! We are cousins of everyone who ever lived going back to Adam and Eve, but we are brothers and sisters of those who are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Not surprisingly, the word "brother" is also one of John's favorite words in 1 John. We have already seen it in 2:9, 10, and 11. It also occurs at 3:10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 4:20, 21, and 5:16. That makes a total of 13 times, just like the word children.

The word "Beloved" occurs another 1 time at 2:7. That means that one out of 6 verses in 1 John has the word brother or brethren in it. Whatever else goes through your mind as you read and study 1 John, remember that if you have received Christ you are a child of God with lots of brothers and sisters in Christ!

Now let's take a closer look at the challenge John gives in 1 John 2:28-29.

According to verse 28, what does John want us to have when Christ appears to us?

Was there ever a time you were waiting for your parents to get home, and when they walked in they caught you doing something wrong? You probably felt ashamed in that moment! Likewise, there probably was a time your parents came home and you were doing something good and helpful for the household. You had no fear in that moment, but were confident that finding you doing what was asked would bring a smile to your parents as they walked through the door!

That is what John is getting us to think about in verse 28-29. The challenge is to do the right things (the righteous things) a child of God would do as they wait for Jesus to appear! John is reminding us of the truths he heard Jesus teach in places like Matthew 25, when Jesus taught the Parable of the Wise & Foolish Virgins and the Parable of the Talents.

Now let's take a closer look at the Privilege John reminds us of in 1 John 3:1.

According to 1 John 3:1, what kind of love has been bestowed on us?

The Apostle John was probably over 90 years old when he wrote 1 John, but he still can't get over how much Jesus loves him and that he had been included in God's family. John knew that the antichrist world system mocked him and other believers for talking about God's love all the time, but "redeeming love had been his theme, and would be 'til he dies!" And after!

John was not alone in feeling that way! Fill in the missing blanks from I Peter 1:8 here –

Though you have not seen him, you _____ him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with _____ that is inexpressible and filled with glory
-I Peter 1:8

Peter was probably in his 60's when he wrote that. I hope that whatever age you are, you always keep in mind the privilege you have to be loved by Jesus. We love Him back because He first loved us! And as the hymn says, "Redeeming love has been our theme, and shall be 'til we die!"

Now let's take a closer look at the inspiring promise in 1 John 3:2-3.

According to 1 John 3:3, what will happen when Jesus appears and we see Him as He is:

When Jesus comes to get His church at the Rapture, we will be instantly transformed into the perfect us He intends us to be!

What a promise! Right now we struggle to live out our faith consistently, often needing to revisit I John 1:9. But in an instant, when Jesus appears, we will be like Him! Keep that hope before you, brothers and sisters, and it will purify you to want God's best for your life now! Pray the promise of 1 John 3:2-3 back to the Lord now!

Day 12- Read 1 John 3:4-9

As we said yesterday, from here until the end of 1 John we don't really get any new expectations spelled out for us. But John does emphatically go back over what he has already told us is expected of believers.

Look up and write down 1 John 2:1 here –

We always need to remember twin New Testament teachings:

First, the only reason anyone is a child of God and going to Heaven is through faith in God's grace poured out to the believer through what Jesus did on the cross. No action of ours got us saved or keeps us saved! Only faith in Jesus does that! Second, the goal of every believer is to be done with sin in their life. There is no excuse ever for believers to sin, and we need to fight against indwelling sin with every fiber of our being.

The Apostle Paul deals with these twin truths comprehensively in the first 8 chapters of the Book of Romans. Fill in the missing blanks from Romans 5:20 to 6:2 here –

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, _____ abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life _____ Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By _____! How can we who died to sin still live in it? _____
-Romans 5:20-6:2

How indeed? Yet as Paul goes over in Romans chapter 7, he personally as a believer many times had done the sins he no longer wanted to do as a believer, and did not always do the righteous deeds he wanted to do as a believer (see Romans 7:15-17). He states in Romans 7:16 that his failure to do what the law of God asks for had shown that the law is perfectly good in a way that Paul is not! And in Romans 7:17 Paul states that when he falls short of obeying God it is because he has given in to the remaining old sin nature that believers must fight in this lifetime.

Paul in his teaching describes the law of God in two ways –

First, as the perfect description of the heart of God, the law shows us what living perfectly would look like. The fact that we fall short of 100% obedience to it shows how badly we need Jesus to save us! He is the only one who ever gave 100 % obedience to the expectations of God.

Second, once we become believers, the same law we fall short of becomes the standard we strive for by faith. We don't do that to save us, but to experience as much of God's best as much as we can before we go to Heaven.

The struggle in Romans 7 makes what Paul says in Romans 8:1 all the more beautiful –

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus! -Romans 8:1

Sounds a lot like 1 John 2:1! Back in 1 John 3:4-9, the text describes what the Devil and the old nature wants you and I to do, and what Jesus and the new nature demands of us.

Go through verses 4-9 and write in what the 2 natures want for you:

(Verse)	The Devil wants you to:	The Lord wants you to:
(4)	To Commit sin and _____	To obey God
(6)	SIN!	Abide in Him and not _____
(7)	Be unrighteous	Practice _____
(8)	Do the works of the Devil	Destroy the works of the Devil
(9)	SIN!	NOT _____

The strong words in this passage tell us that our objective as believers must be to turn from doing sinful deeds to doing godly deeds through faith in Jesus Christ.

If there is no evidence that we are turning from living in sin to living as children of God, it may very well be because we don't really know Jesus (verse 6) because we have not been born of God (verse 9). If that is you, turn to Jesus for salvation now, using the prayer from Day 3!

For the rest of us, that brings us right back to 1 John as being like a car inspection. Some of us reading this right now would get a FAIL sticker in our inspection. The car can drive, but has problems that must be addressed!

Remember the context of 1 John! When the Holy Spirit's inspection reminds us of where we are in sin against the Lord, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One (2:1). As we confess our sin to Him, He forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness!

Cars need regular maintenance and oil changes, and our lives need times of cleansing from sin. As we close today, confess any sin that is messing you up, and receive Christ's forgiveness and cleansing! Don't miss out on God's best for your life by letting that sin continue to mess you up!

Day 13- Read 1 John 3:10-15

In an earlier entry I stated that the word ‘brother’ occurs 13 times in 1 John. Five of those occurrences are in the 6 verses we are looking at today.

We have already seen that a key indicator of how we are doing as a follower of Jesus Christ is that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Apostle John bears down on that theme today.

Verse Ten does not mince any words. There are children of God, and children of the Devil. The reality is that until we are born again and become children of God, we are in fact children of the Devil.

The word redeem means ‘to buy back.’ When He shed His blood on the cross, Jesus paid the price to buy back all those that God foreknew would receive His salvation offer. Salvation transfers us out of Satan’s domain and into the family of God.

Look up and fill in the missing blanks from Colossians 1:13-14 here –

He has _____ us from the domain of darkness and _____ us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have _____, the forgiveness of sins.

-Colossians 1:13-14

The entire world can be divided up into children of Satan and those who have responded to God’s call to become children of God. The word church essentially means “the called out ones.”

According to 1 John 3:10, what are the two ways that manifest the difference between children of God and children of Satan:

Children of God are to be known for their commitment to do the right things the Bible calls for, the "righteous" things the Bible calls for, and to love their Christian brothers and sisters as they also do righteous things. It actually becomes fun to do righteous things together for the Lord.

This takes us back to 1 John 1:7, that said that if we walk in the light as Jesus is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. When I do what the Bible says, and you do what the Bible says, we can lovingly support each other as we do what the Bible says.

John brings up Cain and Abel from Genesis chapter four. When we look back there, we see that both brought an offering to the Lord. The text makes clear that Abel brought forth what God said to bring forth as an offering from the best of what he had to offer. In contrast, Cain brought a different offering than the Lord had asked for from his leftovers. Abel was commended for bringing an offering that pleased God, and Cain was judged for his evil offering.

Instead of learning the right thing to do from this experience, Cain resented his brother Abel and murdered him. The Apostle John brings that incident up as an example of the OPPOSITE of loving your brother.

In verse 13, John states emphatically that it should not surprise believers that an unbelieving world that does not do what God says hates believers who do what God says. We are a constant reminder to them that they refuse to believe and do what God says.

But that's why verse 14 is so important!

According to verses 14-15, from whom should believers who want to do what God says find loving support and encouragement. Circle the best answer:

Other Believers

OR

Non-believers

Based on my own time in churches over the years, John's words are incredibly important. I have seen many times when churchgoers who may or may not be Christians show resentment and mockery toward serious believers who love Jesus and want to do what the Bible calls for. According to these verses, those churchgoers are not loving their brothers and have serious issues to address in being followers of Jesus. Some are not followers of Jesus at all, but love the world just like Cain did.

Besides each statement below, write 'T' for True, or 'F' for False in the blank:

True believers want to obey the teachings they find in the Bible _____

Non-believers want to obey the teachings of the Bible _____

Obedient believers should expect non-believers to support and encourage them _____

Believers should love and support other believers they see doing the right thing _____

As you pray today, ask God for help being a believer who does what the Bible says. And commit to loving, encouraging, and supporting other believers as they do what God says in a world that shows contempt for those of us who follow Jesus!

Day 14- Read 1 John 3:16-18

Did you know that the Bible has two “John 3:16’s?” There is John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16.

See if you can complete John 3:16 here by memory (look it up if you need to):

For God so loved _____

John 3:16 tells us what God’s love for us looks like. The “other” John 3:16, 1 John 3:16, encourages us to love others like Jesus has loved us!

Since Jesus laid down His life for us, what are we to do in relationship to other believers?

If you are part of a family, you probably at some point have said you love your family members so much that you would lay down your life for them. We are also thankful for those of you who served in one of the Armed Forces protecting our freedoms. In the act of signing up you were acknowledging that you would be willing to give up your life if it meant defending others.

**What does John 15:13 call the kind of love that would lay down one’s life for his friends?
Hint: it starts with the letter ‘g.’**

When I think of how a person with ‘greater love’ would lay down their lives for their friends, I immediately think of Jesus’ death on the cross for my sins. I also think of the inspiring acts of sacrifice that we celebrate on days like Memorial Day. I also think of Christian martyrs down through the centuries who were murdered as they took the gospel to hostile places.

Even though I think of those ultimate sacrifices when I hear the phrase “lay down your life,” I can’t help but also think of it as a call to act in unselfish ways that put others before myself.

When I “lay down” 5 hours of my time on my day off to help someone move, I have laid down my life for the good of others. When I feel God speaking to me about giving someone a tangible financial gift or gift card to meet their need, I have laid down the ways I could have used that money on myself to benefit them.

Any time I use my time or resources in service to others in Jesus’ name, I have laid down my life for the brethren.

I think verse 17 makes clear that when John speaks of laying down one's life like Jesus, he is not just speaking of dying for another, but living to do other's good.

From verse 17, what's the opposite of "shutting up" your heart from someone in need?

If we love God, we will open our hearts to those around us in need. According to verse 17, if I see a fellow Christian in need and have the resources to meet that need, what should I do?

In verse 18 John makes clear he expects our love for others to be both practical and tangible. It is simply not enough to say or text someone that you love them. We must show our love for them by deeds that address their needs.

I really like how the Apostle Paul says it in Titus 3:14 look it up and write it here –

Now you may have noticed that John is specifically calling for us to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. You may be wondering about the ministry we do beyond the body of Christ that may include helping people who aren't Christians. Obviously John and his fellow apostles saw Christ applying the concept of brotherly love to those who were not yet believers. It may be that ministry to them actually helps them become believers!

Since most of us have limited resource, the apostle's help us understand that we are called to help others in concentric circles.

First, we are called to take care of the needs of our immediate families.

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. -I Timothy 5:8

Second, we are called to see and meet needs within our church family.

Third, as able we are called to see and meets other needs in our community and world.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. -Galatians 6:10

As you pray today, ask God for His help in identifying which needs around you He would have you practically meet, showing your love for God and others!

Day 15- Read 1 John 3:18-23

I find today's verses among the most encouraging in 1 John. Yesterday we saw that if we love God, we will use the resources God has entrusted to us to meet the urgent needs that those around us have. Anyone can speak empty words about how much they love God and other people. True love is shown when we act to help others in Jesus' name.

According to verse 19, there are Two benefits Christians who love others in deed have. Fill in the missing blanks from verse 19 to see what those benefits are –

By this we shall _____ that we are of the truth,

And _____ our heart before Him.

Knowledge and assurance that we are saved are such precious possessions! Many people who wonder if they are really saved get really anxious about whether they believed correctly on the day in the past that they prayed to receive Christ.

The Bible speaks of knowledge and assurance differently. The Bible places the emphasis on belief right now, in the present tense. If you believe in Jesus right now, you are a believer, regardless of whether you fully understood when you started believing back then. The question is not "Did you believe, but DO you believe?"

For those who pass the present tense belief test, the Bible urges a "fruit" inspection to see if your present tense belief in Jesus is leading to loving others in His name. The question is not "did you really believe then" but "Do you believe in Jesus now with all your heart, and are you trying to love others as you have been loved by Christ?" If the answer is even a shaky yes, then you should have knowledge and assurance of your salvation.

Now at this point John the Apostle shows the skills he had obtained as a Pastor over the years. He knows that some of his more tender hearted Christian readers were going to really be beating themselves up over whether they really believe in Jesus and love others.

As a Pastor I have seen often that some people who don't doubt their salvation probably should, and I have seen wonderful Christians who shouldn't doubt their salvation but do. People are very different, and their personalities are very different.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, the Apostle Paul spoke of what to do with several kinds of people:

Admonish the IDLE

Encourage the FAINTHEARTED

Help the WEAK

Be Patient with them ALL

Perhaps you are among those who are fainthearted or weak. Notice Paul tells the Thessalonian church to deal with the people in different ways based on their situations. Warnings were

prescribed for those who were defiant toward God's commands. Comfort and upholding were prescribed for those who agreed with God's commands, but struggled to obey, and whose own tender hearts were constantly condemning them (to borrow the wording of 1 John 3:20).

According to 1 John 3:20, WHO is greater than our heart that condemns us?

According to 1 John 3:20, what does God know about us?

I love what John appears to be saying to struggling believers here. John is saying, "Whose verdict of you are you going to accept about you – God who knows everything about you or yourself with your partial understanding of yourself?"

We are not to follow our own deceitful hearts that are constantly being accused by the Evil One. Jeremiah 17:9 says our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Revelation 12:10 names Satan the "accuser of our brothers."

One of the keys for believers to having knowledge and assurance of their salvation is to accept God's verdict of them as His child, and keep on focusing on doing those things which are pleasing in God's sight. When your heart does condemn you don't forget that back in 1 John 1:9-2:1 John has already told us how to get forgiven and cleansed of the sins we commit as believers. Part of our obedience is getting back on track after we have been disobedient! It is progress, not perfection, that defines the true believer!

And that leads us to verse 24, which wonderfully clarifies what God means when He says to keep His commandments. Write 1 John 3:23 here –

The normal Christian life for most of us is love for Jesus but frustration that so much selfish, sinful behavior remains in our life. I love that John sums up all that we are commanded to do as believers under the words BELIEVE and LOVE.

I can do that for Jesus! I want to do that for Jesus! I believe in Him, and I want to love others in His name with the resources He has entrusted to me. Since all of His other commands fit under the category of proper ways to believe in Him and love others, I will embrace them and keep up the good fight against my own sin and selfishness! As you pray today, tell God you believe in Him and will love others in His name! Accept His verdict of you as being His child!

Day 16- Read 1 John 3:24 – 4:6

In today's passage John reminds us of the power source God has given believers to remember and apply the Bible in their lives – the indwelling Holy Spirit of God!

Look up and draw a line from each verse below to the truth it shares about the Holy Spirit:

- John 7:38-39 The Spirit of Truth testifies about Jesus
- John 15:26 The Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come
- John 16:7-8 Believers receive the Spirit, which is like having living water within
- John 16:13-14 The Spirit of God dwells in true believers
- Romans 8:9 The Spirit of promise seals believers, and guarantees their inheritance
- I Corinthians 2:12 The body of the believer has become a Temple of the Holy Spirit
- I Corinthians 6:19 The Spirit of Truth guides us into all truth
- Ephesians 1:13-14 The Spirit from God helps us know what God has freely given to us

What rich and wonderful truths about the Holy Spirit! Thank God that when Jesus ascended to Heaven He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and help them remember and apply the Bible! It makes me think about the earpiece that Secret Service agents have. As they scan an arena in front of them, someone in a control room with access to cameras mounted above the arena is able to feed information to the agent that he or she can use based on their training.

The Holy Spirit does that for us. He speaks things in our ears. He says, "What you just heard taught about Jesus isn't true – remember what John 1:1 said!" He says, "Stop and help that person over there the way that Jesus stopped and helped people." He says, "Being at this party is going to get you into trouble – let's flee from here!" What a great resource – God living in us!

Earlier in 1 John 1:18 we learned that there are many antichrists in the world, false teachers who declare things to be true that do not agree with what the Bible teaches. Here in 1 John 4:1 we learn that those antichrist teachers and "do-ers" are energized by spirits that are not from God.

Angels are spirits that worship and serve God and minister to people (Hebrews 1:14). Demons are rebellious spirits that joined Satan's rebellion and will one day be in the Lake of Fire (Matthew 25:41). These demonic spirits work through false teachers to deceive people the way Satan himself deceived Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3.

In 1 John 4:1, what does the Apostle John say believers are to do with the spirits:

Basically, we as Christians are not to believe everything we hear taught, but we are to “test” what we hear by the truths of the Bible. A group that modeled this very well were the people that lived in Berea. When they heard Paul preach in Acts 17, they wanted to make sure what he taught was Biblical. Fill in the missing blanks from Acts 17:11 here –

Now these Jews were more _____ than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, _____ the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.
-Acts 17:11

The Bereans took what they were hearing and made sure what they were hearing was what the Bible taught. The Bible’s truth about Jesus led them to believe in Him and be saved!

Back in 1 John 4:2-3, John gives them an example of false teaching. Some false teachers taught that Jesus had not really become a human at all. They probably believed the Greek philosophers who had taught that human flesh is inherently evil. They taught their conclusion, which was that God could not have been in a human body without sinning.

But back in John’s gospel we read in John 1:14 that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” All the apostles taught the same thing – that Jesus was fully God and became fully human without diminishing His deity. (See Philippians 2:5-11). The virgin birth had guaranteed that although He was fully human, the sin nature that has passed to each generation through Adam’s seed did not pass to Him. He was a “second Adam.” He was fully human, but born without the sin nature we all inherit at birth.

John makes clear in these verses that anything taught that doesn’t agree with the Bible is false teaching, and anyone doing that teaching is a false teacher. We are not to agree with statements that disagree with the Bible, no matter how likeable the false teacher is!

John makes clear that the Holy Spirit who lives in the true believer will help believers spot false teaching that does not square with the Bible and reject it as the spirit of error. Always remember that God the Holy Spirit indwells you. Satan and his demons are working in this world, but they are no match for the Holy Spirit who lives within us!

Write out 1 John 4:4 here –

I love the places John calls believers overcomers! Here he teaches that believers are already overcomers because they have God the Holy Spirit living within them. As you pray today, thank God the Holy Spirit for living within you and guiding you into all the truth of the Bible!

Day 17- Read 1 John 4:7-11

Believe in Jesus and love others as Jesus has loved you!

Believe in Jesus and love others as Jesus has loved you!

Believe in Jesus and love others as Jesus has loved you!

Back in 1 John 3:23, John summed up what it means to obey God's command: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

In school our teachers often said, "Repetition is the mother of all learning."

We repeat things to get them properly placed in our heads and hearts until they show in our actions and life. In the last passage John repeated the necessity of believing rightly in Jesus. In today's passage he repeats the importance of loving one another as Jesus loved us!

How are you doing?

Are the thoughts of believing rightly and loving fervently locked into your head?

On the scale of 1 to 10 below, with 10 being 100% committed, circle how much you believe in Jesus –

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On the scale of 1 to 10 below, with 10 being 100% committed, circle how much you are actively loving others in the name of Jesus –

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If you are like me, you probably had no problem circling 10 on the first one, but struggled a little going all the way to 10 with the second.

That reminds me of the rhyme...

Oh to dwell with saints above, that will be such glory.

But alas, to dwell with saints below, now that's another story!

For most Christians, it is easier to circle 10 on the first question, but if we honestly answer the second question we don't come close to a 10 – not if we are passionate about loving others as Christ loved us! Sounds like a good time for another refresher, which is what 1 John 4:7-11 is.

What does 1 John 4:8 explicitly say that God is?

God is _____

That is worth stopping and considering!

My wife knows I love her and would say that I love her, but I am confident she would never say “Danny IS love.” I do love her and do loving actions to show it. But you and I fall well short of the 100% pure love that this verse shares about God when it says, “God is love.”

How does 1 John 4:9-10 say that God’s love was made manifest toward us?

Sometimes when we are struggling we fickle humans question whether God is really there and really cares about us. Never forget that the question of God’s love for every human who has ever lived was settled on the cross. Perfect love was crucified on the cross so perfect love could be manifested to all who would recognize their need and receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

John brings the perfect conclusion in 1 John 4:11 – write it here –

What is one word you would use to describe the kind of love John is calling for?

The word that comes to my mind is the word sacrificial. If I love others like Jesus loves me, I will not hesitate to sacrifice time and resources to minister to them. As you pray today, use the word you used to pray that just as Jesus modeled that love for you, you will pass it on to others.

Day 18- Read 1 John 4:12-16

Our passage today begins with a statement we need to make sense of.

John begins verse 12 by saying “No one has ever seen God.” Since John the Apostle had walked with Jesus for several years, some false teachers may conclude that John did not believe that Jesus is God. But one clear principle of Bible reading is that the Scriptures help us interpret the Scriptures. And the writings of John make clear that he thought Jesus is God.

Besides the verse below, draw a line to the way it teaches that Jesus is God.

- John 1:1-3 Jesus the Word is God and created all things.
- John 8:24 Jesus stated that He and the Father shared glory before the world was.
- John 10:30 Jesus stated that He and the Father were One.
- John 10:33 Jesus said, “Unless you believe that I Am, you will die in your sins.”
- John 17:5 The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming to be God

Not only did John repeatedly refer to Jesus being part of the God-head in John’s gospel, but he does in 1 John as well.

Write 1 John 5:20 here, where John identifies Jesus the Son of God as the True God –

So in 1 John 4:12, when John says no one has ever seen God, he is excluding the 33 years that God the Son Jesus had been on the earth.

Jesus Himself had said in John 4:24, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

I Timothy 1:17 says that God the King is “immortal, invisible, the only God.”

Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God.”

Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”

In John 14:9 Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

The present reality of everyone John was writing to then and now is that we have not seen God physically. The rest of our passage speaks about how they can show their love for God even though He is not physically present with them.

In verse 13 John reminds us that even though we can't see God physically, He has put His Holy Spirit inside of us, helping us perfect God's love for us by demonstrating love for one another!

You will remember from 1 John 3:23 that God's commands can be summed up by the words believe and love.

We are to believe right things about Jesus and love others as Jesus has loved us.

Believing right things about Jesus is orthodoxy – correct belief.

Loving others as Jesus has loved us is orthopraxy – correct practice.

Earlier in 1 John 4:2-3 we saw that it is false teaching to say that Jesus was not fully human. Jesus called Himself the Son of Man often. We must reject false teaching that says Jesus did not come in the flesh. We must affirm that Jesus did come in the flesh and was fully human.

What correct doctrine does John say we must confess in verse 15?

True believers affirm that Jesus is BOTH fully God and fully man. As the Son of God, or we could say God the Son, He created all things and holds them together (Colossians 1:15-17). He became the Son of Man when He was born of the virgin Mary. His perfect human life made Him able to be the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).”

I really like verse 16 – WE who are true believers have known and believed the love that God has for us, and we abide in that love, we abide in God, even though we can't see Him – YET!

Peter does something similar in I Peter 1:6-9 as he encourages believers as they await Jesus' visible return.

Fill in the blanks from I Peter 1:6-9 here –

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the _____ of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you _____ him. Though you do not now _____ him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the _____ of your souls. -I Peter 1:6-9

As you pray today, ask God to help you show your love for the God you can't see by loving the people around you who you can see!

Day 19- Read 1 John 4:17-19

Earlier in this study, several times we have compared reading 1 John to a car inspection. But think about it – you don’t just want to pass inspection, meaning you meet the minimum requirements to be out on the road. You want to have confidence that you are functioning exactly the way God saved you to function! That’s what John addresses with us in this passage!

The word translated as confidence in verse 17 is the Greek word *parresia* (Strong’s 2192). It carries the idea of feeling ‘free to speak.’

Fill in the missing blanks in the following verses –

Since we have such a hope, we are very _____. -2 Corinthians 3:12

Let us then with confidence (*parresia*) draw near to the throne of grace, that we may _____ mercy and _____ grace to help in time of need. -Hebrews 4:16

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence (*parresia*) to _____ the holy places by the blood of Jesus -Hebrews 10:19

Therefore do not throw away your confidence (*parresia*), which has a great _____ -Hebrews 10:35

There are four occurrences of confidence in 1 John. Back in 1 John 2:28 we read that if we abide in Jesus, we may have confidence instead of shame when He comes. In 3:21 we read that if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. In 5:14 we are told that we can be confident as God’s children that God will hear our prayers!

Here in 1 John 4:17 John writes that we can know God’s love has done its perfect job in us when we no longer fear the Day of Judgment. Believers in Jesus can have confidence that God will keep all the promises He has made to them.

Notice at the end of verse 17, John moves from the believer’s confidence on the Day of Judgment back to the present day and says, “because as he is so also are we in this world.”

The saying there is somewhat difficult to understand, but I think the Apostle John is referring in the most basic of ways to how Christ is presently working on earth through us as His body.

Look up and write down Galatians 2:20 here:

I love the ramifications of this confidence believers are called to have in verse 18 – we can serve God through love, not fear.

Hebrews 2:15 says that non-believers are in lifetime bondage because of their fear of death; Hebrews 9:27 says that after death non-believers will face judgment. Based on Revelation 20:11-15 we refer to this as the Great White Throne Judgment. After non-believers are judged there, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:15 says that believers, whose names are in God's Book of Life, will not be subject to that judgment and will not go to Hell.

I Corinthians 3:11-15 speaks of the judgment believers will be judged at, Christ's Bema Seat judgment. It is called that because of the Greek word for judgment seat in Romans 14:10. It was a raised platform that men like Pilate used to judge Jesus, but also was used of where the judges sat that gave out rewards at the end of an athletic contest.

For the Christian, there is no punishment involved in that judgment. At that judgment Jesus Christ will reveal what each believer has done for Him, and they will be rewarded! Believers should be motivated out of love for Christ to do what He will reward on that Day of Reward. Believers need not fear the Day of Punishment reserved for non-believers who refuse Christ's offer of salvation.

According to 1 John 4:17, what does perfect love cast out?

You may recall that the Bible calls for the fear of God, but here says that perfect love casts out fear. There is no contradiction here! Everyone's spiritual journey should begin with the proper fear of God.

The proper fear of God acknowledges that God is Holy and would be perfectly right to judge us as the rebellious sinners that we are. That 'fear' caused us to humble ourselves before God and ask Him to save us. Then we understood that because of His great love God the Father sent His beloved Son Jesus to take the punishment due our sins (John 3:16). Those who believe in and receive Jesus have the wrath of God due their sins diverted to the cross. Those who neither fear God nor embrace Jesus still have the wrath of God abiding on them (John 3:36).

God did not save us so we would fear Him but so that we would love Him, the very thing which we were originally created to do! I love 1 John 4:19 – We love Him (back) because He first loved us. It makes we want to sing, "He loves me, yeah, yeah, yeah!"

As you pray today, thank God that He saved you for a purpose – to love Him back for His great love for you, and to love others in His name. If this 'inspection' has revealed any residual fear of judgment in your life, go to 1 John 1:9 and use it to confess fear and any other sin you need to. Then confidently receive His forgiveness and go forward in faith!

Day 20- Read 1 John 4:20-21

Here John goes again! Once again John the Apostle reiterates that true love for God will be seen in love for our Christian brothers and sisters.

What does John call anyone who says they love God but hates a fellow Christian?

If you and I say that we love God, but refuse to love any fellow believer, John says that we are lying about our love for God.

What are some examples that you have seen of someone saying they love Jesus but showing hateful contempt for other believers?

Take a moment to pray that you won't be guilty of any of those examples of 'hating' fellow Christians.

Take a moment to pray for any professing Christian you know that is guilty of 'hate crimes' in the church like gossip, slander, making fun of people, putting others down, unforgiveness, intolerance in matters of personal preference, racism, sexual inappropriateness, dishonoring the elderly, scorn for young people, disrespect for the poor (or the rich), etc...

Sometimes to get all you can out of a verse, it is helpful to mediate on it and think through what it means.

In the second part of verse 20 John explicitly says that he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot really love God whom he has not seen. Let's flip that around...

From verse 20, how does John indicate we can love the God who we have not seen?

By loving his _____

In Matthew 25:34-40, Jesus gave specific examples of what that kind of love for Jesus looks like as it is expressed toward God's people.

Write down at least three of the six examples of ministering to Jesus by ministering to God's people listed in Matthew 25:35-36 –

Up above we thought about some examples of professing Christians who didn't show love.

Take the time now to list a few examples you have seen of God's people showing God's love to others –

Take a moment to pray that you will imitate these examples of loving fellow Christians.

Think of one person from above that you have seen loving Jesus by loving others. When you get a chance, contact them and let them know that their example of showing Christ's love has inspired you to do it more in your own life!

Never forget: Our love for others in the body of Christ and beyond makes Jesus Christ visible to the world!

Day 21- Read 1 John 5:1-5

Believe in Jesus and love other people in His name!

Believe in Jesus and love other people in His name!

Believe in Jesus and love other people in His name!

The Apostle John relentlessly returns to those truths in his letter to believers in 1 John.

Back in I John 3:23 John made clear that the call to obey God's commandments is summed up by belief in Jesus and loving others as He loved us. Everything we are called to believe and act on as believers tucks back under those items. For instance, you and I are called to be sexually pure so that we express proper love toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When a teenage boy is dating a teenage girl, he is dating someone's future wife. If the Christian teenage boy dates her correctly, her future husband will be able to shake his hand one day, thanking him for treating her rightly and purely and not creating any baggage for her that would carry over into marriage.

That teen boy has thus loved his Christian sister, who he dated but did not marry, by treating her right for Jesus. That teen boy has thus loved his future Christian brother, the one she does marry, by not taking from her what was intended by God to wait for marriage.

In 1 John 5:1 the Apostle repeats God's call to believe and love in a creative way.

According to 1 John 5:1a, what happens to a person who believes in Jesus?

John is referring to being born again, the new birth believers experience when they believe.

You may remember the wonderful exchange Jesus had with Nicodemus in John chapter 3. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews, probably a member of the Sanhedrin. This is the group that later in John's gospel put Jesus on trial.

This very important man (VIP) came to see Jesus at night, perhaps afraid of what his fellow rulers would think of him for talking with the Man that had caused quite a stir in Jerusalem. Everyone was talking about the miracles Jesus had done and His cleansing of the Temple. Nicodemus wanted Jesus to know that he was impressed with Jesus. Jesus ignored the flattery though, and used the opportunity to show Nicodemus his spiritual need.

According to John 3:3, what does Jesus say needs to happen for a person to go to Heaven:

They must be born _____.

I have met people that claim to be Christians, but who almost proudly say, “but we’re not the born again kind.” According to Jesus, though, there is no such thing as being a Christian and going to Heaven if you have not been born again.

Nicodemus immediately asks how a grown person can be born a second time. In Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus, we find a beautiful explanation of what needs to happen to any person who wants to go to Heaven.

Finish the statement after looking at verse 5:

To enter God’s kingdom a person has to be born of water AND born of the _____.

Before a woman gives birth, we speak of her water breaking. For 9 months the baby has been in a sac of fluid, and at birth the baby and the fluid comes gushing out together. Jesus is referring to our physical birth here. That has happened to everyone. But NOT everyone has had a spiritual birth. Thus to go to Heaven we have to be born again, or born of the Spirit.

It may help us understand these two concepts if we lay them on top of each other:

Physical birth = Born of water = Dead in sin = Hell-bound

Spiritual birth = Born of Spirit = Alive in Christ = Heaven-bound

When you believed in Jesus and received Him as your Lord and Savior, you were born of God, born from above, born again! That happened to me on December 16th, 1984. I did believe, I do believe, and I will believe!

John 1:12 says that those who believe in and receive Christ become children of God. They have been ‘born’ of God. The word ‘born’ we looked at in John 3:3 in the Greek language (gennaō, Strong’s 1080) is the very same word used for ‘born’ in 1 John 5:1. With that in mind, I get tickled reading the second part of 1 John 5:1b, the creative new way John repeats the command to love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

According to 1 John 5:1b, if you have been begotten by God, who should you love?

If you love the God who begot you, you will love others that God has begot. Together we will see God beget or ‘birth’ some more people who become our brothers and sisters through faith in Jesus!

Important note: the word translated ‘born, begotten, birthed’ in the verses we have looked at is related to, but not the same word used of Jesus in John 3:16 that calls Him God’s ‘only begotten son’ in the New King James Version. That Greek word is monogenēs (Strong’s 3439). It is best

translated “one of a kind,” or “only one of this kind,” combining the word for only and the word for kind (genos, S1085).

Back in 1 John 5, fill in the missing blanks from 1 John 5:4-5 –

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our _____. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who _____ that Jesus is the Son of God? -1 John 5:4-5.

What tremendous verses!

According to 1 John 5:4-5, what makes a person an overcomer of the world?

I love this because when Jesus spoke again to John in The Book of Revelation, He gave wonderful promises to those who are overcomers. According to these verses in 1 John 5, anyone who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ IS an overcomer already. Even when we feel like we are losing individual ‘battles’ in the Christian life, the ‘war’ has been won for us by Jesus- if you have believed and ‘signed up’ to follow King Jesus, you too are an overcomer!

Draw a line from the promise to overcomers to its reference from Revelation chapters 2-3.

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Rev. 2:7 | Will be clothed in white garments and listed in the Book of Life |
| Rev. 2:11 | Will receive a white stone with the nickname that Jesus has for them |
| Rev. 2:17 | Will have authority over the nations (during Christ’s 1000-year reign) |
| Rev. 2:26 | Will not be hurt by the second death (a reference to the Lake of Fire) |
| Rev. 3:5 | Will get to eat from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God |
| Rev. 3:11 | Will have a seat with Jesus in the throne room of God |
| Rev. 3:21 | Will have a crown in the kingdom of God |

What incredible promises are given to Christian overcomers!

And how do we become and stay overcomers? Faith in Jesus! The same God that saved me in the past is working in my present to use me and my fellow overcomers to advance the good news that everyone on earth can also be an overcomer by turning to Jesus! As you pray, today, give God thanks that your faith in Christ has made you an overcomer of the world!

Day 22- Read 1 John 5:6-10

In 1 John we have repeatedly seen John go back and forth between correct Christian belief (orthodoxy) and correct Christian practice (orthopraxy). Pastors like John have always been very concerned about both areas. When it comes to dealing with false teaching that departs from correct Biblical beliefs, each generation of Pastors winds up having to deal with false teachers and their teaching as they arrive on the scene. In our passage for today, John is probably dealing with false teaching that was making the rounds among those who first received this letter.

Yesterday we ended by seeing from 1 John 5:5 that true born again believers have come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. They have come to believe that Jesus is God the Son, One with the Father, Creator of all, Second Person of the Trinity. He did not start to exist when He was born of the Virgin Mary. He had always existed as the divine Son of God, but stepped into time as the Son of Man so that He could save us from our sins. While on earth He did not cease to be God, but limited His use of His deity to fully identify with humankind.

Writers of the New Testament used the word ‘mystery’ as they wrote about the dynamic tension between full deity and full humanity co-existing in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Faithful Christian teachers have always affirmed Christ’s full deity and humanity as they appreciate the ‘mystery’ of how it is all possible. Unfortunately, false teachers always have wound up rejecting either Jesus as fully God or Jesus as fully man.

The False teaching John is probably dealing with went something like this – it taught that Jesus was just a man and never really God. It taught that when Jesus was baptized, “the Christ spirit” came upon Jesus and worked the miracles through him. It then taught that when Jesus was on the cross, “the Christ spirit” left Jesus and he died like any other human. It probably taught that the resurrected Christ that the disciples saw was really just this spirit. There have been variations of this heresy taught throughout the last 2000 years.

Before going into John’s refutation of that false teaching in this passage, let’s look again at what John has already taught in this letter.

According to 1 John 1:8, who are we deceiving if we say we have no sin? _____

According to 1 John 2:1, Who is the advocate for our sins? _____

According to 1 John 2:22, what are you if you deny Jesus IS the Christ? _____

According to 1 John 2:23, who must you confess to know the Father? _____

According to 1 John 3:8, who destroys the works of the Devil? _____

According to 1 John 4:3, what spirit denies Jesus Christ came in flesh? _____

According to 1 John 4:15, who must we confess IS the Son of God? _____

John is clear: It is not that Jesus ever BECAME the Christ, the Son of God; it is that the Pre-existent Son of God, the Christ, CAME to deal with our sins.

1 John 5:5-6 say that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who came by water AND blood, born witness to by the Holy Spirit.

Water here is a reference to Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, which began His public ministry (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34). All 3 members of the Triune Godhead were active at Jesus' baptism. When Jesus came out of the water after being immersed, God the Father spoke how pleased He was with His Son. God the Spirit descended from Heaven like a dove on Jesus to bear witness to Jesus. Go to John's gospel and read John 1:29-34.

In John 1:29-34 John the Baptist understood what the Spirit had done and he proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God. It is important to note that even though John the Baptist was born before Jesus was, he recognized that Jesus came before Him, a reference to Jesus deity. John the Baptist also would have scoffed at the idea of the Spirit using Jesus up until the cross and then dispensing of Jesus, because John the Baptist said that one day Jesus will baptize believers with the Spirit after He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! In other words, John the Baptist recognized the Father, Son, and Spirit as equals working together!

That's why it's so important in 1 John 5:6 that John the Apostle says that the Holy Spirit has also witnessed to the blood Christ shed on the cross for our sins! True believers cannot set aside the necessity of what God the Son did for us on the cross, shedding His blood for our sins. We affirm that Jesus came by blood also. In 1 John 1:9 we have already been told THAT blood can forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It is so neat to think that the same Holy Spirit that was with Christ at His baptism and the cross was with the Apostles as they wrote the Bible, and that the same Holy Spirit is here in the present time convicting sinners of their lost condition and pointing to who Jesus is and what He did for us all on the cross. Additionally, He indwells people when they believe and illuminates Biblical truth for God's saints.

The water, the blood, the Spirit. Verse 7 says together they bear witness. Verse 8 says they agree as one. And we are called to wholeheartedly agree with the Spirit's witness about Jesus!

According to 1 John 5:10a, if you believe in Jesus, what will you have in yourself?

You will have the Holy Spirit in yourself! He is the Witness, correct! When you believe in Jesus, you have the Witness in yourself – you have the same Holy Spirit who witnessed Christ's baptism baptize you. In other words, He will take up residence in your heart, just as Ephesians 1:13-14 promises, as well as many other passages! As you pray today, rejoice that the Witness lives within you!

Day 23- Read 1 John 5:11-13

These three verses are packed with encouragement for all who have come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior! They contain the promise that believers CAN have assurance of their salvation! That gives us all the motivation to continue to believe in Jesus!

Two very important and related words occur in yesterday and today's passage.

One is the word martyreo (Strong's 3140) and is translated in the New King James Version as 'bear witness,' 'testified' and even 'given' in verse 10.

The other is the word martyria (Strong's 3141) and is translated in the English Standard Version here as 'testimony.' It could also be translated as 'record,' 'report,' or 'evidence.'

You may see that the word looks like the English word 'Martyr.' As many early believers "witnessed" (martyreo) to the "evidence" (martyria) that had transformed their life, they were murdered by those who rejected God. The word "Martyr" became synonymous with giving one's life for the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

When we put the words together as they appear in 1 John 5:10, we see that true believers have believed the testimony that God has testified (translated given in NKJV) about His Son Jesus.

John the Apostle was himself a faithful witness to the record of what he had seen Christ do!

Look up and write down John 21:24 here:

Back in 1 John 5:11, John says the sum of the testimony believers bring is that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Those words remind me of Paul's description of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15.

Fill in the missing blanks from 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 –

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ _____ for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was _____, that he was _____ on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he _____ to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve [including John]. -1 Cor. 15:3-5

You may remember that, back in 1 John 1, John began this letter by referring to being a witness of all that Christ had done and said, "that which we have seen and heard we DECLARE to you.

According to 1 John 5:12, if you have the son of God, what do you have?

If you have Jesus as your Savior, you have life, eternal life that can NEVER be lost!

I have written a booklet entitled *99 Reasons I believe in Eternal Security*. Eternal Security is the doctrine that once a person believes on Jesus and is born again, they can NEVER lose their salvation based on God's fidelity to His own promises. One of the 99 reasons in that booklet is the very nature of eternal life. If you ever truly have eternal life, it includes from now into all of eternity. If you truly possess that today, and it includes tomorrow and every tomorrow afterward, it is impossible that you could lose that in any tomorrow!

Clearly John the Apostle wanted believers to have the assurance of their salvation!

Fill in the Missing blank from 1 John 5 :13 here –

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

John wanted believers like the ones He was writing to and believers like you and me to KNOW that having believed in Jesus, we possess eternal life, forever life with Him!

John expressed the same desire in John 20:30-31 at the end of his gospel –

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. -John 20:30-31

As you pray today, say, "Jesus, I believe in You and I love You. Thank you for the gift of eternal life with You. I will continue to believe in You and love others as You have loved me."

Day 24- Read 1 John 5:14-17

Today's passage addresses the confidence we should have as we pray to our Heavenly Father on behalf of our own true needs and the needs of others.

One of the truths I have discovered as a Pastor over the years is that people are more likely to feel loved by you if they feel that you have truly heard and understood them when they come to you with a concern. This happens when you pause whatever else you are doing, give them your undivided attention, and "listen with both ears" as they speak.

One of my greatest regrets from my younger days is being so "oft-distracted" that I did not do a better job "listening with my heart" when they came to me. My actions communicated disrespect and a lack of love even to those that I do value highly and greatly love. One of my greatest ambitions for the rest of my life is to take the time to listen to others in such a way that they feel heard, understood, and loved.

I think that is part of what John is trying to communicate to us as we think about coming to the Heavenly Father in prayer.

God loves His children so much, and actually WANTS to spend time with us!

As His children we WANT to be about that which is pleasing to Him.

As we grow in our relationship with God, we come to understand that God wants to answer our prayers "Yes," but even more than that He knows what is actually best for us. Our knowledge is limited, and we only see one piece of the overall puzzle. His knowledge is unlimited, and He sees how the one piece of our life puzzle we are dealing with goes with the overall puzzle.

There are times in our lives that the "Yes" answer we want from God would actually not be in our best interest, like forcing a puzzle piece where it will not fit! Sometimes God has to respond to our prayers with a "No" or a "Wait" answer to bring about His greater "Yes" in our lives.

"When God says 'No' to us in prayer, it is to bring about His greater 'Yes' in our lives."

-Beth Moore

According to 1 John 5:14, what is the confidence believers can have as they ask for their prayers according to what God wants (wills)?

John has already made clear that he has written so believers may know that they have eternal life and how much they are loved by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He wants us to know when we pray to our dear God, we will be heard, understood, and answered in the way that is best for us. We can trust our loving God that when He answers 'No' or 'Wait' that He is acting in our best interest.

Write here a short description of how knowing God hears, understands, and will best answer your prayers makes you feel?

For me, I feel loved and protected when I think of how God hears, understands, and answers!

According to 1 John 5:16, what should I do when I see another professing Christian in sin?

When we see another professing Christian in sin, we should immediately begin praying that they will realize they are in sin and do what John says to do in 1 John 1:9. We should pray that they will confess their sin, receive Christ's forgiveness, and try to forsake that sin going forward with all the resources God gives. This may include an accountability relationship with another Christian, such as is laid out in James 5:16 –

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. -James 5:16

Please understand that praying for a professing Christian in sin does not mean you don't need to say something to the professing Christian in sin in a desire to help them.

Fill in the missing blanks from Galatians 6:1-2 here –

Brothers, if anyone is _____ in any transgression, you who are spiritual should _____ him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. _____ one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

-Galatians 6:1-2

Now what about John's distinction between a sin which does not lead to death, and a sin which does lead to death, and his statement that we should not *necessarily* spend time in prayer for someone given over to a sin leading to death?

Let me first say that this is one of those "hard to understand" passages that we may not fully understand until we get to Heaven. Many great Bible scholars disagree about exactly how to understand what's written here. That should keep us humble and also keep us from overstating any conclusions we come to or from embracing the weird things some commentators say!

The first thing to think through is whether John is talking about physical death, spiritual death (the Lake of Fire that awaits non-believers, described in Revelation 20:11-15), or both.

He could be talking about the physical death of true believers, hastened by their not repenting of a specific sin that they wouldn't repent of.

That had happened to Ananias and his wife Sapphira for lying publicly to church leaders (see Acts 5:1-11). That had happened to some in the Corinthian church related to the flippant way they took the Lord's Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:27-30). Paul threatens that this might happen to a man in the Corinthian church who was in an adulterous relationship with his step-mom and they were coming to church like there was nothing wrong with their sin (see 1 Corinthians chapter 5). In that last case, the man did finally repent and Paul instructed the church to receive him rather than continue to treat him as an unbeliever (see 2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

Like the example of that last man, the Bible's pages are filled with people who committed gross sin and were forgiven when they did repent. John calls us to pray for professing believers in sin in 1 John 5:16, and the Bible assures us that many people in gross sin have been forgiven by God when they did repent. It seems to me we are not being encouraged to identify particular sins as ones that could lead to physical death, but to pray for any professing Christian who needs to deal with a sin.

That leads me to think that in 1 John 5:16 when John speaks of "sin leading to death" he is referring to spiritual death and the one unforgiveable sin that Jesus identified: unbelief.

Follow my reasoning here.

According to John 3:36, everyone in the world who does not believe in Jesus still has the rightful wrath of God abiding on them and remains on the way to Hell. That was true of all us before we believed. When we believed, the wrath due our sins was transferred to the cross of Jesus. We will never face the wrath of God due our sins. But unbelievers certainly will.

That means that every sin people commit can be forgiven except stubborn unbelief in which a person refuses to accept the Bible's teaching about Jesus and turn to Him as Lord and Savior. In John 16:9 Jesus elevated unbelief to being the chief issue for lost mankind. There Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit will convict the lost world about sin, "because they do not believe in Me."

Because of what Jesus says in John 16:9, I often say to non-Christians that for them unbelief is the main sin they need to focus on. If Jesus is who He says He is, and we have the need the Bible says we do, and the only hope to remedy our need is what Jesus did for us on the cross, and the only way to be born again is to believe Him and trust Him, then it is rejecting that and going on in unbelief that will keep them on the highway to Hell. After they commit to Christ, they will have to deal with every other sin in their life. But dealing with every other sin but unbelief will not spare them spiritual death and the Lake of Fire if they never believe.

You may be saying, "Danny, I see that and I agree with you – but does that mean I am not supposed to pray for unbelievers to be saved?"

Great question. I DO believe in praying for nonbelievers to become believers, and personally spend lots of time praying for nonbelievers to be saved. I think John would say the same.

“So what’s going on here, Pastor Danny?”

Remember that John has spent a lot of time in 1 John warning us about false teachers who deny Biblical Teaching about Jesus and teach others those false beliefs about Jesus. Many of them have willfully rejected proper belief in Jesus. They are on the way to Hell, and their teaching is leading many other people astray.

I believe John is speaking of these false teachers who identify themselves as Christian brothers and sisters but willfully reject true belief. As I read verse 16, John is not prohibiting praying for those false teachers, but doesn’t want us spending too much of our limited prayer energy there.

As you pray today, ask God to restore a specific professing Christian you know who is in sin.

Day 25- Read 1 John 5:18-21

You made it to the end of our study in 1 John! Good job! You may remember that I think what John is saying is summed up in 1 John 3:23. Write 1 John 3:23 here –

Everything God expects of us falls under the two categories of correct belief (orthodoxy) and correct practice (orthopraxy). Specifically we are called and commanded to “believe in the Lord Jesus and love others as He has loved us!” Under those two main themes of belief and love, we saw that John lists “areas of inspection” the Christian needs to address:

The areas of inspection John had covered by the end of chapter two were:

1. Having a 100% commitment to God’s Biblical commands.
2. Dealing with sins as they come through confession to Jesus.
3. Having a commitment to following Jesus’ example as we obey those commands.
4. Loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, and dealing with any hate in our heart.
5. Not loving the world system characterized by the lust of the flesh, eyes, and the pride of life.
6. Identifying and rejecting false teachers and false teaching with our God given resources.

In chapters three through five, John repeated those themes for emphasis, because “repetition is the mother of all learning!” It does not surprise us to see elements of those inspection items here in our final passage!

In 1 John 5:18 we see John repeat the expectation that those who have become believers have a 100% commitment not to sin, grateful for the 100% commitment God has to them!

If that still troubles you that it is said that way, let me ask you if any other way would be okay to say that. What if it said, “those in relationship with God should aim for at least 50% faithfulness to Him, or 75 % faithfulness to Him, or 90% faithful to Him?” Ask yourself how it would go over if a husband said to his wife, “Honey, I am committed to being 50% faithful to you, or 75% faithful to you, or 90% faithful to you.” That wouldn’t go over very well, would it! Considering how Jesus is the perfect spouse to His bride the church, he is worthy of us committing to 100% faithfulness to Him. Thank God that He has recognized we fall short of 100% obedience and had given us the instructions for dealing with our sin in 1 John 1:9-2:1.

I like the rest of 1 John 5:18. It once again recognizes that we have a very real enemy who wants to do us harm, and we need to keep ourselves on guard. I like how John's fellow Apostle Peter addressed this in 1 Peter. Fill in the missing blanks in 1 Peter 5:8-9 here –

Be sober-minded; be _____. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. _____ him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. -1 Peter 5:8-9

You are not alone in your struggle with the world, the flesh, and the Devil – every believer has experienced some degree of difficulty in following Jesus on their way to their Heavenly reward! You have been inspired by the stories of other Christians perseverance – keep your eyes on Jesus and keep moving forward and become a story of Christian perseverance! According to verse 20, we who are believers know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true! And as we learned in 1 John 4:4, greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world! By faith in Jesus, and with the Spirit of Christ in us, we have got this!

What 2 things does 1 John 5:20 say about our dear Jesus:

He is the true _____ AND _____ life.

Don't you LOVE Jesus? Let's love Him together when the church gathers and scatters!

All the way back in chapter one, verse three John expressed his desire that his letter would foster greater fellowship between believers as they together expressed greater fellowship with God! We are to believe in and worship God, and love others who do the same! When we worship the Lord, we are expressing how much we value Him above all else in our lives, and we want to keep ourselves from being distracted by valuing anything else in an unhealthy way. That's why John's final warning to us is to "keep ourselves from idols."

Idols CAN be sinful objects that reflect direct worship of false gods, like Buddha statues. But don't forget also that after God gave the 10 commandments the first idol was made by Aaron, a golden calf about which he proclaimed "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:8) Do you see what Aaron had done? He took popular cultural notions of how to worship from when he had lived in Egypt, and used them to define the worship of the True God. The worship he then called for looked a lot more like what the ungodly Egyptians practiced than what God had called for, and it brought God's wrath on the people. Thank God He let them repent. We must also be careful because our hearts are still "idol making factories" today. Michael Card was right when he sang, "We've made you in our image so our faith is idolatry." God help us, you and me as believers in Jesus, to stick with what the Bible says and worship Jesus alone, and love others in His name! As you pray today, ask God to reveal any idols you have made and need to repent of. And commit once again to always believe in Jesus and love others in His name!

Day 26- Read 2 John 1:1-6

It won't surprise any of us who have just studied 1 John together that in the little letter of 2 John he mainly covers two topics – proper belief in the Lord Jesus and loving one another the way Jesus has loved us!

By what title does John identify himself in verse 1?

John's fellow apostle Peter, who had died 30 years before John wrote 2 John, identified himself the very same way in 1 Peter 5.

Look up and fill in the missing blanks from 1 Peter 5:1-4 here –

So I exhort the elders among you, as a _____ elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: _____ the flock of God that is among you, exercising _____, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being _____ to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. -1 Peter 5:1-4

In the New Testament, 3 words are used interchangeably for the leader(s) of churches.

The word elder is the word presbyteros (Strong's 4245). You can see how "Presbyterians" got their name from that. The word elder reminds us of those who are "older" or more mature. This word represents the spiritual maturity we expect from those who lead us.

The word overseer is the word episkopeo (Strong's 1983). You can see how "Episcopalians" got their name from that. The word overseer reminds us that we expect these men to lead us in accomplishing the Biblical expectations that the Lord has for His church. They are to oversee us and equip us to fulfill our individual and corporate ministries.

The word Pastor/Shepherd is the word poimaino (Strong's 4165). It is most often translated shepherd, but pastor means the exact same thing. Interestingly, it could simply be translated "Feeder." In Ephesians 4:11 the word Pastor is combined with the word Teacher. Our Pastors are to be spiritually mature men who oversee us and teach us God's Word.

Interestingly, the word Minister comes from the word we get "Deacon" from and simply refers to serving others. It is used of Deacons but also of all Christians using their spiritual gifts to minister to others (1 Peter 4:10-11). Peter and John used it of themselves in their role as Elders in Acts 6:4 when they raised up the first deacons to minister to congregational needs and then said, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry (deaconing) of the word."

One take away from John's referring to himself as the elder and Peter referring to himself as a fellow elder is that it leaves absolutely no room for the 100% wrong idea that there should be a Pope over Christianity that traces back to Peter himself. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd of the church in every generation, and the churches leaders are merely under-shepherds under Jesus.

John says he is writing to "The elder to the elect lady and her children."

Some take this to be a reference to a specific lady somewhere. I believe he is using "elect lady" to refer to the church, the "bride of Christ." That would make her "children" his brothers and sisters in Christ in that church. In verse 13 he says, "The children of your elect sister greet you." That probably is a reference to the church in Ephesus that John spent much time ministering to.

In verse 1 John is saying that he loves the church in truth, along with all those who know the truth.

According to verse 2, what two things are true of Christians and the truth –

What does John rejoice over in verse 4?

Dear fellow Christian, do you also rejoice when you see fellow believers walking in the truth? Let's join the beloved disciple John in celebrating faithfulness to Christ and Biblical truth!

According to verse 5, what does John plead with the lady to ensure is emphasized?

That we L_____ O_____ A_____

Walk in the truth you have believed and love one another!

Walk in the truth you have believed and love one another!

Walk in the truth you have believed and love one another!

In his second letter we find John emphasizing exactly what he did in his first: proper belief (orthodoxy) and proper love (orthopraxy).

As you pray today, ask for God to help you walk in the truth and love one another!

Day 27- Read 2 John 1:7-13

In 1 John we saw several times John the Apostle warn Christians about false teaching.

Those of us who believe correct doctrine that squares with the Bible need to reject false teaching and the false teachers who bring it.

What two things does John call false teachers in verse 7?

The d_____ and the a_____

Don't be deceived by deceivers, brothers and sisters! And be PRO-Christ, not antichrist!

According to verse 9, what does the person failing to abide in the correct Biblical teaching about Jesus NOT have?

They do not have G_____

According to verse 9, what does the person who abides in correct Biblical teaching about Jesus have?

They have both the F_____ and the Son.

Put those together and we understand that Jehovah's Witnesses do not have God; Mormons do not have God; Muslims do not have God. Anyone who denies what the Bible says about Jesus' full deity, full humanity, and salvation in His name alone DOES NOT HAVE GOD!

According to verse 10, what does John say we are not to do?

According to verse 11, what does John say will be true of us if we do?

I certainly don't want to be guilty of sharing in the evil deeds of false teachers! I know you don't want to do that either.

Now don't forget the context here! John is speaking about local churches here. Some have taken these verses to mean that you should have no association whatsoever with any lost person who belongs to a group of idolaters that has wrong ideas about Jesus. They would say you should not have them into your house or invite them to church.

But that's not what the Apostles taught!

Look up and fill in the blanks from 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 –

I wrote to you in my letter not to _____ with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or _____, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the _____ of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. -I Corinthians 5:9-11

In 1 Corinthians 5 the Apostle Paul was dealing with a Christian in Corinth that refused to acknowledge his sexual immorality as sin, let alone repent of it. Every church should help their people through struggles with sin, as long as the sin is acknowledged as sin. But no church should tolerate a person claiming to be a Christian in good standing who rejects Biblical teaching. Note Paul specifically says he is not speaking of normal interactions in the world with people that don't know Jesus.

Coming back to 2 John verses 10-11, we now can see what John is saying!

In our churches, we are not to welcome or give false teachers any opportunity to promote their false teaching in our midst. By extension every Christian should use this same standard when they consume any kind of media messages that regularly deny Jesus Christ.

Don't continue to listen to false preachers!

Don't continue to watch Hollywood content that dishonors Christ!

Don't continue to listen to music that encourage godless living!

Don't let it in your home, your heart, or your head!

According to verse 8, what was John concerned that Christians would lose if they didn't look to themselves?

Let's be clear that John was not concerned that they would lose their salvation, just that they would lose the full reward that God has for believers who do what He says.

Scripture teaches that believers will one day be rewarded by Jesus Christ for everything they think, speak, and do that honors Him and advances His cause on earth.

First Corinthians 3:12 compares everything Christians think, speak, and do as being like unburnable elements such as gold, silver, precious stones or like burnable elements such as wood, hay or straw.

Imagine every single thing you have thought, said or done since you were a Christian as being piled up beside you on the day you stand before Jesus and give an account.

Imagine a torch being placed on that pile and the fire beginning. The fire then burns away all that dishonored Christ, the same way a fire would burn up wood, hay and straw. But the fire would not burn up the gold, silver, and precious stones.

What is left after that fire will be the basis of your reward as you enter into Heaven. What is “burned up” will be what could not be rewarded, meaning you will get less than the full reward that could have been yours.

You must understand this is not speaking of hell-fire, but a refiner’s fire. When gold is put in the refiner’s fire, the dross is consumed but the pure gold remains.

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. -I Cor. 3:11-15

A Christian’s ‘work’ does not save us – our faith in Christ’s work for us saved us; But a Christian’s work done through faith in Jesus will be rewarded! As you pray today, ask God to help you live out your faith in such a way that you will receive as much reward as possible!

Day 28- Read 3 John 1:1-4

In the little letter of 2 John, the Apostle warned the church not to be hospitable to false teachers. In this little letter of 3 John, he warns about an opposite danger. There was actually a bully in the church being inhospitable to Christian brothers who could help the church with good teaching, and who the church could help by contributing to their missionary efforts. Bullies like Diotrephes (verse 9) needed reminding that they are not the head of the church – Christ is!

According to verse 1, who did John the Elder write this letter to?

When we look up the name Gaius on blueletterbible.org, we find men named Gaius listed in 5 verses – Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; Romans 16:23; I Corinthians 1:14; 3 John 1:1.

Studying the Bible is fun work! When you look up those verses and use your maps in the back of your Bible, you can discover so much!

The Gaius in Acts 19:29 was a travelling companion of Paul from the Province of Macedonia that was seized in a riot in Ephesus that was caused by hostile reaction to the gospel's effectiveness. Berea and Thessalonica are cities within the Province of Macedonia.

The Gaius in Acts 20:4 was also a travelling companion of Paul, but we are told that he was from the city of Derbe, not far from Paul's hometown of Tarsus in the Province of Cilicia.

In 1 Corinthians 1:14 Paul mentions that he had baptized a man named Gaius in the city of Corinth in the Province of Achaia.

This is likely the same Gaius Paul speaks of in Romans 16:23, where Paul was staying when he wrote the book of Romans. Paul says that Gaius was his host there in Corinth AND host of the entire church.

We can't be certain if the Gaius John refers to is one of those three men or another Gaius altogether. But from the context we can assume that Gaius was an important local church leader trusted by the great Apostle John. Gaius needed to know what was going on and what John intended to do about the behavior of Diotrephes if he came.

I love John's prayer for Gaius in verse 2. John knows that Gaius' soul is prospering.

According to verse 2, what other two ways does John pray for Gaius to prosper?

I often pray for my fellow Christians using John's words here. I first pray for their soul to be prospering, Then I pray that they will also prosper in physical health and in all things experience God's blessing as they serve the Lord.

According to verse 3, what had brothers recently told John about Gaius. Fill in the blank –

For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are _____ in the truth.

That is a tremendous thought, isn't it?! If people around you were talking to the Apostle John, would they enthusiastically testify that you are walking in the truth? If you could only answer 'no,' or hesitate because you are not sure, ask Jesus to help you truly be a Christian who walks in the truth.

Who are some people you know who you could testify are walking in the truth?

Verse 4 is one of my favorite verses! John says he has no greater joy than hearing that his children are walking in the truth.

If we are parents we immediately think of our own children when we hear this, and that is definitely okay. But John is clearly speaking about his spiritual children, both those he had influenced to become Christians and those he had helped grow in Christ! Perhaps John had mentored Gaius the way that Paul had mentored Timothy.

Look up and write down 2 Timothy 2:2 here –

Note there are 4 generations in those verses – Paul had mentored Timothy who was called to mentor some faithful men who would influence others still, and so on and so on down to the present day and until Jesus returns! I define faithful men as those within our sphere of influence who listen when we talk about Jesus and want to follow Jesus like we do. Others shrug us off, but God keeps allowing us to influence these men for Christ, even as we urge them to influence others still. And it is a cause of rejoicing when we know they are walking in the truth!

Of course we are also saddened when our own children and the children of our churches are not currently walking in the truth of Jesus. Spend a few moments in prayer right now for any "Prodigal children" you know who need to get back on track with Jesus.

Day 29- Read 3 John 1:5-8

In today's passage the Apostle John commends Gaius as being an example of how to support Christian co-workers from within our own church and also those who were previously "strangers" to us.

According to verse 6, what trait had both people who knew Gaius already and those who had previously not known him born witness to experiencing from him?

Throughout first, second and third John we are called to proper belief in Jesus and to loving others in His name. People that came into contact with Gaius felt loved by him!

Do people who come into contact with you feel loved by you?

If not, pray that will become true about you as you grow in your faith in Jesus!

One of my favorite verses related to being hospitable to strangers is Hebrews 13:1-2.

Look up and write down Hebrews 13:1-2 here –

Think of it – when we show basic kindness and hospitality to people we don't know, we may over the years actually help an angel or two! That will be fun to discover when we get to Heaven! Imagine an angel coming up to us and saying, "remember me" and then revealing he was an angel and we passed a heavenly test!

Let me give one clarifying note here about the danger of "Lone Ranger" ministry. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in which one man helped another man by himself. But don't forget that in practice Jesus sent His disciples out not alone but at least in pairs. The Book of Acts does show Philip reaching out to the Ethiopian by himself, but that is the exception. Acts gives many more examples of teams of Christians doing the Lord's work together. So don't go it alone when you can share the ministry with others from your church family.

Now let's be very clear about what John is and is not commending Gaius for. He is not commending Gaius for letting anyone come into their fellowship off of the street and saying whatever they wanted to. That would create the kind of chaos that Paul was addressing in 1 Corinthians 14:40 where he concluded, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Do you remember John's warning from 1 John 4:1? John said "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

We also know that in the early days of the church, those who were bonafide apostles like Peter, John, and Paul often sent men they had trained to visit local churches. They would tell the local church how the apostles work was going and would report back to the apostles about how the local church was doing.

Many of these men were also being sent to plant churches in places that needed churches. Not only could they help already established churches with good teaching for a while, the established churches could help these men with prayer and financial support as they went out to plant churches. We are no longer in the days of the apostles, but effective denominations like the Southern Baptists Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV) provide similar networking for mutually beneficial ministry today. As able, local churches partner together with the SBCV and each other for greater effectiveness.

Here's what Gaius was commended for: the Apostle John had probably sent workers to the church with his letter of recommendation. When Gaius got a letter, he would sit down with the one sent by John and make sure they were indeed a teacher of truth. He would then give them an opportunity to share a testimony and teach the church, and lead the church to give what they could financially to support their work. It was, after all, the church's responsibility to support Christian work – not the Gentiles who did not know God yet!

Gaius understood the church did not belong to him but that it belonged to the Lord Jesus. And Jesus had given clear instructions to His disciples in His great commission in Matthew 28:18 – "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." Gaius knew that disciples before him had taken the gospel from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, and eventually to his city. He knew that it was his turn now to be part of the gospel's continual spread to the nations. He wasn't threatened by these workers sent by John, but received them, learned from them, and partnered with them as he was able!

God forever endorsed Gaius' love and open-handed approach to advancing Christ's gospel by what is written here in the Bible! I wonder how you and I would fare if there were Bible verses written about the extent to which we support Christ's Great Commission.

As you pray today, pray that you would be like Gaius, faithfully supporting the work of Christ in your own city, state, country, and world!

Day 30- Read 3 John 1:9-14

Yesterday we saw the Apostle John commend a church leader named Gaius who was exceedingly loving and generous. In today's passage we see him rightly criticize a church leader named Diotrephes who was unjustifiably belligerent and stingy.

Now let's be honest about what we don't know here. We don't know if these two men were co-leaders in the same church, or if they each led a church in their home in the same city.

If they were different churches, I sure would want to go to Pastor Gaius' church, wouldn't you?! Diotrephes' church had become a toxic place where no one lifted a finger without his permission.

If they were both leaders in the same church, that would certainly correspond to many local church situations I have seen where one church bully made church life miserable for all.

If the bully is the Pastor, over time he will feel threatened by some of the most effective Christians around him and constantly demoralize them. If that person is a lay leader, he will not tolerate an enthusiastic pastor's plans to reach the city for Christ, and often make himself an enemy of all the new people the church brings in who love their pastor. He does not appreciate that they look to the Pastor to lead them rather than himself.

When I get a chance to counsel young men considering a church, I try to get them to consider the church's history. A church in which the Diotrephes spirit wins expects the Pastor to really only be a Chaplain. They want the Pastor to teach them, marry them, and bury them but not really lead them to fulfill the Great Commission. They want all the leading to be left to Diotrephes. Such churches often have short Pastoral tenures. In contrast, a church with the Gaius spirit wants their Pastor to lead them in reaching others for Christ, and encourages him as he does!

From each verse below fill in the missing blanks that record the problems with Diotrephes:

V. 9 He likes to put himself _____

V. 9 He does not _____ us (the Apostle John and friends!)

V. 10 He is talking wicked _____ against us

V. 10 He refuses to _____ the brothers (sent by John!)

V. 10 He stops those who want to and _____ them out of the church

When I read verses 9 and 10, I am astonished! John the Apostle had walked with Jesus Christ. He was one of the "Big 3" within the 12 disciples, often spending extra time with Jesus along with James and Peter. After Jesus' ascension, Jesus' mother Mary had lived with John upon Jesus' request. When he wrote this letter, he was the last living Apostle, universally loved by all Spirit-filled Christians. John wrote 50 chapters of the Bible!

And then there was Diotrephes, a little man with a big mouth. We actually read here that he was actively denying his church the opportunity to hear from the Apostle John and men John sent! He actually spoke of John with disrespectful and malicious words. He even kicked out of his church those who spoke in favor of hearing from John.

Diotrephes' number one problem was pride. He had forgotten who the church really belonged to. He thought of the church as his church, not as Jesus' church. In any real church, only Jesus is preeminent, and His purposes must prevail in His church. The church of Diotrephes is no substitute for the church of Jesus!

Yesterday we saw that church leaders do have a responsibility to screen what their people hear and wisely guide them into gospel partnerships. But this turkey was so insecure and so controlling he was denying his people exposure to the Apostle John, the 'beloved' disciple. John basically states that Diotrephes' actions were evil and such actions betray someone who doesn't really know God. In contrast, Gaius' actions were good and showed that he knew God.

Did you ever see the Highlights magazine cartoons of Goofus and Gallant? Goofus always did selfish things, whereas Gallant always did the right thing. The only mention of Diotrephes in the Bible is here in 3 John, and it shows him to be a real Goofus. In contrast, Gaius' love for the Lord, his love for his fellow Christians, and his love for God's work make him the Gallant one.

John makes clear in verse 10 that if he gets the chance to come to town, he will deal with sinning Diotrephes. But it appears that Diotrephes had a chance to repent even before that. In verse 12 John commends a Christian worker named Demetrius to the church. Hopefully reading 3 John caused Diotrephes to repent and receive Demetrius rather than reject him. When you pray today, ask God to help you spot the workers like Demetrius He wants you to support.

We now come to the end of our study in John's letters. Write down three truths the Lord has impressed upon you from this study:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. -1 John 2:1-2

Why not end this study by spending some time now with your Advocate in Heaven!