



The Epistles of John: Introduction and Overview

The message that runs throughout this study of 1, 2, and 3 John is that the believer has the ability to evaluate the reality of their faith and be confident in their salvation.

Main Idea

Our heavenly Father is calling us to hold fast to the truth of the eternal Word of life, Christ Jesus, come in the flesh to make us righteous through his work on the cross.

Type of Literature

1 John has been accepted as a circular letter sent to a number of different churches known by the author.

The Author

Though John's name is not mentioned in the Epistle, there is much evidence that he indeed is the author.

- Internal Evidence - John's Gospel and John's Epistles reveal consistent themes from the author: The Word of life from the beginning (1 John 1:1-2/ John 1:1-4), the light, the new commandment, love, being born of God, and water and blood are a few
- External Evidence - Early manuscripts validate John the Apostle as the author of these Epistles in the writings of Eusebius (c. 352), Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (c. 260), Cyprian, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Polycarp.
- What about "the Elder" in 2 and 3 John?
- Rev. 1: 9

Time of Writing

John wrote the three Epistles while residing in Ephesus, perhaps between A.D. 85 and A.D. 95.

Recipients

The recipients appear to have been members of a number of churches in fellowship with the church of the author. They already know the truth of the gospel (2:21), that Christ appeared to take away sins (3:5), and have already received an anointing from the Holy One (2:20). The author has an affectionate regard for his readers, addressing them as "beloved" or "dear friends", as "brothers", and as his "children".

Opposition

Certain people had left the author's community. These Epistles are written to the church in Asia to address false teachers, whose activities and theological error concerning the person of Jesus form the background of the letter. "His great emphasis is on the difference between the genuine Christian and the spurious, and how to discern between the two." (Stott).

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is a philosophy which centers on a search for a higher knowledge. The first major Gnostic doctrine was the supremacy of knowledge. The Gnostics taught that this knowledge was a knowledge which the ordinary Christian was incapable of attaining. Once a believer came into

possession of this extraordinary knowledge, he had “salvation.” The second major Gnostic doctrine was the separation of spirit and matter. All matter was considered to be evil and the source of evil. The spirit was considered to be good. When the Gnostics embraced Christianity, they split into factions on the subject of Christ’s deity. One faction was the Docetic Gnostics. They denied the humanity of Jesus. They believed Jesus was a phantom; He didn’t possess a real flesh-and-blood body. He only seemed to have a body.

“I am writing to you” (Purpose)

- 1 John
 - He wrote to promote his readers’ fellowship and joy. 1 John 1:4
 - He wrote to help readers avoid the pitfalls of sin, yet find forgiveness when they did. 1 John 2:1
 - He wrote to protect believers from false teachers. 1John 2:26
 - He wrote so believers might know they have eternal life. 1John 5:13
- 2 John - He wrote to warn his readers about the deceivers and the dire consequences of accepting their teaching.
- 3 John - He wrote to give a word of exhortation to Gaius and encourage him not to imitate the bad example of Diotrephes. Instead, Gaius was to continue the good work of providing hospitality to traveling missionaries.

Themes

Through John’s letters, we learn what we know, how we know it, and how to apply what we know to our daily Christian walk.

- Assurance of salvation is a pervading theme in 1 John. The believer’s assurance is grounded on God’s testimony about his Son, on the Spirit’s testimony to Christ, and our own godly living as seen by our concern for fellow believers and obedience to Christ’s commands.
- The real humanity of Jesus as the Christ, come in the flesh
- The nature of God: God is Light, God is Love, God is revealed as the Father of Jesus Christ
- The Holy Spirit
- Eternal life
- Atonement
- Sin
- Hospitality

Driving Home the Main Idea

Our heavenly Father is calling us to hold fast to the truth of the eternal Word of life, Christ Jesus, come in the flesh to make us righteous through his work on the cross. In light of this reality, God calls us to examine our own lives that we may know we are alive and have eternal life in Christ. We are called to respond to this truth through obedience in love, holiness, and belief, and to discern falsehoods that lie under the guise of Christianity.

Application Questions

1. How has our denomination or evangelicals in general been “persecuted” (disparaged, ridiculed) on account of the word of God? In your own life, how have you been “persecuted” on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus?
2. How are the ideas contained in Gnosticism similar/dissimilar to those found in the church in America today?
3. Do you have assurance that you are truly born again? What evidence do you see in your own life to give you that assurance?



1 John 1:1-4

Review & Context

Last week we considered the type of literature, date, authorship, and setting of John's epistles. They were written around AD 90 by the apostle John, who was an eyewitness to Jesus. These letters were circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. The false teaching was most likely Gnosticism infused into orthodox Christianity. One of the main themes of the 1 John is having assurance of our salvation by holding fast to the eternal Word of life, Christ Jesus.

Main Idea: *The eternal, incarnate Word is proclaimed for our joyful fellowship with God and one another.*

Structure & Overview

Vv.1-3a Jesus is the eternal, incarnate Word of life.

- John doesn't begin his letter in typical fashion stating his name and greeting. Rather, he gets right to the theological heart of the letter and the assurance he wants his readers to have. He reminded them of the message he proclaimed. It's the message that Jesus is eternal, incarnate Word of life.
- Vv.1-3 is one sentence in the original language. The sentence structure is awkward making it a little complicated to immediately understand the meaning. In outlining it, you see John's emphasis on understanding the content of the message he "proclaimed," specifically who the "word of life" is.
- The phrases about hearing, seeing, and touching the word of life show John and his companions had firsthand account of Jesus, which makes his message reliable and trustworthy.
- The phrases "was from the beginning," "with the Father," and "made manifest" show that John's message was embodied in Jesus. Two truths are implied or alluded to:
 - First, Jesus is the divine, pre-existent Son. Jn. 1:1-2 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Furthermore, all things were created "through" this Word and there is "life" and "light" in him (vv.3-4). Jesus was eternally in intimate relationship with and equal to the Father before creation.
 - Second, Jesus is God in the flesh, i.e., incarnate God-man. That's the point of saying "made manifest" (v.2). Jn. 1:14, 18 say, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." The eternally, divine Son was physically manifested in person of Jesus.
- One of the letter's main themes is eternal life (see 1 Jn. 5:13). John has a dual purpose in proclaiming Jesus as "word of life" and "eternal life." On one hand, eternal life is found only in Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6b). Jesus is the source of eternal life. On the other hand, Jesus is the personal manifestation of the eternal life found only in God. He is the substance of the eternal life we long for (see Jn. 6:56; 14:6a; 15:1-11).

V.3b Our fellowship in the truth means we have fellowship with Father and Son.

- John's purpose in proclaiming the word of life was "so that" his readers might have fellowship with him and others. Some had deserted true fellowship by leading others astray with false doctrine about person of Jesus.
- John says if you don't have fellowship with him in the truth of who Jesus is then you don't have fellowship with the Father and Son. The theme of fellowship is further explained in vv.5-10.

V.4 Joy from Christian fellowship

- John has multiple purposes in writing (1:4; 2:1, 7-8, 12-14, 21, 26; 5:13). One of those is joy.
- You might expect him to say that the aim of his writing was his readers' joy, not his joy. But John has a pastor's heart that received much joy from seeing his children persevere in the faith (see 1 Jn. 2:26; 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3).
- John's joy, though, was not to the exclusion of the churches' joy. If they remained believed "these things" he reminded them of then they would have true Christian fellowship. And that fellowship produces joy for everyone.

Driving Home the Main Idea

John's prologue lays the theological foundation for what's to come. It's like signs posted on doors describing what's to be explored inside. But think about the sweetness of fellowship you have and enjoy with one another. Remember! That exists because of believing together the truth of who Jesus Christ is – eternal, incarnate Word of life in and through whom have fellowship with one another and Triune God.

Application

1. How do we persuade people of the Gospel's reliability when we have not been eyewitnesses to Jesus death and resurrection?
2. Why is Jesus' incarnation a touchstone test for orthodox Christianity?
3. Is it necessary to have potential members sign stating their agreement with our Church Covenant and Statement of Faith before they join? If so, why?
4. Truth and joy are inextricably linked in the Christian life. How does that work itself out in Christian relationships?



1 John 1:5-10 Walking in the Light or in the Dark

Review & Context

Last week in the first four verses of 1 John we saw that Jesus is the eternal, incarnate Word of life. We saw how Jesus is the divine, pre-existent Son as well as God in the flesh, the incarnate God-man. We learned that Jesus, the eternal Word of life, is not only the source of eternal life but also the substance of eternal life. All this is proclaimed to us for our joyful fellowship with God and one another.

Main Idea: *The message proclaimed to us is that “God is Light” and this message provides a basis for how the believer should walk.*

Structure & Overview

V5 The Great Message

- Darkness had crept in among the readers whom John addressed. To dispel it, he testified to him who is Light.
- Light is a common metaphor in Scripture for righteousness, goodness, purity, and holiness. (Proverbs 4:18, Matt. 5:16)
- God, who is light, has absolutely no darkness, no sin. He is infinitely holy.
- “God is Light” shows him as the source of all moral illumination:
 - God is light symbolizes the illuminating action of the divine Word (Ps. 19:8, 119:105).
 - God is light symbolizes the illuminating action of the divine Spirit (Ps. 36:9, Prov. 20:27).
 - God is light symbolizes the illuminating action of the divine message from God’s people to the world (Isa. 49:6, 42:6-8, 60:1-3).
- John connects light with truth (1 John 1:6).
- John wants us to know that God is light, and so is His Son (John 8:12).
- John wants us to know that “God is Light” and his glorious light will be present forever (Rev. 22:5).

Vv.6-10 □ Claims to commune with God tested by attitudes to sin

- Definition of sin: “Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.” - Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology

- First false claim – Denying the reality of sin (1:6,7)
 - The reality of sin is that it separates us from God.
 - The contrasting position is to walk in the light as he is in the light, not to walk in darkness.
- Second false claim – Denying the principle of sin (1:8,9)
 - The principle of sin is that it effects everyone. (Rom. 3:23)
 - The contrasting position is to confess our sins . Authentic Christian living involves honest and ongoing acknowledgment of one’s sins.
 - “Children of God should not make a general confession by acknowledging their innumerable sins in a vague manner, because such confession does not provide conscience opportunity to do its perfect work. They ought to allow the Holy Spirit through their conscience to point out their sins one by one. Christians must accept its reproach and be willing, according to the mind of the Spirit, to eliminate everything which is contrary to God” - *Watchman Nee*
- Third false claim – Denying the practice of sin (1:10)
 - Since God is light and in Him there is no darkness and in Him is no sin, to claim to be without sin is to claim to be equal with God and denies the practice of sin.
 - No contrasting, counter position here. Instead, in 1 John 2:1-2 the author addresses his readers in a pastoral manner urging them not to sin.

Driving Home the Main Idea

The message proclaimed to us is that “God is Light” and this message provides a basis for how the believer should walk. The light reveals wrong attitudes to sin. The believer should walk in the light by having a right attitude to sin, by confessing sin, by leading lives of goodness and holiness, and by living consistent with God’s character.

Application

1. Do you think that Christians today have lost sight of the hatefulfulness of sin to a large extent?
2. What does it mean to walk in darkness?
3. Ephesians 5:8 says “...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...”. What does it mean to walk as children of light?
4. How would you apply to your life the message that “God is light and in him is no darkness at all” with a contrasting statement to 1 John 1:10?



1 John 2:1-6

Review & Context

John's epistles were written around AD 90 by the apostle John, who was an eyewitness to Jesus. These letters circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. The false teaching was most likely Gnosticism infused into orthodox Christianity.

In 1:5-10, John reminded his readers of the message he heard from Christ that "God is light" (v.5). Only those who walk in holiness and the truth have true fellowship with God. That is not true of those claiming fellowship with God but live in unrepentant sin or deny the presence of sin in their lives. They walk in darkness.

Main Idea: *Assurance that you know God is grounded in the person and work of Christ and evidenced in regular obedience to the Father's commands.*

Structure & Overview

Vv.1-2 Jesus' work leads us to take sin seriously and to have assurance our sins are forgiven.

- 2:1-2 conclude John's argument from 1:6-10. There John presents 3 contrasting statements dealing with false claims. He introduces the claims with phrase "if we say" (vv.6, 8, 10). He then provides a positive correction (see. 1:6-7). 2:1-2 are the positive correction to the negative claim in 1:10.
- John's point is that you cannot deny the reality of sin, even in the life of a believer. But the presence of sin does not give anyone an excuse to sin. Rather, sin and obedience should be taken seriously (cf. Rom 6:1). He wants his reader "not to sin."
- To give believers assurance of their salvation when they sin, he reminds them of the person and work of Christ. What Jesus does and has done is the ground of their assurance. He describes Jesus 3 ways:
 - Advocate: The term is used 5 times in the Bible only by John and primarily to describe the Holy Spirit as the "Helper" (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Jesus being our advocate means he meditates our relationship with Father. He advocates with Father for forgiveness, grace, and mercy when we sin.
 - The Righteous: Jesus advocates his own righteousness. The One who always acted righteously stands in the Father's presence to speak for those who have not acted righteously.
 - Propitiation: This means Jesus' death atoned for sin thereby bringing forgiveness, and he satisfied God's wrath. It explains how God is "faithful" and "just to forgive" (1:9; cf. Ex. 34:6-7; Rom. 3:25-26).
- The phrase "not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" is often debated because it gets at the question of the extent of the atonement, i.e., for whom did Christ die? I think the NT teaches that Jesus made propitiation, for all who believe, and those

who truly believe are God's elect.

- From a wider reading of John's writings, "world" can have refer to the scope of God's redemption. It not for one particular group of people but for people without distinction from the whole world (see Jn. 1:9-13; 4:42; 12:20-21, 32). Thus, John is saying in 1 Jn. 2:2 that Jesus died not just for the sins this gnostic, spiritually superior group or just John and his apostolic companions but for everyone who believes, i.e., "whole world," believers everywhere.
- Alternative interpretations are (1) Jesus propitiated the sins of every single person regardless of whether or not believe, which is the liberal, universalist interpretation. (2) Jesus' propitiation was sufficient and made it possible for every single person, but it is only applied to those who believe, a conservative view held by many.

Vv.3-6 Your assurance is strengthened by obedience, not just your profession.

- John wants his readers and us to know that "we know that we know him [and]...are in him" (vv.3, 6). He wants his readers to have assurance (see 5:13)
- He is most concerned with how people live. Their lives are to be true and in accord with their profession. Twice he says, "whoever says" (vv.4, 6). They need to prove the veracity of their claim by how they live.
- "Keep his commandments" and "walking as he [Jesus] walked" is how he describes what obedience ought to look like. Those whose lives are not consistent with their profession are "liars and the truth is not in them" (v.5).

Driving Home Main Idea

Chapter 2 is where the book becomes more personal to a church like Mount Vernon. We have no trouble acknowledging the reality and presence of sin. But how are we doing at striving for obedience and walking as Jesus walked? If we meditate on our efforts for obedience, we find that we have a long way to go. Thus, it's also good to remember that our assurance is always ground in what Jesus did. He is our righteous advocate, who propitiated our sins.

Application

1. How does Jesus being our righteous advocate (v.1) practically equip us to not sin and pursue holiness?
2. How should we relate to family and friends who profess to know God but don't show it in how they live?
3. In light of vv.3-6, how should we relate to someone we think is truly a Christian but is struggling with a sin that if they continue in it, may prove they aren't a Christian?



1 John 2:7-14

Review & Context

John's epistles were letters circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. To give believers assurance of their salvation when they sin, he reminds them of the person and work of Christ: Advocate with the Father, the Righteous One, and the Propitiation of our sins. Wanting to strengthen his readers assurance, John describes what obedience ought to look like: "Keep his commandments" and "walk as he walked".

Main Idea:

The assurance that we truly know God, that we abide in the light, is evidenced by our obedience to the commandment to love our brothers.

Structure & Overview

Vv. 7,8 The Old Commandment become New

- Looking forward to what the apostle will recommend in verses 9-11 that follow suggests that the commandment is the love commandment found in John 13:34. The clear evidence that this is the case is found in 2 John 5 in which he says the "new commandment" is not new.
- Sense in which the commandment is *old*:
 - They have had it "from the beginning". John says it just as plainly in 1 John 3:11.
 - It is *old* in the sense that the command is found in the Old Testament. Lev. 19:18
- Sense in which the commandment is *new*:
 - The commandment to love one another is new in character.
 - It is new in us, who fulfill it with a new spirit, after a new example, and with new motives.
 - It is read in a new light, the light of the Gospel.
- The Greek word for "true" is sometimes used to mean "real" or "genuine". The sense demanded here is something like "truly expressed."
- Jesus is the true light coming into the world which the darkness cannot overcome (John 1:5,1:9, 9:5, 12:35). The darkness of self and sin is only in act of passing while in the person of Jesus Christ the perfect light of love is fully come.

Vv. 9-11 Applying the new commandment

- These verses relate the new commandment in two cases: a person who *hates* (v. 9 and v. 11) and a person who *loves* (v. 10). Love and light are connected, much as hate and darkness are connected.
- Characteristics of a person *not* following the command:
 - *Darkness of moral condition*. He is "in" the darkness—in it as the element of his moral life.

- *Darkness of moral action.* He "walks" in the darkness—his course of life and conduct is in keeping with the gloom of sin.
 - *Darkness as to destination.* He "does not know where he is going"—he knows neither the way he is walking in nor the end to which it leads.
 - *Darkness of the spiritual being.* "The darkness has blinded his eyes"—the moral darkness in which the sinner dwells has destroyed his spiritual vision and he walks in moral night.
- Characteristics of a person following the command:
 - *Shows evidence of the Christian life.* He abides "in the light"—in a true Christian life in harmony with the light of God.
 - *Stability.* He "abides" in the light—he abides, dwells, continues in the light. Remaining in the light, helps to apply the command of brotherly love and promotes the strength of the entire Christian life, its firmness in holiness and faithfulness.
 - *Security.* In him there is "no cause for stumbling"—for those who walk in the light there is nothing to cause them to fall into sin.

Vv. 12-14 Affirming the new commandment

- Encouraging those addressed as *children*:
 - Your *sins are forgiven*, the foundation of all Christianity, not for your own sakes, but for God's name's sake.
 - The fundamental encouragement: God's children *know* God as the Father. As those who *know* the Father, John affirms that they are people who walk in the light, keep God's commandments, and practice love of fellow believers.
- Encouraging those addressed as *fathers*: They *know* him who is from the beginning, Jesus Christ, and, like the children who *know* the Father, John affirms that they are people who walk in the light.
- Encouraging those addressed as *young men*:
 - Affirms they have *overcome* the evil one (Satan) through their faith in God.
 - They are *strong*. They have overcome the evil one because they are strong, and they are strong because the word of God abides in them.
 - The word of God *abides* in them. To have the word of God abide in them means that they allow the message proclaimed by, and embodied in, Jesus Christ to remain in them.

Your strength to overcome the evil one comes from having the word of God abiding in you.

Driving Home the Main Idea

Those who love their brothers are walking in the light. Those who hate their brothers are walking in darkness. And be affirmed and encouraged by the basic pronouncements of truth, whether you are old in Christ or young in Christ.

Application

1. Is hatred ever appropriate for the believer?
2. What are some of the practical ways we can demonstrate love one to another?
3. What are some things we can do to ensure the word of God is "abiding" in us?



1 John 2:15-17

Review & Context

John's epistles were written around AD 90 by the apostle John, who was an eyewitness to Jesus. These letters circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (5:13).

In 2:7-14, we saw how those who walk in the true light of Jesus Christ will keep the command to love their brothers. Otherwise, they are in the darkness. In vv.12-14, John encourages his readers with truths about their salvation. They know God as Father and the Word of God abides in them (vv.13-14). John give a word of exhortation in vv.15-17.

Main Idea: *Love for the world and love for the Father cannot coexist in a Christian's life.*

Structure & Overview

V.15a The Command: Do not love the world.

- John often uses the word "love" (2:7; 3:16; 4:9; 2:10; 4:7). His intended use is determined by the context. In some cases, he tells readers to love one another means they are focused on each other's well-being.
- In v.15, he means do not love the world in a way that selfishly seeks gratification and fulfillment from what the world offers.
- "World" is another commonly used word by John. In this case, world refers to what we often call worldliness, i.e., a system with values, priorities, attractions, and an attitude opposed to God (see 4:4-6).
- John's point is that we are to not seek satisfaction, fulfillment, or purpose in a system that has values, priorities, attractions, and an attitude opposed to God and his law.

V.15b-16 1st Reason: Worldliness proves you do not love the Father.

- The second half of verse is a conditional statement that gives the first reason why we're not to love world. Loving the world proves we don't love the Father. We can't have assurance of eternal life if we love the world.
- "Love of the Father" either refers to the Father's love for us or our love for him. In this context, it refers to the latter. NIV translates it "love for the Father is not in them."
- In this context, John is focused on our love for either the world or the Father. Both cannot exist in the life of a believer, which is consistent with other biblical writers (see Mt. 6:24; Jam. 4:4).
- V.16 explains why love for the world is not compatible with love for the Father. If we love the Father then we're to love the things from the Father and things in the world are not from the Father.
- 3 things are said to be "in the world":
 - "Desires of the flesh" refers to the whole of sinful man.
 - "Desires of the eyes" refers to how we are aroused by what we see.
 - "Pride of life" refers to boasting in worldly possessions.

V.17 2nd Reason: Only those who do the Father's will live forever.

- This is the second reason for why we are to not love the world. The world with its sinful desires are “passing away.” It’s passing away because the “darkness is passing away” because the true light of Jesus Christ has entered the world (2:10). Jesus’ death and resurrection inaugurated a future coming where Jesus will return to judge every evil desire opposed to him. Jesus’ death and resurrection were victorious over a world that stands in opposition to him.
- For those who love the world, they will pass away with it. Thus, this is a word of judgment.
- John comes back to the fact that true believers are those who obey the commands, i.e., “do the will,” of God (2:4-8). Furthermore, they show their love for the Father by their obedience. Thus, this is another word of encouragement. Those who do God’s will are those who truly love the Father and can have assurance of eternal life.

Driving Home the Main Idea

As we conclude, remember John says that if we truly love the Father then we cannot love world. Those two loves cannot coexist. So where are you tempted to love the world? Where do you need to grow in obedience to and love for Father?

Application

1. How may the command in v.15 be applied to people in Christians in different seasons of life, e.g., single or newly married at the start of your career, parents of teenagers, empty-nesters at the peak of their career, retired?
2. How do good desires, i.e., desires for God-given things, become sinful desires?
3. Why is godliness more attractive than worldliness?
4. How does obedience to God’s word produce a love for God and hatred for the world?



1 John 2:18-27

Review & Context

John's epistles were written around AD 90 by the apostle John, who was an eyewitness to Jesus. These letters circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (5:13).

Last week, we saw from 2:15-17 that love for the world and love for the Father cannot coexist in a Christian's life. John exhorts us not to love the world but to do the Father's will, which shows our love for the Father. In today's passage, John warns his readers directly of the opponents, who lied and tried to deceive them of the truths about Jesus.

Main Idea: *Abiding in the truth of Jesus protects us from deceptive teaching and reassures us of our eternal life.*

Structure & Overview

Vv.18-19 The reality of false professors in the church.

- John wrote this portion because people were trying to “deceive” the churches (v.26). He alluded to their false teaching previously. This is the first time he states it directly.
- He calls these people “antichrists” (v.18), which they knew were coming in the “last hour.” Both phrases are used only here in the NT, though the idea is taught elsewhere.
 - “Last hour” is similar to “last days” or “last times” (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:5, 1:20). It refers to the final period of history between Christ's first and second coming.
 - “Antichrist” is someone opposed/against Christ. Jesus taught about “false Christs and false prophets...who seek to deceive the elect” (Mt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22) Paul described a “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:1-12). John saw a vision of a “beast,” who blasphemes God and leads others to false worship (Rev. 12-13).
- The churches to whom John wrote were facing former members who rose up in opposition to truth about Christ. These antichrists were not true Christians. They forsook the church and a true profession so “that it might become plain that they are all not of us.”
- V.19 is particularly helpful for understanding the nature of local church.
 - A local church is intended to be a visible representation of the true people of God.
 - It clearly implies the idea of biblical membership.
 - There is always to be some mixture of true and false professors.

Vv.20-21 The anointing of the Spirit that confirms the truth about Jesus.

- V.20 is the start of the second section. Vv.18-19 identified who was trying to deceive, and vv.20-27 warns of them and equips the churches for how to guard against the false teacher's deceptive schemes.
- Being “anointed by the Holy One” (vv.20, 27) refers to Jesus anointing them with the Holy Spirit who would confirm and guide them to all truth (Jn. 6:68-69; 16:13). The passage's context also implies this understanding. They received “all knowledge” of the “truth” from the Spirit. The truth is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

- The phrase “I write to you because” explains John’s comment from v.20: The Spirit confirms the truth and not a lie about Jesus. That’s important because people were trying to deceive them with a lie.

Vv.22-23 The denial of either the truth or a lie about Jesus.

- These verses get to the heart of what the opponents denied about Jesus. John calls them a “liar” because they deny Jesus is God’s Messiah come in the flesh and that his death was real and victorious over sin (1:3; 4:2-3; 15; 5:1, 6-8).
- John says you can’t have the Father while denying the Son. The false teachers were claiming true fellowship with the Father. John has said that doesn’t exist so long as you walk in sin and darkness (1:6-10). Now he says that you don’t have true fellowship with the Father unless you confess Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- It was the Father who sent the Son (4:10). It was the Father who bore testimony to the Son (5:9-10).

Vv.24-27 The assurance of abiding in the truth about Jesus.

- John’s readers had heard the truth of gospel, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They heard this from “the beginning,” i.e., the moment they believed and confessed him. John exhorts them to hold closely to that truth, to let it “abide in them” (v.24).
- The benefit of that is they will receive the promised “eternal life” (v.25). V.24b describes the eternal life as “abiding in the Son and in the Father.” This is another word of comfort and assurance, which is John main goal in writing this letter (5:13).
- Vv.26-27 get at same point previously made by focusing again on the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Their opponents were trying to deceive them with their teaching. Thus, the churches did not need John and definitely not the opponents to teach them because they had the Spirit who has taught and confirms the truth about Jesus, the truth they already knew. They needed to abide in the truth and abide in Christ.

Driving Home the Main Idea

At Mount Vernon, we often go back to fundamental truths about the gospel and orthodox Christianity. This is essential to our own perseverance so that we are not tempted to believe a lie about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Praise God for his Spirit and how he confirms the truth and helps us to abide in him!

Application

1. How does revealing false professors strengthen a local congregation?
2. Have you ever had a moment of being alarmed as you tried to discern biblical truth when you heard strange teaching? If so, what was that experience like? What did you do?
3. Why is it essential to confess, i.e., believe, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
4. What do you say to someone who says, “I don’t need the church to teach me; I have the Spirit.”



1 John 2:28-3:10

Review & Context

Written around AD 90, John's epistles were circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (1Jn 5:13).

Last week, John warns his readers directly of the opponents, who tried to deceive them of the truths about Jesus. In today's passage, John exhorts God's children to be like Jesus in righteousness and purity and not to continue in sin.

Main Idea

Righteousness is inseparable from being a child of God. Sin is incompatible with being a child of God.

Structure & Overview

Vv. 2:28-3:3 God's children are to strive to be like him in righteousness and purity

- In 2:24-27, for protection from deceptive teaching, John encourages his readers to abide in the truth and abide in Jesus. Now John encourages God's children to abide in Jesus in order to have confidence, instead of shame, at his coming (2:28). The same word is used by John to tell us we can have confidence for the day of judgment (1Jn 4:17).
- There is a fundamental connection between knowing God and doing (practicing) righteousness (2:29), a basis for distinguishing those who are the children of God from those who are the children of the devil.
- *Righteousness* is the quality or state of being righteous. For the true understanding of righteousness, we look to God.
 - "God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right." - Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Deut. 32:4, Isa. 45:19).
 - If our God were not righteous, we would have no need for a savior. If our God were not righteous, his word to us would be untrustworthy.
 - When Christ lived and died, He imputed (legally transferred) to us His righteousness as He took on our debt for sin. (2Co 5:21).
 - And now what? Rom 6:13 says, "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."
- The phrase "born of God" or "born of him" (2:29) is used 9 times in 1 John. For John, to be "born of God" was something that could not be affected by human action but only by God himself through the Holy Spirit in conjunction with faith in Jesus Christ. (John 1:12-13).
- In his great love, God has called us his children (3:1).
- It is not fully revealed what we shall be (3:2) but one thing we know, when he appears we will be like him. (2Co 3:18).
- The hope of seeing Christ and being made like him in the future expresses itself in an effort to purify oneself in the present (3:3). Our hope affects our conduct.

Vv. 3:4-6 God's children are not to continue in sin

- *Sin incompatible with the purpose of Christ's appearance (3:5).* Jesus appeared, sent by God to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1Jn 2:2)
- *Sin incompatible with Christ's sinlessness (3:5).* That Jesus himself was sinless is the consistent testimony of the New Testament (2Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1Pet 1:19, 2:22).
- *Sin incompatible with communion with Christ (3:6).* Since Christ is without sin, it tells us that a life style of habitual sin is incompatible with a life of abiding in Jesus Christ.
- Sinless perfectionism is not being taught in verse 3:6 (or 3:9).

You can drift into sin, but not into righteousness. - Leon Morris

Vv. 3:7-10 God's children are not to be led astray by evil

- The false teachers were not only living sinful lives themselves, but they were teaching others to do them same. Thus, the warning from John to God's children is to let no one deceive you or lead you astray (3:7).
- In 3:5 above Christ *appeared* to take away sins. Here Christ *appeared* to destroy the works of the devil (3:8). Putting the two together, we see that through his atoning death Jesus dealt with the problem of human sin and in so doing destroyed the work of the devil.
- There are various thoughts about the expression "God's seed" (3:9), though the general understanding is that it is a metaphor referring to something abiding in the heart of the true Christian which will prevent his sinning.
- The hallmark of God's ownership is proved by practicing righteousness and love (3:10).

Driving Home the Main Idea

Jesus is righteous, pure, sinless and loving. God's children should strive to be like Jesus in righteousness, purity, and love. In so doing, God's children should not continue in sin nor be led astray by evil.

Application

1. If we want to be like him in righteousness and purity, how do we purify ourselves? How do we go about acquiring and maintaining a pure and righteous heart?
2. Can a Christian achieve sinless perfection?
3. How are righteousness and love connected? What happens if you have one without the other?



1 John 3:11-24

Review & Context

John's epistles were written around AD 90 by the apostle John, who was an eyewitness to Jesus. These letters circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (5:13).

Last week, we saw from 2:28-3:10 how one can know if they are "children of God or children of the devil" (3:10). It's those who practice righteousness and not sin who are "born of God" (2:29). Practicing righteousness is inseparable from being a child of God.

Main Idea: *The true children of God love one another by following Christ's example even when their hearts don't want to.*

Structure & Overview

Vv.10c-11 Love for one another proves we are children of God.

- "By this" or "this is how we know" (NIV) is often used by John (v.11, 14, 16, 19, 24). In this passage, John says how we know who are the "children of God" or "children of the devil."
- What distinguishes the two is "love [for] one another." The conjunction "*for*" connects v.10 to v.11. His point is the true children of God love one another, a message they heard from the beginning of their Christian experience (see Jn. 13:31-35).

Vv.12-15 Do not follow Cain's example of hating your brother.

- In vv.12-18, he gives two examples – Cain and Jesus – one showing how not to love and one showing how to love.
- John's point is that the hatred of murderer and hatred of professing Christians toward one another are no different (v.15). Jesus says both are liable to same judgment (Mt. 5:21). John says both are of the same nature. He used Cain to illustrate his point, and said not to be like him (v.12a).
- John asked, "Why did [Cain] murder him?" That is a question of motive. John answered talking about his "deeds" compared to his brother's, referring to their offerings to God (Gen. 4:4-5). Cain responded with anger to his brother's offering being accepted by God. Thus, John's answer alludes to Cain's anger and hatred toward Abel. He had such anger and hatred because he was "of the evil one."
- In vv.13, John reminded them that they will be hated world. Jesus said the same (Jn. 15:18-19). That should make Christian love for one another shine all the brighter.
- V.14 is another word of assurance that makes a clear distinction. If you share the same hatred as the devil because you share the same nature as the devil then you'll share in the same destiny as the devil.

Vv.16-18 → Follow Jesus' sacrificial example of love.

- John turned back to the command to love and gave a positive example of Jesus' love. The phrase "by this we know love" implies more than just an example. At cross specifically, we know the essence of God's love for us (see 4:7-12).
- In this section, John focuses on Jesus' love as the defining example of Christian love. That's why he says "and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." Jesus willingly sacrificed himself for us; we ought to do same for one another. Love is a readiness and willingness to do anything for another's good (see Jn. 15:13).
- V.18 summarizes the main command for this section – "love in deed and truth." That specifically looked like providing generously to meet one another's physical needs, i.e., "world's goods."

- The phrase “yet closes his heart against him” gets to the motive of love (see Deut. 15:7-9). This implies that generosity doesn’t start with how much have or don’t have; it starts with the heart. In addition, we can be outwardly generous and inwardly selfish and not truly loving.

Vv.19-24 → Loving one another even when it’s hard gives us assurance.

- Vv.19-22 seem like digression from the command to love. That’s not the case. Rather, John gives a warning, encouragement, and word of assurance.
 - Vv.19-20 → *Warning against not loving by “closing your heart” to those in need.* If we love generously then we have assurance that we’re “of the truth.” When we’re tempted to “close our heart against” a brother or sister in need, we need to “persuade”¹ our heart not to do that by remembering God is greater in love and we’re to be like him and that he knows everything about our heart.
 - Vv.21-22 → *Encouragement to love generously knowing God answers our prayers.* If our hearts don’t object to loving generously then can have confidence in relationship with God, specifically in prayer knowing he will hear and answer.
 - Vv.23-24 → *Assurance of salvation from keeping his commandments.* His commandments are to “believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” It pleases our Father when we reflect his Son’s love by loving one another generously. If we do this then we have assurance we “abide in God and God in us” (v.24).

Driving Home Main Idea

When we ask each other, “How are you doing spiritually?” That should not simply mean how are your quiet times. It also means “How are you doing at practicing righteousness and loving the brethren?” Love is central to Christian obedience. It’s following Jesus 101.

Application

1. Why is this command central and essential to the Christian life?
2. What is hatred toward another?
3. Practically, how do we guard our hearts against hatred of one another?
4. What ways can we love one another at Mount Vernon? How can we practically fulfill the command to “love in deed” from vv.16-18?
5. How are you tempted to “close your heart against” another brother or sister in need? How can you fight the temptation to stinginess?

¹ Colin Kruse, *The Letters of John*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2000), 140. Kruse says that the word translated “set at rest” (NIV) or “reassure” (ESV) is best interpreted as “to persuade or convince.” The word used here is used 52 times in the NT. “To persuade or convince” is the meaning 42 times. 6 times it means “to trust” and 3 times it means to “obey.” Only here do translators say “reassure,” which Kruse finds misleading and thus opts for the more frequent meaning.



1 John 4:1-6

Review & Context

Written around AD 90, John's epistles were circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (1Jn 5:13).

Last week, we saw that love for one another proves we are children of God. Indeed, loving one another generously gives us assurance we "abide in God and God in us." Also, we saw that Jesus' love as the defining example of Christian love.

Main Idea

Believers are able to know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Structure & Overview

V. 4:1 Test the spirits

- John warns his readers: "Do not believe every spirit." Believe the Spirit, the Spirit whom he has given us (V3:24), but do not believe every spirit.
- "To test the spirits" means to evaluate the utterances of those who claim to know God and say they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It means to compare the doctrines which they profess to hold with what is revealed, by the fruits of their doctrines in their lives.
- Testing the spirits is important because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Warnings about false prophets operating in the Christian community are found in several places in the New Testament (Matt 7:15, Matt 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2Pet 2:1). Errant teaching leaves people with a false hope of salvation and prevents them from hearing the true message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Vv. 4:2-3 Criteria used to test the spirits

- The sincere, genuine confession of Christ, the heartfelt conviction and submission to Christ, is evidence of the Spirit's work.
- "Come in the flesh" is an important phrase here as it points to the humanity of Christ. The fact that there was a real incarnation is essential to all just views of the atonement.
- Anyone denying that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh indicates the spirit by which they were speaking was not the Spirit of God and show the "spirit of the antichrist." The aim of the antichrist is to deceive people by denying the truth about Jesus Christ, and in the context of 1John, by denying the true humanity of Christ come in the flesh.

V. 4:4 Victory in applying the test

- The fact of the victory
 - John encourages his readers reminding them they are "from God".
 - His readers are people who have overcome "them." They have overcome the false teachers and false prophets by rejecting their heretical teaching that denies Christ come in the flesh.
 - He writes later in the letter of their victory of faith as an accomplished fact (5:4).
- The reason for the victory

- They overcome the false teachers because “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”
- Believers are not only “from God” but also indwelt by God (4:12, 13, 15), an indwelling effected by the Spirit (4:13).

There are two great forces at work in the world today: the unlimited power of God and the limited power of Satan. - Corrie ten Boom

Vv. 4:5-6 Know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error

- Listening to those from the world
 - Being from the world was one of the marks by which the spirit of the antichrist might be known.
 - Their conversation pertained to the things of this world. The influence of the world was evident in their speech.
 - The people of the world approve of what they say and receive their instructions with pleasure, and recognize them as teachers and guides, for their views are in accord with their own. (2Ti 4:3-4)
- Listening to those from God
 - Those who truly know God, who knows him so as to trust in him and love him, will listen to them.
 - The opposite is also true: Those who are not born of God, who do not practice righteousness, nor loves his brother, nor confesses Christ come in the flesh, will not listen to them. (John 8:47)
 - The test in verse 2 is whether people bring sincere and truthful words *out of* their heart, while the test in verse 6 is whether they will allow sincere and truthful words go *into* their heart. (John Piper)

Driving Home the Main Idea

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1Cor. 2:12-13)

Application

1. What is the difference between biblical discernment and the sin of being judgmental? Can discernment be taken too far?
2. The truth of Jesus’s humanity is just as important to hold to as the truth of his deity. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be fully human?
3. How has knowing “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” encouraged or strengthened you?
4. How can a Christian develop discernment?



1 John 4:7-12

Review & Context

John's epistles were written around AD 90 by the apostle John, who was an eyewitness to Jesus. These letters circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers (2:26). He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (5:13).

In today's passage, John returns to the command to "love one another." Love is one of the ways one has assurance they know God and are born of God (2:7-11; 3:11-24; 4:7-5:5). Practicing righteousness (1:5-2:1; 2:29-3:10; 5:16-18) and believing Jesus is Son of God (1:1-4; 2:21-23; 4:2-3; 5:6-11) are also evidence for assurance.

Main Idea: *We are commanded and constrained to love one another because God is love and greatly loved us by sending his only Son to die for our sins.*

Structure & Overview

Vv.7-8 → Love one another because God is love.

- Keeping the command to "love one another" is a defining characteristic of those "born of God" and "know God." If one claims to "love God" then they must love the brethren or they are "liars" (4:20-21). That's the issue John addressed in 4:7-5:5.
- The point of vv.7-11 is to reiterate the command and to explain why we're to love. First, love comes from God because it's who he is by nature (vv.7-8). Second, his love in the gospel constrains us to love one another (vv.9-11).
- Love comes from God like light from the sun and heat from fire. He is the source of love because "he is love." If we have experienced God's love then we will love.
- Love is a communicable attribute of God, so we can be described as "loving." But it can only be said of God, not us, that he "is love." Love has always existed within the Godhead. God did not need his creation in order to show love. God is and shows love apart of creation within the persons of Trinity. Love is woven into the Triune God's nature and relationship.
- God does everything as a Father. He created as a Father (Jn. 17:24-26). He ruled over, cared for, and guided Israel as Father to his "firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 1:31; Is. 1:2; Jer. 31:0; Hos. 11:1). He loved and sent his "beloved Son" (Mt. 3:16-17). The Spirit makes known the Father's love and fosters love (Lk. 10:21; Rom. 5:5; 8:15; 2 Cor. 13:14). Thus, God is a loving, life-giving Father.
- Michael Reeves: "And just as a fountain [Jer. 2:13], to be a fountain, must pour forth water, so the Father, to be Father, must give out life. That is who he is. That is his most fundamental identity. Thus, love is not something the Father *has*, merely one of his many moods. Rather, he *is* love. He could not love. If he did not love, he would not be Father."¹

Vv.9-11 God's love manifested in the gospel constrains us to love one another.

- In v.11b, the command is repeated in light of the gospel (vv.9-10). God's love was manifested in "sending his only Son." The gospels commonly talk about the Father sending the Son (cf. Jesus' high priestly prayer in Jn. 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 25).

¹ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (IVP, 2012), 26. Author's emphasis.

- Vv.9-10 say why the Father sent the Son. It was “so we might live through him.” V.10 explains how that was done. It was by him being “the propitiation for our sins” (cf. 2:2). Meaning Jesus bore the punishment and removed God’s wrath by dying on the cross so we might be reconciled to God.
- The word translated “only” is used 9 times in the New Testament. Three times in Luke (Lk. 7:12; 8:42; 9:38) and once Hebrews (Heb. 11:7). In each case, it describes the individual’s only child in a dire situation.
- John uses it 5 times to describe Jesus as God’s *unique* Son (Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn. 4:9). Only the Son reveals Father’s glory (Jn. 1:14, 18). We find life through the only Son sent by the Father (Jn. 3:16,18). John’s point is we are to be amazed at just how great God’s love is for us in his *only* Son. In light of that, we are constrained to love one another.

V.12 Loving one another proves that the invisible God abides in us.

- This is fascinating verse because it shows the miraculous experience of God’s love. When we experience God’s love in the gospel by being born again then we have God himself and his love “abide in us!”
- When love we one another, we demonstrate the truthfulness of this experience. “No one has ever seen” God in unveiled, radiant glory. But they can see him in our love for one another.
- The phrase “his love is perfected [or completed] in us” is a little confusing. It is best understood as having its full affect or reaching its end goal. In other words, when we love one another, God’s kind of love has its full effect in lives. That freely-given, selfless, life-giving love God showed us is demonstrated to and experienced by others when we love.

Driving Home the Main Idea

To conclude, I encourage you to do two things: First, remember just how much God has loved you. You may be experiencing guilt, shame, apathy, or something else. If so, over next 24hrs think, meditate, and talk to others so you might be more thankful for God’s love for you. Second, identify specific ways and specific people you need to love more.

Application:

1. How does this aspect of God’s love – “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us...” – inform how we love one another?
2. What wrong motives can we have for loving others and how does the gospel correct those motives?
3. How have you practically experienced or seen God’s love to you through the love of another brother or sister?



1 John 4:13-21

Review & Context

Written around AD 90, John's epistles were circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (1Jn 5:13).

Much like last week, today's passage is about our abiding relationship with God and the command to love one another ("whoever loves God must also love his brother").

Main Idea

Our love for fellow believers springs forth from our abiding relationship with God.

Structure & Overview

Vv. 4:13-16 Abiding in God's love

- *Assurance of mutual indwelling is related to the presence of the Spirit*
 - The important little word "abide" is used 25 times in John's epistles and six times in 4:12-16. Our abiding in Jesus is not a one-sided affair: just as true as it is that we should abide in Him, it is true that He does abide in us. (John 15:4)
 - It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit within us that makes it possible for us to know that we abide in Him. The Holy Spirit gives us this assurance of abiding.
- *Assurance of mutual indwelling is related to the confession of Christ*
 - The mere words "Jesus is the Son of God" is not sufficient evidence of indwelling. It must be that the sincere, genuine confession of Christ, the heartfelt conviction and submission to Christ, is evidence of the Spirit's work.
 - Confession of the truth about the Son is a condition for an abiding relationship with God the Father. (Rom. 10:9)
- *Assurance of mutual indwelling is related to abiding in love*
 - The testimony of the eyewitness that the Father sent the Son to be Savior of the world (v. 14) is an affirmation of the love of God and believers may have full assurance of the love God has for them.
 - The twofold indwelling is realized by him who "abides in love", the one who lives, moves, thinks, and acts in love. Such a one "dwells in God."

The only way to love, as the only way to believe, is by living in God and God in us. -Stott

Vv. 4:17-18 Confidence and no fear are fruits of abiding in God's love

- The word for "perfect" is also translated "complete". It also means to bring to the end or goal. Perfected love refers to God's love in us coming to completion or coming into action as we love each other. God's love is put into action reaching its appointed goal.

- The two-way relationship of God's love in our lives gives us confidence. God's love that is with us, perfected with us, completes its work so that our fear is removed as we face the day of judgment.
- The meaning of this phrase "as he is so also are we in this world" is hard to understand. NIV says "because in this world we are like him". It shows that we are like Jesus. Thus, at the judgment day, God won't condemn people who are like his Son.
- The fear John writes of here is not the appropriate reverence and awesome fear we should all have of God, but the kind of fear which involves punishment. It is that agonizing kind of fear which robs their confidence before God in the day of judgment. The love that casts out such fear is perfect love.
- The lingering apprehension of future wrath shows that perfected love has not accomplished its full and completing work. If our relationship with God is marked by this tormenting fear, it shows that we have not been made perfect and complete in His love.

Vv. 4:19-21 Loving fellow believers is evidence of God's Abiding love

- If the love relationship with God is real, it will manifest itself in love for Christian brothers and sisters.
- John is saying, if people cannot carry out the lesser requirement to love the fellow believers whom they have seen, they cannot carry out the greater requirement to love God whom they have not seen.
- Though love springs forth from our abiding relationship with God and comes from our being born of Him, there is also an essential aspect of our *will* involved. We are therefore commanded to love our brother in Christ.

Driving Home the Main Idea

Love is an action verb. God loved us first and we are to put love into action by loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the recurring themes of the whole book — loving each other — is the reassuring evidence that we are truly born of God and that we have an abiding relationship with the Lord.

Application

1. How can we tell when we are "abiding in Christ?" What are some signs of abiding?
2. Jesus was in the world. And "as he is so also are we in this world." What do you see in the life of Jesus that makes you want to be like him?
3. Perfect love casts out fear. Besides fear of final judgment, what else might a non-believer fear that a Christian need not fear?
4. What do you say to non-Christians or Christians who use "God love us" or "God is love" as a license to sin?



1 John 5:1-5

Review & Context

John's epistles were written around AD 90 by the apostle John, who was an eyewitness to Jesus. These letters circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers (2:26). He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (5:13).

In today's passage, John concludes his instruction about love and shows how faith in Jesus as the Son of God, love for one another, and obedience to God's commands are interconnected. These three things are the defining characteristics of the children of God.

Main Idea: *Faith, love, and obedience must all be present as proof we're children of God and have overcome the world.*

Structure & Overview

Vv.1-4a Faith, love, and obedience are inseparably connected.

- 4:7-5:3 is one section making point that if we love God then we have to love his children (see 4:20-21). 5:1-3 conclude the section and show how love, faith, and obedience are inseparably connected.
- Those who are truly born of God believe Jesus is God's king sent to conquer God's people's enemies – sin and death – and establish God's loving rule over their lives. Those who love the Father loves those born of the Father. John's goal isn't to give an exposition on how the new birth happens. Rather, he's showing how we are to love those born of God evidenced in their belief that Jesus is the Christ (v.1)
- In vv.2-3a, John takes a different approach than usual. He says that we show our love for one another by loving the Father, which is different than his usual approach (see 4:21). We show our love for the Father by obeying his commandments. John's main commandment in his letter is to love one another. So now John has run full circle to show how all 3 of these characteristics inseparable.
- Vv.3b-4a show how the new birth makes it possible to fulfill God's commands to love one another and overcomes selfish, worldly desires. When we're born again, we come to know God's power to keep his law and how his commands are not a burden (see Mt. 11:30). That's also because we have overcome our worldly desires that want to live selfishly (see 1 Jn. 2:16-18).

Vv.4b-5 True faith in Jesus as the Son of God gives victory over the world.

- These verses function as transition between the previous section and the following section. John goes back to the theme of faith, i.e., right belief, in Jesus as Son of God.
- John uses the phrase "overcomes the world" three times. It's his way of describing how his readers have and can overcome the outside influences tempting them to belief falsehood about Christ and about how they can live as a Christian.
- The means by which we overcome is through faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Professing Jesus is the "Christ" (v.1) and the "Son of God" (v.5) are synonymous in John's letter. In the following verses, he will explain what it means that Jesus is the "Son of God." John's

emphasis here is that the faith that overcomes is not ambiguous but has a rightful object. It's Jesus as the Son of God. Only those who believe that truth are those who "overcome the world."

Driving Home the Main Idea

Faith, love, and obedience must all be present as proof we're children of God and have overcome the world. Who do you need to love better and how can you do that? Whatever the relationship and however hard it may be, remember God has done a miraculous work in your life. He has caused you to be born again and given you faith in Christ that empowers you to love.

Application

1. How does sound doctrine strengthen a congregation's love?¹
2. How does obedience to the Lord strengthen a congregation's love for one another?
3. What counsel would you give to someone who finds obedience burdensome?
4. At the risk of sounding Pentecostal, how would you apply that "faith gives us victory" to someone struggling with the flesh, world, and the devil?

¹ Comments are inspired by Bobby Jamieson, "Sound Doctrine Is for Love", *Sound Doctrine: How a Church Grows in the Love And Holiness of God* (Crossway, 2013), 63-72.



1 John 5:6-12

Review & Context

Written around AD 90, John's epistles were circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (1Jn 5:13).

Last week we learned that three things are the defining characteristics of the children of God: faith in Jesus as the Son of God, love for one another, and obedience to God's commands. We also learned that true faith in Jesus as the Son of God gives victory over the world. This week we will look at testimony concerning the Son of God and how it relates to eternal life.

Main Idea

The certainty of God's testimony assures believers that God gave eternal life in his Son.

Structure & Overview

Vv. 5:6-8 Three that testify concerning the Son of God

- Last week in v. 5, we saw that John's emphasis is that the faith that overcomes is not ambiguous but has a rightful object and that object is Jesus as the Son of God. Only those who believe that truth are those who "overcome the world."
- The connecting link between v. 5 and today's passage is this: if the victory over the world can be secured only by those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 5), then it is of vast importance that the Divine testimony to him should be unmistakably clear.
- We should not get distracted by the meaning of by water and by blood: the focus of verse 6 is Jesus Christ. The point of all this is that John wants to precisely identify who Jesus the Son of God is, the One on Whom we must believe.
- The Holy Spirit bears witness to the true person of Jesus, even as Jesus promised He would (John 15:26).
- John describes the Spirit as the "Spirit of truth" here, in 4:6, and three times in the upper room discourse (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). The testimony of the Supreme Witness of Jesus is most true, and firmly to be believed.
- There are three that testify. In both the Old and New Testaments important issues were decided with the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut 17:6, 19:15, Matt 18:16, John 8:17, 2Cor 13:1, 1Tim 5:19, Heb. 10:28). These three are all consistent witnesses in telling us the importance of who Jesus is.

Vv. 5:9-10 The certainty of God's testimony concerning his Son

- God’s testimony is more worthy of belief, more valuable, more sure, and to be more firmly depended on, since it must be infallible; for God can neither deceive, nor be deceived (Heb 6:18).
- John does not want us to believe with blind faith concerning the Son of God. Instead, our faith is to be based on reliable testimony. And we have the most reliable testimony possible, the witness of God.
- John explains that the divine testimony is appropriated internally by those who believe in Christ. The testimony in themselves is the true testimony concerning Jesus Christ which they have heard, accepted, and internalized.

Vv. 5:11-12 God gave us eternal life in his Son

- The sum and the substance of the testimony of God is declared: God gave us eternal life (Rom 6:23), and this life is in his Son (5:20).
- Because it is God Himself who declares this, it should give assurance to believers that they indeed have eternal life.
- To “have the Son” is closely related to believing in the Son (5:13) and the “abiding language” found in 1 John (2:24, 2:27, 2:28, 4:13) and in the Fourth Gospel (John 6:56, 14:23, 15:4-7).
- While those who believe in and are indwelt by the Son have eternal life, the opposite is the case for those who do not believe in him. There is no salvation outside of faith in Christ (John 3:36).

Driving Home the Main Idea

Who is Jesus Christ the Son of God? The Divine testimony to him is unmistakably clear: Jesus Christ is Eternal Life and “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” This certainty of God’s testimony assures believers that God gave them eternal life. But “whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” There is no salvation outside of faith in Christ. Is there someone in your life you need to testify as to who Jesus is?

Application

1. The Spirit of truth testifies. Our church covenant begins with the words “Having been led by the Spirit of God”. In your own experience, in what manner has the Spirit of God led you to truth?
2. What are some practical things you can do to be ready to give your testimony or share the gospel message?
3. Is your life different now that you are a believer than it was before you became a Christian? How would you describe the “life” you have in Jesus Christ to a non-believer?



1 John 5:13-21

Review & Context

Written around AD 90, John's epistles were circulated to different churches being led astray by false teachers. He wrote his letter to give assurance that they know they have eternal life (1Jn 5:13).

Last week we learned that the certainty of God's testimony assures believers that God gave eternal life in his Son (5:6-12). In the concluding verses, John emphasizes how we can know that we have the eternal life God gives in his Son.

Main Idea *Through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we have assurance of eternal life, answered prayer, and sovereign protection.*

Structure & Overview

Vv.13-15 The assurance of eternal life and answered prayer.

- V.13 is the letter's main purpose statement. This statement is similar to the purpose statement in his gospel (see Jn. 20:30-31). The difference was his gospel had an evangelistic purpose and his letter had a pastoral purpose. He wanted readers to be assured of their eternal life.
- According to v.12-13, assurance of eternal life is never separated from faith in the Son. Having the Son and believing in him are intimately connected (Jn. 1:12).
- Jesus is both the source and substance of eternal life. We believe in Christ by faith to receive eternal life, and he is the life we are to seek by faith (see Jn. 11:25).
- Vv.14-15 are derived from the assurance of having eternal life. If we know God has given us eternal life then we know he hears and answer prayers. Thus, we can have boldness to pray for "anything according to his will."

Vv.16-17 The assurance when committing sin.

- Vv.16-17 are connected to the previous verses with the theme of prayer. John's point is to reassure faithful Christians that God gives life when they repent of sin. He uses our prayers for one another to accomplish his purpose.
- V.16a is referring to a Christian, who commits an observable sin. That sin is still serious because "all wrongdoing is sin" (v.17). The Christian needs to repent. That happens through others praying. God will hear that prayer and "give him life." That's why the sin does "not lead to death." John reassures readers that God will answer prayers for repentance and give life when they fall short of love and obedience
- The "sin that leads to death" refers to the sin of the false teachers. They were never truly of the community of faith (2:19). They were "antichrists (2:18, 22; 4:3) because they sought to deceive churches with false teaching (2:26; 3:7). They persisted in those false lies and lifestyle; therefore, they committed a "sin that leads to death." John is assuring his readers that the false teachers are condemned.
- V.16b says, "I do not say that one should pray for that." This is either an implied exhortation not to pray for or to question how effective it is to pray for false teachers. John discourages praying for them because God does not tolerate false teaching. Those who pervert his word and grace are objects of wrath (Deut. 18:20-22; Gal. 1:8; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 4).

Vv.18-21 The assurance of sovereign protection and knowing the true God, Jesus Christ.

- John concludes with three statements that bolster assurance. V.18 says we know that “everyone who is has been born of God does not keep on sinning.” This is similar to 3:4, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning.” If we’re born again, our life will be characterized by ongoing repentance, faith, and obedience.
- Jesus provides sovereign protection to God’s children from the evil one’s temptations and snares that lead to condemnation. V.19 says that’s because “we are from God” and are under his rule, love, and protection (see Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13).
- In v.20, John ties everything back together with laser focus on Christ to give assurance. This is nearly identical to what Jesus prayed in Jn. 17:3: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Jesus knew his purpose was to give eternal life by knowing the Father and the Son.
- John, writing to confused and troubled churches 50-60 years from when Jesus prayed, reminds them of the exact same reason why Jesus said he came. He adds, “And we are in him...in his Son.”

Driving Home the Main Idea

With the most direct words about Jesus’ divinity, John gives us unshakable assurance of salvation! Assurance is never rooted in what we do. It’s all about who Jesus is. He is “the true God and eternal life.” It’s all about what he came to do. He came to give us true understanding. He came to give us eternal life through his atoning sacrifice. He has united us to him by his Spirit.

Application

1. Why is assurance essential to the Christian life? Why do we need to “know that we have eternal life?”
2. Assuming you’re like me, why don’t we pray more boldly for “anything according to God’s will?”
3. John’s emphasizes in vv.16-17 how God gives life through praying for one another’s repentance. What do relationships in a church need to look like for this to happen?
4. How does Jesus’ sovereign protection help equip us to fight temptation (v.18)?