

The MARKS OF A TRUE BELIEVER

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary
on 1, 2 & 3 John



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By Dr. Paul Crawford

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Preface

The letters of 1, 2, and 3 John are among the most personal, practical, and spiritually searching writings in the New Testament. Though brief in length, they speak with remarkable clarity about some of the most important questions any believer can ask: How can I know that I truly belong to Christ? What does genuine faith look like? How should a Christian respond to sin, false teaching, hatred, fear, and the pressures of the world? What are the visible marks of a life that has truly been transformed by the grace of God?

These are not merely theological questions. They are deeply personal questions.

The Apostle John writes as a spiritual father to believers who were facing confusion, deception, and division. False teachers had arisen. Some denied essential truths about Jesus Christ. Others claimed to know God while living in disobedience. Still others spoke about love while failing to demonstrate it in their relationships with fellow believers.

Into that environment, John writes with both tenderness and authority.

Again and again, he brings his readers back to the foundational realities of the Christian faith: truth, obedience, love, righteousness, assurance, fellowship, and faith in Jesus Christ.

John does not present salvation as a vague religious feeling. He shows that genuine faith produces recognizable fruit. The believer does not become sinless, but there is a new direction to his life. He desires to walk in the light. He confesses his sin. He seeks to obey God. He loves other believers. He rejects the spirit of the world. He holds firmly to the truth about Jesus Christ. He perseveres in faith.

These are the marks of a true believer.

That is the central emphasis of this commentary.

The Purpose of This Book

The Marks of a True Believer: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on 1, 2 & 3 John was written to help readers carefully examine these three inspired letters and understand their message in a clear, practical, and biblical way.

The goal of this book is not simply to explain what John wrote. It is also to show why his words matter to believers today.

Every verse of Scripture deserves careful attention. Sometimes the smallest phrase carries tremendous theological significance. A single word can connect a passage to the entire message of the gospel.

For that reason, this commentary moves slowly through the text.

Rather than rushing from one major theme to another, we will examine John's words verse by verse, considering their meaning, their doctrinal significance, their biblical connections, and their practical application.

My desire is that the reader will not merely finish these letters with more information, but with a deeper love for Christ and a clearer understanding of what it means to walk faithfully with Him.

First John: Assurance and Genuine Faith

First John repeatedly addresses the subject of assurance.

John tells us plainly why he wrote:

“I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

That word **know** is extremely important.

God does not intend for His children to live in constant spiritual uncertainty. Biblical assurance is possible.

However, John does not build assurance upon emotion alone.

He gives his readers several spiritual tests.

Do we believe the truth about Jesus Christ?

Do we desire to obey God's commandments?

Do we love other believers?

Are we walking in the light?

Do we confess our sin?

Are we resisting the spirit of the world?

These questions do not teach salvation by works. Salvation is entirely by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Yet saving faith produces evidence.

A changed life does not earn salvation.

A changed life reveals salvation.

First John therefore provides one of Scripture's clearest examinations of the difference between profession and possession.

Many may profess Christianity.

John asks whether there is evidence that Christ truly possesses the heart.

Second John: Truth and Love Must Remain Together

Second John is one of the shortest books in the Bible, but its message is urgently needed.

John repeatedly joins two ideas together:

Truth and love.

Biblical Christianity never requires us to choose between them.

Truth without love can become cold and harsh.

Love without truth can become sentimental and spiritually dangerous.

Christian love must be governed by truth, and Christian truth must be expressed in love.

John also warns believers about deceivers who deny the truth about Jesus Christ.

The early church faced false teachers who attempted to distort the identity and nature of Christ. The church still faces the same danger today.

Names and movements change.

False teaching remains.

Second John reminds us that Christian hospitality and kindness must never become cooperation with those who intentionally corrupt the gospel.

Believers must be gracious.

But believers must also be discerning.

Third John: Faithfulness in Christian Service

Third John provides a fascinating contrast between three men.

Gaius represents faithful Christian hospitality.

Diotrephes represents pride, control, and selfish ambition.

Demetrius represents a good testimony.

Through these three men, John shows that spiritual character is revealed not only in what a person believes, but also in how that person treats others.

Gaius faithfully supported those who were spreading the gospel.

Diotrephes loved to have the highest position.

Demetrius possessed a reputation that agreed with the truth.

These examples remain extremely relevant for pastors, church leaders, teachers, missionaries, and every believer serving in the body of Christ.

Christian ministry must never become a pursuit of recognition or authority.

The purpose of ministry is to glorify Christ, serve His people, and advance His truth.

A Word About False Teaching

One of the strongest themes running through John's letters is the danger of deception.

John does not treat doctrine as unimportant.

What we believe about Jesus matters.

The gospel has content.

Jesus Christ is not simply a spiritual example, moral teacher, or religious symbol. He is the eternal Son of God who came in the flesh, died for sinners, rose again, and gives eternal life to everyone who truly believes in Him.

Any teaching that denies the biblical Christ attacks the foundation of Christianity itself.

John therefore calls believers to discernment.

We are to test the spirits.

We are to examine teaching.

We are to remain in the truth we have received.

The church must always be loving, but it must never become careless about doctrine.

A Word About Christian Love

John is often remembered as the apostle of love, and rightly so.

Few biblical writers speak about love as frequently or powerfully as John.

Yet John's definition of love is far deeper than emotion.

Love is rooted in the character of God.

“God is love.”

Love is revealed supremely in Jesus Christ.

God sent His Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

Christian love therefore reflects sacrificial love.

It serves.

It gives.

It forgives.

It obeys.

It seeks the good of others.

John even tells us that love for other believers is one of the clearest evidences that a person has passed from death to life.

A Christianity without love is a contradiction.

A Word About Sin

John is equally clear about sin.

Believers must never pretend that sin does not exist.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.”

The Christian life is not sinless perfection.

It is a life of confession, repentance, dependence upon Christ, and increasing obedience.

The believer may fall, but he does not make peace with sin.

He runs to Christ.

John gives believers one of the most comforting promises in Scripture:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Our confidence is not found in our perfection.

Our confidence is found in our perfect Savior.

A Word About Assurance

Many sincere believers struggle with assurance.

They wonder whether they are truly saved.

They examine their failures and become discouraged.

John's letters offer strong help to the doubting Christian.

Assurance does not come from pretending that we never fail.

It comes from looking to Christ, believing God's promises, and recognizing the evidence of God's transforming work within us.

John repeatedly points believers toward certainty.

“We know.”

“We have passed from death to life.”

“We know that we have eternal life.”

The Christian faith is not built upon wishful thinking.

It rests upon the promises of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ.

How to Use This Commentary

This book may be used in several ways.

It can be read devotionally, a few verses at a time.

It can be used by pastors preparing sermons.

It can assist Sunday school teachers and Bible study leaders.

It can help individual believers study John's letters in greater depth.

It can also serve as a reference work when questions arise about specific verses or doctrines.

Whatever your purpose, I encourage you to keep an open Bible beside you.

Read the passage first.

Examine the cross references.

Consider the explanation.

Then ask the most important question:

What is God teaching me through His Word?

Bible study should never stop with interpretation.

Truth must lead to transformation.

My Prayer for the Reader

My prayer is that this commentary will help you see Jesus Christ more clearly.

I pray that those who lack assurance will find confidence in the promises of God.

I pray that those who have grown spiritually cold will be drawn again to the light.

I pray that those facing deception will be strengthened in the truth.

I pray that those carrying bitterness will rediscover the command to love.

I pray that pastors and teachers will find useful material for faithfully explaining God's Word.

And above all, I pray that every reader will be challenged to examine his or her own life in the light of Scripture.

The question is not merely:

Do I call myself a Christian?

The deeper question is:

Does my life display the marks of someone who truly knows Jesus Christ?

John's letters call us to examine ourselves, but they do not leave us staring at ourselves.

They continually direct our attention back to Christ.

He is our Advocate.

He is the righteous One.

He is the propitiation for our sins.

He is the Son of God.

He is eternal life.

He is the One in whom we must abide.

As you begin this journey through 1, 2, and 3 John, may your faith be strengthened, your assurance deepened, your discernment sharpened, your love increased, and your fellowship with Jesus Christ made sweeter.

And may the marks of a true believer become increasingly visible in every part of your life.

Dr. Paul Crawford

Prologue

When Faith Is Put to the Test

There is a difference between saying that you believe and possessing a faith that has truly changed your life.

That difference matters.

A person can know Christian language, attend church, own a Bible, sing hymns, pray publicly, and still never seriously examine whether his profession of faith is genuine.

The Apostle John refuses to allow us to remain comfortable with empty profession.

In his three New Testament letters, he brings us face-to-face with some of the most searching questions in Scripture.

Do you walk in the light?

Do you confess your sin?

Do you obey God?

Do you love other believers?

Do you believe the truth about Jesus Christ?

Do you resist the spirit of the world?

Do you remain faithful when false teaching appears?

Do you possess assurance that eternal life is found in the Son of God?

John does not ask these questions to destroy the confidence of genuine believers.

He asks them so that genuine believers may know where they stand.

His purpose is not to create hopeless uncertainty.

His purpose is to expose false confidence while strengthening true assurance.

That is one of the reasons the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John remain so important.

A Church Surrounded by Confusion

The first Christians lived in a world filled with competing philosophies, religious claims, false teachers, spiritual deception, and moral compromise.

In that respect, their world was not very different from ours.

John wrote during a time when dangerous teachers were attempting to distort the truth about Jesus Christ.

Some denied that Jesus had truly come in the flesh.

Others claimed special spiritual knowledge while refusing to submit themselves to the moral demands of God's Word.

Some separated spirituality from obedience.

Others separated love from truth.

John would allow none of it.

For him, Christianity was not merely an intellectual system.

It was not simply a collection of religious ideas.

It was life in fellowship with the living God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

And that life could be recognized.

It had marks.

It had evidence.

It produced fruit.

The Question of Genuine Faith

Few questions are more important than this:

How can I know that my faith is real?

John addresses that question repeatedly.

He does not point us toward emotional experiences alone.

Feelings change.

He does not tell us to trust merely in a prayer we once prayed.

Memories can be uncertain.

He does not tell us to depend upon church membership, baptism, religious activity, or family tradition.

None of those things, by themselves, can save.

Instead, John directs us first to Jesus Christ.

Then he shows us the evidence that appears in the life of one who truly knows Him.

A genuine believer believes the truth about Christ.

A genuine believer desires to obey God.

A genuine believer loves the people of God.

A genuine believer does not become comfortable with sin.

A genuine believer remains in the truth.

A genuine believer perseveres in faith.

These things do not earn salvation.

They flow from salvation.

Good works are not the root of eternal life.

They are fruit produced by eternal life.

Walking in the Light

One of John's most powerful pictures of the Christian life is walking in the light.

God is light.

There is no darkness in Him.

Therefore, anyone who claims fellowship with God while continually choosing darkness is living in contradiction.

Walking in the light does not mean that the believer never sins.

John immediately makes that clear.

The believer still battles sin.

The believer still fails.

The believer still needs forgiveness.

The difference is that the genuine Christian no longer desires to hide comfortably in darkness.

When sin is exposed, he confesses it.

When he falls, he returns to Christ.

When God's Word corrects him, he desires to respond.

That is one of the marks of spiritual life.

The unbeliever may excuse sin.

The believer increasingly learns to confess it.

The Advocate for Sinners

John's tests of faith are searching, but they are never separated from grace.

He knows that sincere believers can become discouraged when confronted with their failures.

That is why he quickly points us to Jesus Christ.

If anyone sins, John tells us, we have an Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous.

What a comforting truth.

The Christian's hope is not that he has lived perfectly.

His hope is that Jesus Christ is perfectly righteous.

The Christian's confidence is not in his ability to save himself.

His confidence rests in the finished work of Christ.

Jesus is not merely an example to follow.

He is the Savior to trust.

He is the righteous One.

He is the propitiation for sin.

He is the eternal Son of God.

He is the source of eternal life.

The Test of Obedience

John writes:

We know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.

That statement strikes directly at a Christianity that wants salvation without surrender.

The New Testament never teaches that obedience saves us.

But it repeatedly teaches that salvation produces a new attitude toward obedience.

A person who truly knows Christ will not obey perfectly.

But he will increasingly desire to obey.

There will be a new direction.

A new allegiance.

A new relationship with the commands of God.

The believer no longer sees God's commandments merely as restrictions.

He begins to recognize them as the instructions of a loving Father.

Obedience becomes an expression of love.

The Test of Love

John also gives enormous attention to love.

Again and again, he tells believers to love one another.

For John, this is not optional Christianity.

Love is one of the clearest evidences of spiritual life.

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.”

Those are strong words.

Christian love is more than politeness.

It is more than warm feelings.

It acts.

It sacrifices.

It forgives.

It serves.

It gives.

It seeks the spiritual good of others.

John points us to Jesus Christ as the supreme example.

Christ laid down His life for us.

Therefore, we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

The Test of Truth

John is sometimes called the apostle of love.

That is appropriate.

But John is also an apostle of truth.

He never separates the two.

He understands that love without truth becomes sentimentality.

Truth without love can become harshness.

Biblical Christianity requires both.

That becomes especially clear in 2 John.

Believers are commanded to walk in love.

But they are also warned not to assist those who spread false doctrine about Christ.

That may sound severe to modern ears.

John understood what was at stake.

False teaching about Jesus is not harmless theological disagreement.

If we lose the biblical Christ, we lose the gospel.

If we lose the gospel, we lose the message of salvation.

Truth matters because Christ matters.

The Spirit of Antichrist

John uses one of the New Testament's most serious expressions when he speaks about the spirit of antichrist.

He warns his readers that many antichrists have already appeared.

His concern is doctrinal deception.

Anyone who denies the truth about Jesus Christ places himself against Christ.

This warning remains relevant.

Every generation encounters teachers who attempt to redefine Jesus.

Some reduce Him to a moral teacher.

Some deny His deity.

Some deny His humanity.

Some deny His resurrection.

Some admire His ethics while rejecting His authority.

John gives us a simple but demanding responsibility:

Test the spirits.

Not every spiritual claim comes from God.

Not every preacher speaks truth.

Not every religious movement honors Christ.

Not every message using Christian vocabulary is Christian.

Discernment is therefore essential.

Greater Is He Who Is in You

Yet John's warnings are not written to produce fear.

He reminds believers of their spiritual security.

“Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

The believer does not face deception alone.

God has given His Spirit.

God has given His Word.

God has given His truth.

The Christian must remain watchful, but he need not live terrified.

Christ has overcome.

Faith overcomes the world.

The child of God belongs to the victorious Son of God.

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

John also speaks directly to fear.

Fear can dominate the human heart.

Fear of judgment.

Fear of rejection.

Fear of death.

Fear of failure.

Fear about whether God truly loves us.

John directs us toward the love of God demonstrated in Christ.

Perfect love casts out fear.

The mature believer increasingly understands that his relationship with God does not rest upon uncertainty.

Those who are in Christ need not live under the terror of condemnation.

Jesus bore judgment.

Jesus satisfied divine justice.

Jesus gives eternal life.

The believer therefore approaches the future not with arrogant presumption, but with humble confidence.

That You May Know

Perhaps no theme in 1 John is more encouraging than assurance.

John explicitly states why he has written:

So that those who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that they have eternal life.

Not guess.

Not hope vaguely.

Know.

Biblical assurance is possible.

It rests first upon God's promise.

It is strengthened by the evidence of God's work within the believer.

The Christian looks outward to Christ and inward to the fruit of grace.

He asks:

Do I believe the biblical gospel?

Do I trust Christ?

Do I love God's people?

Do I desire obedience?

Do I confess sin?

Do I remain in the truth?

These are not questions designed to make the believer earn salvation repeatedly.

They help demonstrate whether spiritual life is present.

Three Men in Third John

Third John brings the themes of truth and character into the life of the local church.

Three men stand before us.

Gaius.

Diotrephes.

Demetrius.

Gaius walks faithfully in truth and demonstrates hospitality.

Diotrephes loves prominence and abuses his influence.

Demetrius possesses a good testimony.

These men show us that theology eventually becomes visible in conduct.

Character matters.

Leadership matters.

Hospitality matters.

Humility matters.

How we treat the people of God matters.

Diotrephes is especially sobering.

A man can operate within a church environment and still be driven by pride.

He can desire control rather than service.

He can love preeminence rather than Christlike humility.

That warning is timeless.

Ministry is never meant to become a platform for personal power.

Christian leadership is service under the authority of Jesus Christ.

The Marks Become Visible

As we travel through these letters verse by verse, certain marks will appear repeatedly.

The mark of truth.

The mark of obedience.

The mark of love.

The mark of righteousness.

The mark of discernment.

The mark of confession.

The mark of perseverance.

The mark of faith.

The mark of assurance.

The mark of Christian fellowship.

None of these replaces the gospel.

They reveal what the gospel produces.

The true believer is not perfect.

But he is different.

Grace has changed the direction of his life.

Christ has become precious.

Sin has become an enemy.

Truth has become valuable.

God's people have become family.

Obedience has become desirable.

Eternity has become certain.

The Most Important Examination

There are many examinations in life.

Medical examinations.

Academic examinations.

Financial evaluations.

Performance reviews.

Legal investigations.

But there is one examination more important than all the rest.

Scripture tells us to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith.

That examination should never be careless.

Eternity is too important.

Yet it should also never be separated from the gospel of grace.

We do not examine ourselves so that we can discover enough goodness to save ourselves.

We examine ourselves so that we can determine whether the saving work of Christ has produced evidence in our lives.

And when we see our weakness, we look again to Jesus.

When we see our sin, we confess it.

When we see areas of disobedience, we repent.

When we see evidence of grace, we give God the glory.

Before You Begin

As you open the pages that follow, do not approach these letters merely as ancient documents to be analyzed.

Allow them to examine you.

Let John's words ask difficult questions.

Let them correct mistaken ideas.

Let them expose hidden sin.

Let them strengthen assurance.

Let them sharpen discernment.

Let them deepen love.

Let them lead you again to Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this commentary is not merely to identify **the marks of a true believer** in theory.

It is to encourage every reader to ask:

Are these marks becoming visible in me?

Do I walk in the light?

Do I love the brethren?

Do I treasure truth?

Do I confess Christ?

Do I desire obedience?

Do I resist the world?

Do I abide in Him?

And when I fail, do I return to Jesus Christ, my righteous Advocate?

The answer to those questions reaches far beyond scholarship.

It reaches into the heart.

It reaches into daily life.

It reaches into eternity.

John's message is clear.

Eternal life is found in Jesus Christ.

Those who truly know Him will never remain exactly as they were.

His grace leaves marks.

His truth leaves marks.

His love leaves marks.

His Spirit leaves marks.

These are **the marks of a true believer**.

And now, with the Bible open before us, we begin.

1 John Chapter 1 — Crawford Standard Bible

“God Is Light”

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study with Cross References in Simple American English

I. THE WORD OF LIFE

1 John 1:1

Verse:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and touched with our hands—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”

Explanation

John begins by emphasizing that Jesus Christ was not a legend, a vision, or merely an idea. John and the other apostles **personally experienced Jesus**. They heard Him speak, saw Him with their own eyes, watched His ministry, and even touched Him.

John calls Jesus **“the Word of life.”** This connects directly with the opening of John's Gospel, where Jesus is identified as the eternal Word who was with God and was God.

Christian faith is based upon the historical revelation of Jesus Christ.

Cross References

John 1:1

“In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 1:14

“The Word became human and lived among us. We saw His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:4

“In Him was life, and that life was the light of humanity.”

Bible Study Question

What does John mean when he says that he heard, saw, looked at, and touched the Word of life?

Answer

John is emphasizing that Jesus truly came in human flesh. The apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ. Their message was based upon what they personally experienced, not something they invented or imagined.

II. ETERNAL LIFE HAS BEEN REVEALED

1 John 1:2

Verse:

“The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

Explanation

Jesus is the visible revelation of **eternal life**. John says that this life was “with the Father” and appeared to humanity through Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is not simply living forever. It is having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Cross References

John 1:4

“In Him was life, and that life was the light of humanity.”

John 14:6

“Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

1 John 5:20

“We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true God. And we are in the true God by being in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

Bible Study Question

Who is the source and revelation of eternal life?

Answer

Jesus Christ is the revelation of eternal life. He came from the Father and makes the Father known to us.

III. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

1 John 1:3

Verse:

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”

Explanation

John's purpose is not merely to give people information about Jesus. He wants people to **enter into fellowship with God**.

Christian fellowship begins with fellowship with the Father and the Son. Believers are brought together because they share a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:9

“God is faithful. He has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

John 17:21

“May they all be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Philippians 2:1

“Since there is encouragement in Christ, comfort from His love, fellowship with the Spirit, and tenderness and compassion...”

Bible Study Question

What is the foundation of true Christian fellowship?

Answer

True Christian fellowship is founded upon a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son. Believers have fellowship with one another because they share fellowship with Christ.

IV. COMPLETE JOY

1 John 1:4

Verse:

“We write these things to you so that your joy may be complete.”

Explanation

John wants believers to experience **complete spiritual joy**. This joy comes from knowing Christ, walking with Him, and living in fellowship with God.

Biblical joy is deeper than temporary happiness. Circumstances can change, but the believer's relationship with Christ provides a lasting source of joy.

Cross References

John 15:11

“I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

John 16:24

“Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask, and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

2 John 1:12

“I have many things to write to you, but I do not want to write them with paper and ink. I hope to come to you and speak with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.”

Bible Study Question

Where does complete Christian joy come from?

Answer

Complete joy comes from fellowship with Jesus Christ and from knowing that we belong to God.

V. GOD IS LIGHT

1 John 1:5

Verse:

“This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.”

Explanation

This is one of the great declarations of 1 John:

God is light.

Light represents God's holiness, truth, purity, righteousness, and revelation.

John does not say that God merely **has** light. He says that **God is light**.

There is absolutely no moral darkness, evil, deception, or corruption in God.

Cross References

John 1:5

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

John 8:12

“Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”

James 1:17

“Every good and perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father of lights. He does not change like shifting shadows.”

Bible Study Question

What does it mean that God is light?

Answer

It means that God is completely holy, truthful, pure, and righteous. There is no darkness or evil in Him.

VI. CLAIMING FELLOWSHIP WHILE WALKING IN DARKNESS

1 John 1:6**Verse:**

“If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.”

Explanation

John now gives a serious warning.

A person cannot truthfully claim to have fellowship with God while deliberately living in darkness.

Walking in darkness means living contrary to God's truth and refusing to allow His Word to govern our lives.

John is not teaching that Christians never sin. The next verses make clear that believers must confess their sins. Instead, he is confronting the person who **claims to belong to God while intentionally living a life opposed to God.**

Cross References**John 3:19**

“This is the judgment: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their works were evil.”

Titus 1:16

“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for anything good.”

Ephesians 5:8

“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

Bible Study Question

Can someone claim fellowship with God while deliberately walking in darkness?

Answer

No. A person's claim to know God must be consistent with the direction of his or her life. Christians still stumble and sin, but they should not deliberately make darkness their way of life.

VII. WALKING IN THE LIGHT

1 John 1:7**Verse:**

“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Explanation

Walking in the light means living openly before God, believing His truth, obeying His Word, and refusing to hide sin.

Notice something important: **walking in the light does not mean being sinless.**

John immediately says that the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse believers from sin.

The Christian life is not perfection without failure. It is a life of continually coming into God's light and allowing Christ to cleanse us.

Cross References**Ephesians 1:7**

“In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God's grace.”

Hebrews 9:14

“How much more will the blood of Christ cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God?”

Revelation 1:5

“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood.”

Bible Study Question

What happens when believers walk in the light?

Answer

They experience fellowship with other believers, and the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses them from sin.

VIII. THE DANGER OF DENYING SIN

1 John 1:8

Verse:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

Explanation

John directly confronts the idea that a person can become completely free from sin in this present life.

Everyone has a sinful nature and everyone needs God's grace.

The danger is not merely committing sin. The danger is **refusing to admit that we sin**.

When a person says, “I have no sin,” that person is deceiving himself.

Cross References

Romans 3:23

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Proverbs 20:9

“Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin’?”

Ecclesiastes 7:20

“There is no righteous person on earth who always does what is right and never sins.”

Bible Study Question

Why is denying our sin dangerous?

Answer

Because denying sin prevents us from recognizing our need for God's forgiveness. A person who claims to have no sin is deceiving himself and rejecting the truth.

IX. CONFESSION BRINGS FORGIVENESS

1 John 1:9

Verse:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Explanation

This is one of the most beloved promises in Scripture.

John gives us God's response when we honestly acknowledge our sins:

He forgives.

Confession means agreeing with God about our sin instead of making excuses for it.

Notice that God promises both **forgiveness** and **cleansing**.

God does not merely remove the guilt; He also works to cleanse us from unrighteousness.

Cross References

Proverbs 28:13

“Whoever hides his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and turns away from them will receive mercy.”

Psalms 32:5

“Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not hide my guilt. I said, ‘I will confess my sins to the Lord,’ and You forgave the guilt of my sin.”

James 5:16

“Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Bible Study Question

What does God promise when we confess our sins?

Answer

God promises to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He is faithful to His promise and does not reject the person who sincerely comes to Him in repentance.

X. THE SERIOUSNESS OF DENYING SIN

1 John 1:10

Verse:

“If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar, and His word is not in us.”

Explanation

John closes the chapter with an even stronger warning.

To say, **“I have never sinned,”** is not merely an incorrect statement about ourselves. It contradicts what God has revealed about humanity.

God says that all people are sinners and need salvation.

Therefore, denying our sin means rejecting God's testimony.

The proper response to sin is not denial, excuses, or self-righteousness. The proper response is **confession, repentance, faith, and dependence upon Jesus Christ.**

Cross References

Romans 3:4

“Let God be true and every human being a liar. As Scripture says, ‘You will be proved right when You speak and You will prevail when You judge.’”

Romans 3:23

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

1 Kings 8:46

“When they sin against You—for there is no one who does not sin—and You become angry with them and allow them to be defeated by an enemy...”

Bible Study Question

Why does John say that claiming we have never sinned makes God a liar?

Answer

Because God has already declared that humanity is sinful. When someone denies that reality, he is rejecting God's Word and treating God's testimony as false.

XXXVI. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who is the “Word of life” in 1 John 1:1?

Answer:

The “Word of life” is Jesus Christ. John describes Him as the One whom the apostles personally heard, saw, and touched.

Question 2

Why does John emphasize that he personally saw and touched Jesus?

Answer:

John is establishing that Jesus truly came in human flesh. The apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's life and ministry.

Question 3

What does 1 John 1:2 teach about eternal life?

Answer:

Eternal life was with the Father and was revealed to humanity through Jesus Christ.

Question 4

What is the purpose of John's message according to verse 3?

Answer:

John wants believers to have fellowship with the apostles and, more importantly, fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Question 5

What does “God is light” mean?

Answer:

God is completely holy, pure, truthful, righteous, and without any darkness or evil.

Question 6

What does it mean to walk in darkness?

Answer:

It means living contrary to God's truth and refusing to live according to His will.

Question 7

What does it mean to walk in the light?

Answer:

It means living in God's truth, living openly before Him, seeking holiness, and depending upon Jesus Christ for cleansing from sin.

Question 8

Does walking in the light mean that a Christian never sins?

Answer:

No. Verse 7 teaches that those walking in the light still need the blood of Jesus to cleanse them from sin. Christian maturity is not sinless perfection but faithful dependence upon Christ.

Question 9

What happens when we confess our sins?

Answer:

God forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Question 10

Why is confession important?

Answer:

Confession acknowledges the truth about our sin and allows us to receive God's promised forgiveness and cleansing.

Question 11

What happens when someone claims to have no sin?

Answer:

That person deceives himself and rejects the truth of God's Word.

Question 12

What is the difference between committing sin and living in darkness?

Answer:

A Christian can stumble into sin and then confess it. Walking in darkness describes a continuing pattern of living contrary to God while claiming fellowship with Him.

Question 13

Where does complete Christian joy come from?

Answer:

Complete joy comes through fellowship with Jesus Christ and with God the Father.

Question 14

What cleanses believers from sin?

Answer:

The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses believers from sin.

Question 15

What is the central message of 1 John Chapter 1?

Answer:

The central message is that **Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of life, God is completely holy and is light, believers must walk in that light, and when we honestly confess our sins, God faithfully forgives and cleanses us.**

XXXVII. SPIRITUAL APPLICATION

1. Know Jesus Personally

John's faith was based upon a real Christ who came into the world.

Application:

Do not build your faith merely upon tradition or religious activity. Build it upon Jesus Christ.

2. Walk in the Light

God calls His people to live in truth rather than darkness.

Application:

Ask yourself:

- Am I being honest before God?
 - Am I hiding any known sin?
 - Am I obeying God's Word?
 - Does my daily life reflect my profession of faith?
-

3. Do Not Make Excuses for Sin

John does not teach believers to pretend that sin does not exist.

Application:

When you sin, do not justify it. Bring it honestly before God.

4. Confess Your Sin

1 John 1:9 gives believers a tremendous promise.

Application:

Confession should be a regular part of the Christian life. We should quickly acknowledge our failures and seek God's forgiveness and cleansing.

5. Trust the Blood of Jesus

Our hope is not in our own goodness.

Application:

We are saved and continually cleansed because of Jesus Christ, not because we have achieved moral perfection.

6. Pursue Fellowship With God

Christianity is more than following religious rules.

Application:

Seek daily fellowship with the Father through Jesus Christ through prayer, Scripture, obedience, worship, and faith.

KEY DOCTRINAL TRUTHS FROM 1 JOHN 1

1. Jesus Christ Is the Word of Life

Jesus is the eternal life revealed to humanity.

2. Jesus Truly Came in the Flesh

John and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ.

3. God Is Light

There is absolutely no darkness, evil, or corruption in God.

4. Believers Must Walk in the Light

Our lives should increasingly reflect God's truth and holiness.

5. Christians Still Need Forgiveness

Walking in the light does not mean never failing. It means bringing our failures into God's light.

6. The Blood of Jesus Cleanses From Sin

Our cleansing and forgiveness come through Jesus Christ.

7. Sin Must Be Confessed

God calls us to acknowledge our sins rather than hide or deny them.

8. God Is Faithful to Forgive

God promises forgiveness and cleansing to those who confess their sins.

9. Denying Sin Is Self-Deception

No human being can honestly claim to be completely without sin.

10. Fellowship With God Produces Joy

The closer we walk with Christ, the deeper our fellowship and spiritual joy become.

FINAL THOUGHT

1 John Chapter 1 gives us a simple but powerful message:

Jesus is the Word of Life.

God is Light.

We are sinners.

Jesus cleanses us.

We must walk in the light.

And when we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us.

The Christian life is not about pretending that we never fail. It is about **walking honestly before a holy God, trusting completely in Jesus Christ, and continually allowing His light to expose, cleanse, and transform our lives.**

1 John Chapter 2 — Crawford Standard Bible

Bible Study: Walking in the Light and Abiding in Christ

Introduction

1 John Chapter 2 continues John's message that **true fellowship with God produces a changed life**. John addresses sin, obedience, love, spiritual growth, the dangers of loving the world, false teachers, the antichrist, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of abiding in Christ.

The chapter repeatedly presents a test of genuine Christian faith:

- Do we obey Christ?
 - Do we love other believers?
 - Do we reject the values of the world?
 - Do we remain faithful to the truth about Jesus?
 - Do we abide in Christ?
 - Does our life demonstrate righteousness?
-

I. Christ Our Advocate

1 John 2:1–2

Verse 1 — Jesus Is Our Advocate

John says he is writing so believers **will not sin**, but he also recognizes that Christians can fall into sin. When they do, they have an Advocate with the Father—**Jesus Christ, the Righteous One**.

What does this mean?

Christianity does not teach that believers should deliberately continue in sin. The goal is to live in obedience to Christ.

However, when a Christian sins, failure does not mean that Christ abandons him. Jesus represents the believer before the Father.

Cross References:

- John 14:16
- Romans 8:34
- Hebrews 7:25

Important Truth

There is a difference between:

Falling into sin and **choosing to live in sin**.

John encourages believers to pursue holiness while assuring them that Jesus remains their Advocate when they fail.

Verse 2 — Christ Is the Sacrifice for Sin

Jesus Himself is the sacrifice that atones for sin. His saving work is not limited to one small group of people but is presented as being for the sins of **the whole world**.

What does this teach?

Our salvation is based upon what Christ has done, not upon our ability to make ourselves righteous.

Cross References:

- Romans 3:25
- 1 John 4:10
- John 1:29

Bible Study Question

What should a Christian do when he sins?

Answer: He should not hide his sin or excuse it. He should turn to Christ, confess his sin, and depend upon Jesus Christ, our Advocate and Savior.

II. Obedience and Love

1 John 2:3–11

Verse 3 — Knowing Christ Produces Obedience

John says we can know that we truly know Christ if we **keep His commandments**.

This does not mean that Christians earn salvation by perfect obedience. Rather, obedience is evidence that a person's relationship with Christ is genuine.

Cross References:

- John 14:15
- John 15:10
- John 14:21

Question

How can a person demonstrate that he truly knows Christ?

Answer: His life should increasingly demonstrate obedience to God's Word.

Verse 4 — Profession Without Obedience

A person may claim, "I know God," but if that person continually refuses to obey God's commandments, his profession is contradicted by his behavior.

Lesson

Our words about Christianity must agree with our lives.

Cross References:

- Titus 1:16
 - Matthew 7:23
 - John 14:21
-

Verse 5 — Obedience and God's Love

Obedience demonstrates that God's love is being brought to maturity within us.

John gives believers a practical way to examine their relationship with God:

What does my life reveal about my relationship with Him?

Verse 6 — Live Like Jesus

"Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus lived."

This is one of the strongest challenges in the chapter.

Christians are not merely called to believe information about Jesus. They are called to **follow His example**.

Cross References:

- Ephesians 5:1
- 1 Peter 2:21
- John 13:15

Question

What does it mean to live as Jesus lived?

Answer: It means pursuing a life characterized by obedience, love, humility, holiness, compassion, truth, and submission to the will of God.

III. Love Is Evidence of Walking in the Light

1 John 2:7–11

John describes the command to love as both **old and new**.

The command itself was already known, but through Christ its meaning and expression were brought into greater clarity.

Verse 9 — Hatred Reveals Darkness

A person who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still walking in darkness.

Question

Why does John connect love with light?

Answer: Because genuine fellowship with God produces love for others. Persistent hatred contradicts the claim that a person is walking in God's light.

Verse 10 — Love and Spiritual Safety

The person who loves his brother lives in the light.

Love protects the believer from becoming a stumbling block to others.

Cross References:

- Psalm 119:165
 - Romans 14:13
 - John 8:12
-

Verse 11 — Hatred Produces Blindness

John says the person who hates his brother is walking in darkness and does not know where he is going.

Spiritual Principle

Hatred can distort spiritual judgment.

When bitterness controls a person's heart, it can affect how that person sees other people, circumstances, and even God's will.

Cross References:

- 1 John 4:20
 - 2 Corinthians 4:4
 - John 12:35
-

IV. Encouragement to Believers

1 John 2:12–14

John addresses believers as **children, young men, and fathers**.

These descriptions emphasize different aspects of spiritual maturity.

Children

They know the Father and have experienced forgiveness.

Young Men

They are spiritually strong, God's Word lives in them, and they have overcome the evil one.

Fathers

They know the One who is from the beginning.

Question

What does this teach about spiritual growth?

Answer: Christians should not remain spiritually immature. Believers are called to grow deeper in their knowledge of God, become stronger in the Word, and increasingly overcome spiritual opposition.

V. Do Not Love the World

1 John 2:15–17

Verse 15 — Do Not Love the World

John warns believers not to love **the world or the things in the world**.

Here, "world" refers to the sinful system and values that oppose God—not to the people whom God loves.

Question

What does it mean not to love the world?

Answer: It means refusing to make worldly desires, values, possessions, pride, and sinful priorities the controlling focus of our lives.

Cross References:

- James 4:4
 - Romans 12:2
 - John 15:19
-

Verse 16 — Three Dangers

John identifies three major categories:

1. Desire of the flesh

Wrong desires that arise from our sinful nature.

2. Desire of the eyes

Coveting what we see and wanting what belongs to us only because it looks attractive or desirable.

3. Pride of life

Boasting in possessions, status, achievements, or position.

Cross References:

- Genesis 3:6
 - Ecclesiastes 2:10
 - 1 Peter 2:11
-

Verse 17 — The World Is Temporary

The world and its desires are passing away.

But the person who does God's will **lives forever**.

Question

Why should Christians refuse to live for worldly desires?

Answer: Because worldly desires are temporary, while obedience to God has eternal significance.

VI. Warning About Antichrists

1 John 2:18–27

Verse 18 — The Last Hour

John warns that the antichrist is coming and that even then **many antichrists have appeared**.

This indicates that opposition to Christ was already active among the people John was addressing.

Cross References:

- 2 Thessalonians 2:3
 - Matthew 24:24
 - 2 John 1:7
-

Verse 19 — Departure From the Faith

Some people had left the Christian community.

John explains that their departure demonstrated that they did not truly belong to them.

Question

What does their departure reveal according to John?

Answer: It revealed that their profession of faith was not genuine. Their abandonment of the apostolic truth exposed their true spiritual position.

Cross References:

- Acts 20:30
- Matthew 7:23
- Jude 1:19

VII. The Anointing of the Holy One

1 John 2:20–27

Verse 20 — Believers Have an Anointing

John tells believers that they have an **anointing from the Holy One** and know the truth.

The chapter connects this anointing with God's Spirit guiding believers into truth.

Cross References:

- 2 Corinthians 1:21
- John 14:26
- John 16:13

Verse 21 — Truth and Lies

John is not writing because his readers do not know the truth. He is reminding them because they **do know the truth**.

Truth comes from God; lies do not.

Question

Why is knowledge of biblical truth important?

Answer: Because knowing the truth helps believers recognize deception and remain faithful to Christ.

VIII. The Denial of Christ

1 John 2:22–23

John asks:

Who is the liar?

His answer is the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

According to John, denying the Son also means denying the Father.

Question

Why is belief in Jesus as the Christ essential?

Answer: Because Jesus is not merely a teacher or prophet in John's presentation. He is the Son, the Christ, and the way to the Father.

Cross References:

- 2 John 1:7
 - Matthew 10:33
 - 1 John 4:3
-

IX. Remain in the Truth

1 John 2:24–27

Verse 24 — Continue in What You Heard

John tells believers to allow the apostolic message they heard from the beginning to **remain in them**.

Spiritual principle

Do not continually chase every new teaching.

Remain grounded in the truth you received concerning Christ.

Verse 25 — The Promise of Eternal Life

The promise connected with remaining in Christ is **eternal life**.

Cross References:

- John 3:16
 - John 10:28
 - Titus 1:2
-

Verse 26 — Beware of Deception

John specifically says he is writing because there are people trying to deceive believers.

Question

Why must Christians be careful about false teaching?

Answer: Because false teaching can lead people away from the truth about Christ.

Verse 27 — The Holy Spirit's Ministry

The anointing believers have received remains in them.

John is not saying Christians have no need for pastors, teachers, or biblical instruction. Rather, the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of spiritual truth and helps believers recognize what is true.

Cross References:

- John 14:26
 - Jeremiah 31:34
 - John 16:13
-

X. Abide in Christ

1 John 2:28–29

Verse 28 — Confidence at Christ's Coming

John tells believers to **continue in Christ** so that when Christ appears they will have confidence rather than shame.

Question

What does it mean to abide in Christ?

Answer: It means continuing in fellowship with Christ, remaining faithful to His truth, obeying His Word, and refusing to abandon Him when false teaching or opposition appears.

Cross References:

- John 15:4
 - 1 John 4:17
 - 2 Timothy 4:8
-

Verse 29 — Righteous Living

If we know that Christ is righteous, then we should recognize that those who practice righteousness demonstrate that they have been born of Him.

Important distinction

John does not teach that righteous behavior earns the new birth.

Rather, righteous behavior **reveals evidence of the new birth**.

XXXVI. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does John say Christians should not sin, while also saying that Jesus is our Advocate when we sin?

Answer:

John holds two truths together. Christians are commanded to pursue holiness and not deliberately live in sin. However, Christians can still fall into sin. When they do, Jesus Christ is their Advocate before the Father. The presence of an Advocate is not permission to sin; it is assurance that Christ provides forgiveness and representation when believers fail.

Question 2

How does obedience demonstrate that a person knows Christ?

Answer:

Obedience demonstrates that faith is genuine because a person who truly knows Christ desires to follow His commandments. Obedience does not purchase salvation; it provides evidence of a relationship with Christ.

Question 3

What does it mean to live as Jesus lived?

Answer:

It means following Christ's example of obedience, love, humility, holiness, compassion, truth, and submission to God. The Christian life should increasingly reflect the character of Christ.

Question 4

Why does John say that hatred of another believer is evidence of darkness?

Answer:

Because walking in God's light should produce love. Persistent hatred contradicts the character of God and demonstrates that darkness is controlling the person's life.

Question 5

What are the three things John identifies as belonging to the world?

Answer:

1. The desires of the flesh.
2. The desires of the eyes.
3. The pride of life.

These represent sinful desires, covetous desires, and prideful dependence upon worldly possessions and status.

Question 6

Why should Christians not love the world?

Answer:

Because the world's sinful desires are temporary and are passing away. God's will is eternal. Therefore, Christians should invest their lives in what has eternal value rather than temporary worldly desires.

Question 7

What does John mean by "antichrists"?

Answer:

In this chapter, John describes people who oppose or deny the truth concerning Jesus Christ. He specifically identifies the denial that Jesus is the Christ as antichrist teaching. John also says that many antichrists had already appeared.

Question 8

What evidence does John give concerning those who left the Christian community?

Answer:

Their departure demonstrated that they did not truly belong to the community. Their abandonment of the apostolic truth revealed that their profession had not been genuine.

Question 9

What is the importance of the believer's anointing from the Holy One?

Answer:

The anointing points to the Spirit's ministry of guiding believers into truth. The Holy Spirit helps believers recognize truth and resist deception.

Question 10

Why is denying Jesus as the Christ such a serious matter?

Answer:

Because denying the Son means rejecting the truth about who Jesus is. John teaches that whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either. The relationship with God is inseparably connected to receiving the Son.

Question 11

What does it mean to let the message heard from the beginning remain in us?

Answer:

It means remaining faithful to the original apostolic message about Jesus Christ rather than being carried away by false teaching or new doctrines that contradict the truth.

Question 12

What does John mean when he tells believers to abide in Christ?

Answer:

To abide in Christ means to continue in Him—to remain faithful to Him, His Word, His truth, and His way of life. Abiding produces confidence when Christ appears.

Question 13

How can Christians recognize spiritual maturity in their lives?

Answer:

According to this chapter, spiritual maturity is demonstrated through growing knowledge of God, obedience to His Word, strength against the evil one, love for fellow believers, rejection of worldly values, discernment against false teaching, and continued faithfulness to Christ.

XXXVII. COMBINED PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Do Not Make Sin Your Lifestyle

John does not teach Christians to accept sin as normal and remain comfortable with it.

Fight sin. Confess sin. Turn from sin. Depend upon Christ.

2. Remember That Jesus Is Your Advocate

When you fail, do not run away from Christ.

Run to Christ.

Jesus is the Righteous One who represents His people before the Father.

3. Let Your Life Confirm Your Profession

It is easy to say:

"I know Jesus."

The greater question is:

Does my life demonstrate that I know Jesus?

John repeatedly connects genuine faith with obedience.

4. Walk in Love

A Christian cannot cultivate hatred while claiming to walk in God's light without creating a serious contradiction.

Love is not merely an emotion.

Biblical love demonstrates itself through how we treat others.

5. Grow Spiritually

John describes believers at different stages of spiritual maturity.

The Christian life should involve **growth**.

We should know God more deeply, understand Scripture more clearly, become stronger against temptation, and increasingly reflect Christ.

6. Do Not Let the World Become Your Master

Money, possessions, appearance, success, popularity, pleasure, and status are temporary.

They cannot provide eternal life.

John calls believers to seek something greater:

the will of God.

7. Test What You Hear

Not every spiritual teacher speaks the truth.

John warns repeatedly about deception.

The Christian must compare teaching with the truth concerning Jesus Christ and the apostolic message.

8. Stay in the Word

False teaching becomes dangerous when believers become unfamiliar with the truth.

A Christian who knows Scripture is better equipped to recognize error.

9. Depend Upon the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit guides believers into truth.

Therefore, Christians should pray for wisdom, study God's Word, and remain sensitive to the Spirit's work.

10. Abide in Christ Until He Comes

The final instruction of the chapter is powerful:

Remain in Christ.

Do not abandon Him.

Do not exchange truth for deception.

Do not exchange holiness for worldly desires.

Do not exchange love for hatred.

Do not exchange eternal things for temporary things.

Abide in Christ so that when He appears, you may have confidence rather than shame.

Key Lessons from 1 John 2

1. **Christ Is Our Advocate** — When believers sin, Jesus Christ represents them before the Father.
2. **Obedience Demonstrates Genuine Faith** — Knowing Christ should produce obedience.
3. **Christians Are Called to Live Like Jesus** — Our lives should increasingly reflect His character.
4. **Love Is Evidence of Walking in the Light** — Hatred is inconsistent with genuine fellowship with God.
5. **Christians Should Grow Spiritually** — Believers should progress from spiritual childhood toward greater strength and maturity.
6. **Do Not Love the World** — The desires of the flesh, eyes, and pride of life are temporary.
7. **Beware of Antichrist Teaching** — Any teaching that denies the biblical truth about Jesus Christ must be rejected.
8. **Remain in the Truth** — Christians must hold firmly to the message they received concerning Christ.
9. **The Holy Spirit Guides Believers Into Truth** — The believer's anointing helps guard against spiritual deception.

10. **Abide in Christ** — Faithfulness to Christ now prepares believers to stand with confidence when He appears.

Central Message of 1 John 2

A person who truly knows Christ should increasingly walk like Christ, love like Christ, obey Christ, reject the world's sinful system, stand against false teaching, and remain faithful to Christ until He comes.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

1 John Chapter 3 — Children of God and the Call to Love

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

1 John Chapter 3 is a powerful chapter about **identity, holiness, righteousness, love, obedience, prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit**.

John begins by reminding believers of the incredible love of God. Through Jesus Christ, we are not merely people who believe in God—we are **children of God**.

But John also explains that being God's child should produce a changed life.

The believer should desire righteousness rather than sin, love rather than hatred, obedience rather than rebellion, and service rather than selfishness.

John gives us several tests of genuine Christian faith. He asks us to examine whether our lives demonstrate the character of Christ.

This chapter also teaches us that Christian love cannot remain merely in our words. **Love must become visible through our actions**.

Finally, John teaches us that believers can have confidence before God because we belong to Him, keep His commandments, love one another, and have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

The central message of 1 John 3 is this:

Those who have been born of God should increasingly demonstrate the character of God through righteous living and genuine love.

I. GOD'S AMAZING LOVE

1 John 3:1 — Called the Children of God

“See how great a love the Father has given us—that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are. The world does not recognize us, because it did not recognize Him.”

John begins with God's love.

The Christian's greatest blessing is not merely forgiveness of sins, although forgiveness is an enormous blessing. The greater relationship is that God brings us into His family.

We are called **children of God**.

The world may not understand Christians because it did not understand Christ. Believers should therefore not be surprised when the values of Christianity are rejected by the world.

Cross References

John 1:12 — “But to everyone who received Him and believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”

Romans 8:14 — “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”

John 17:25 — “Righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You, and these people have known that You sent Me.”

Bible Study

Our identity is not determined by the opinions of other people.

If we belong to Christ, God calls us His children.

The world may misunderstand us, criticize us, or reject our faith, but none of that changes our identity in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The greatest identity a believer can possess is to be a child of God.

1 John 3:2 — We Shall Be Like Him

“Beloved, we are now God’s children, but it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He truly is.”

John reminds us that our salvation has both a present and a future dimension.

We are already God's children, but we have not yet experienced the fullness of what God will ultimately do in us.

When Christ appears, believers will be transformed and will be like Him.

Cross References

Romans 8:29 — “God decided beforehand that those who belong to Him would be shaped to become like His Son, so that Christ would be the first among many brothers and sisters.”

1 Corinthians 15:49 — “Just as we have carried the likeness of the earthly man, we will also carry the likeness of the heavenly Man.”

Colossians 3:4 — “When Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with Him in glory.”

Bible Study

God is not finished with us.

There is coming a day when Christ will return and believers will experience the fullness of their transformation.

The Christian's hope is therefore not based upon this present world.

Our ultimate hope is Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

What God has prepared for His children is greater than what we presently see.

1 John 3:3 — Hope Produces Purity

“Everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

The hope of Christ's return should affect the way we live today.

If we truly expect to see Jesus, we should want to live lives that honor Him.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 7:1 — “Since we have these promises, let us remove everything that makes us spiritually and morally unclean, and let us pursue holiness because we respect God.”

1 Peter 1:15 — “Just as the One who called you is holy, you should also live holy lives in everything you do.”

James 4:8 — “Come near to God, and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and make your hearts pure.”

Bible Study

The Christian hope is not an excuse for careless living.

Instead, the hope of seeing Christ should motivate us toward holiness.

Spiritual Principle

The hope of Christ's return should produce holiness in the believer's present life.

II. SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

1 John 3:4 — Sin Is Lawlessness

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.”

John makes the seriousness of sin clear.

Sin is not simply a mistake or an accident.

Sin is rebellion against God's authority.

Cross References

Romans 4:15 — “Where there is no law, there is no violation of the law.”

James 4:17 — “If someone knows the right thing to do and refuses to do it, that person is sinning.”

Romans 7:7 — “Would I have understood what sin was without God's law? I would not have known coveting was wrong unless the law had said, ‘Do not covet.’”

Bible Study

God's Word establishes the standard by which sin is understood.

We cannot properly deal with sin until we acknowledge what God says about it.

Spiritual Principle

Sin must be judged according to God's Word rather than human opinion.

1 John 3:5 — Christ Came to Take Away Sin

“But you know that Christ appeared to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”

Jesus Christ came to deal with the problem of sin.

He was completely without sin, yet He gave Himself for sinners.

Cross References

John 1:29 — “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 — “God made Christ, who never sinned, to become the sin offering for us, so that through Him we could be made right with God.”

Hebrews 4:15 — “We have a High Priest who understands our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way as we are, yet He never sinned.”

Bible Study

Jesus understands temptation because He experienced temptation, but He never surrendered to sin.

His sinlessness qualified Him to be our Savior.

Spiritual Principle

Jesus did not come to make sin acceptable; He came to save us from sin.

1 John 3:6 — Abiding in Christ

“Whoever abides in Him does not continue in sin. Whoever continues in sin has not seen Him or known Him.”

John is speaking about the continuing direction of a person's life.

The Christian may stumble into sin, but a person who truly abides in Christ cannot comfortably make persistent, unrepentant sin the settled pattern of his life.

Cross References

John 15:4 — “Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit by itself unless it remains connected to the vine, you cannot produce spiritual fruit unless you remain in Me.”

1 John 3:9 — “No one who has been born of God makes sin the continuing pattern of his life, because God's life remains in him.”

3 John 1:11 — “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil. Imitate what is good. The person who does good belongs to God, but the person who does evil has not known God.”

Bible Study

There is a difference between **falling into sin** and **choosing to live in sin**.

The believer can fail, but God's Spirit produces conviction and calls the believer back to repentance.

Spiritual Principle

A genuine relationship with Christ produces a changed direction in life.

1 John 3:7 — Do Not Be Deceived

“Little children, don't let anyone deceive you. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous.”

John warns believers about deception.

A person cannot simply claim to belong to Christ while deliberately rejecting the righteous life Christ calls us to live.

Cross References

1 John 2:29 — “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been born from Him.”

Matthew 5:6 — “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled.”

Romans 2:13 — “It is not those who merely hear God's law who are right with God, but those who obey it.”

Bible Study

Good works do not purchase salvation.

Instead, righteous living provides evidence of a transformed heart.

Spiritual Principle

True faith produces evidence in the way a person lives.

1 John 3:8 — The Works of the Devil

“But the one who practices sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose—to destroy the works of the devil.”

John presents a direct contrast between Christ and the devil.

The devil works through rebellion, deception, and sin.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

Cross References

Genesis 3:15 — “There will be hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.”

John 8:44 — “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand with the truth.”

Hebrews 2:14 — “Because God's children are human beings, Jesus also became human. Through His death He broke the power of the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Bible Study

Satan is not God's equal.

Christ has authority over him.

Jesus came to break the power of sin, death, and the devil.

Spiritual Principle

The works of the devil cannot ultimately stand against the victory of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:9 — Born of God

“No one who is born of God will continue to live in sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

The new birth produces a new relationship with sin.

The believer may struggle, but he cannot remain content to live continually in rebellion against God.

Cross References

1 Peter 1:23 — “You have been born again, not from something that dies, but from God's living and lasting Word.”

John 1:13 — “They were born, not because of human ancestry, human desire, or human effort, but because God gave them new life.”

1 John 5:18 — “We know that everyone born of God does not continue living in sin, because the One born of God protects him, and the evil one cannot control him.”

Bible Study

Being born again means receiving new life from God.

It is not merely changing our religious identity.

God begins transforming us from within.

Spiritual Principle

New birth produces a new relationship with sin.

1 John 3:10 — The Evidence of God's Children

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love his brother or sister.”

John identifies two major evidences:

Righteousness and love.

Cross References

John 8:44 — “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand with the truth.”

1 John 4:20 — “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother or sister, that person is lying. Anyone who does not love someone he can see cannot honestly say he loves God whom he cannot see.”

Matthew 13:38 — “The field represents the world, and the good seed represents the people who belong to God's kingdom. The weeds represent the people who belong to the evil one.”

Bible Study

John refuses to separate Christian belief from Christian conduct.

What we believe should affect how we live.

Spiritual Principle

The children of God should be recognizable by righteousness and love.

III. LOVE ONE ANOTHER

1 John 3:11 — The Message of Love

“For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.”

Love is central to Christian living.

Cross References

John 13:34 — “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another.”

John 15:12 — “My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you.”

1 John 4:11 — “Dear friends, since God loved us so greatly, we should also love one another.”

Bible Study

Jesus commanded His followers to love one another.

Christian love is not weakness. It is a deliberate decision to seek another person's good according to God's will.

Spiritual Principle

Christians are commanded to love because Christ first loved us.

1 John 3:12 — Cain and Abel

“Not like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's were righteous.”

Cain provides a warning about hatred and jealousy.

His problem began within his heart before it became visible in his actions.

Cross References

Genesis 4:8 — “Cain spoke to his brother Abel. When they were in the field, Cain attacked Abel and killed him.”

Jude 1:11 — “Woe to them! They have followed the way of Cain and have allowed greed and rebellion to lead them away from God.”

Hebrews 11:4 — “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. Through faith, God declared Abel righteous.”

Bible Study

Hatred can grow.

What begins in the heart can eventually produce destructive actions.

Spiritual Principle

Uncontrolled hatred can produce destructive consequences.

1 John 3:13 — The World's Hatred

“So don't be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.”

Believers should not be surprised when following Christ produces opposition.

Cross References

John 15:18 — “If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me before it hated you.”

John 15:19 — “If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. But you do not belong to the world because I chose you out of the world.”

2 Timothy 3:12 — “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will face persecution.”

Bible Study

We should never seek persecution, but neither should we compromise biblical truth simply to receive the world's approval.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness to Christ is more important than approval from the world.

1 John 3:14 — From Death to Life

“We know we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers and sisters. Whoever does not love remains in death.”

Love for other believers is evidence of spiritual life.

Cross References

John 5:24 — “Anyone who hears My Word and believes the One who sent Me has eternal life. He will not be judged as guilty but has passed from death to life.”

Ephesians 2:5 — “Even when we were spiritually dead because of our sins, God made us alive with Christ. We are saved because of His grace.”

John 13:35 — “Everyone will know that you are My disciples if you love one another.”

Bible Study

Love does not replace faith in Christ.

Rather, genuine love demonstrates that Christ has changed our hearts.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual life produces spiritual love.

1 John 3:15 — Hatred Is Serious

“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.”

John takes hatred seriously because Jesus taught that murder begins in the heart.

Cross References

Matthew 5:21 — “You have heard that people were told long ago, ‘Do not murder,’ and anyone who murders will be judged.”

Matthew 5:22 — “I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother or sister without cause is accountable before God.”

1 John 2:11 — “Anyone who hates his brother or sister is living in darkness and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”

Bible Study

Hatred can destroy relationships long before physical violence occurs.

God wants us to deal with hatred, bitterness, and anger in our hearts.

Spiritual Principle

God wants hatred removed from the heart before it produces destruction in our relationships.

1 John 3:16 — The Definition of Love

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

John defines love by pointing us to the cross.

Jesus demonstrated love through sacrifice.

Cross References

John 10:11 — “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

John 15:13 — “No one has greater love than someone who gives his life for his friends.”

Romans 5:8 — “God showed His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Bible Study

Christian love is sacrificial.

Jesus is the supreme example of what love looks like.

Spiritual Principle

Real love is willing to sacrifice for the good of another person.

1 John 3:17 — Love Meets Needs

“If someone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but shows no compassion, how can the love of God be in him?”

John makes love practical.

If we have the ability to help someone in genuine need and deliberately refuse to care, our actions contradict our claim to love.

Cross References

James 2:15 — “Suppose a brother or sister has no clothes and no food for the day.”

Deuteronomy 15:7 — “If someone among you is poor, do not harden your heart or close your hand against your poor brother or sister.”

Luke 3:11 — “Anyone who has two coats should share with someone who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

Bible Study

Love notices needs.

Love responds.

Love gives.

Love serves.

Spiritual Principle

When God gives us the ability to help, love should move us toward action.

1 John 3:18 — Love in Action

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech only, but with actions and in truth.”

John makes the application unmistakable.

Words alone are not enough.

Cross References

James 2:16 — “If someone needs clothing and food and you simply tell them, ‘Go in peace and stay warm and eat well,’ but do nothing to meet their needs, what good is that?”

Romans 12:9 — “Let your love be genuine. Hate what is evil and hold tightly to what is good.”

James 1:22 — “Do not merely listen to God's Word and deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

Bible Study

Christian love must move from words to action.

The same principle applies to God's Word.

We are not called merely to hear.

We are called to obey.

Spiritual Principle

Love becomes credible when our actions agree with our words.

IV. CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD

1 John 3:19 — Belonging to the Truth

“This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence.”

John now moves from our relationships with other people to our relationship with God.

Cross References

John 18:37 — “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.”

John 8:32 — “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Hebrews 10:22 — “Let us come near to God with sincere hearts and complete confidence, knowing that our hearts have been made clean and our guilt has been removed.”

Bible Study

The believer can have assurance because his relationship with God is based upon Christ and God's truth.

Spiritual Principle

Walking in God's truth gives the believer confidence in God's presence.

1 John 3:20 — God Is Greater Than Our Hearts

“If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.”

There are times when our conscience troubles us.

Sometimes that conviction is necessary because God is showing us sin that needs to be confessed.

But sometimes our hearts condemn us even after we have confessed and repented.

John reminds us that God knows everything.

Cross References

Psalm 139:1 — “Lord, You have searched me and You know me.”

Psalm 147:5 — “Our Lord is great and powerful, and His understanding has no limit.”

John 21:17 — “Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You.”

Bible Study

God knows us better than we know ourselves.

Therefore, we should bring our troubled hearts before Him.

Spiritual Principle

God's knowledge and grace are greater than our fears and feelings.

1 John 3:21 — Confidence Before God

“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”

John teaches that believers can approach God with confidence.

Cross References

Hebrews 4:16 — “Let us come boldly to God's throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it.”

Hebrews 10:22 — “Let us come near to God with sincere hearts and full confidence, because our hearts have been cleansed from guilt.”

Romans 8:1 — “There is now no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.”

Bible Study

Our confidence is not based upon being perfect.

Our confidence is based upon Jesus Christ and His finished work.

Spiritual Principle

Because of Christ, God's children can approach their Father with confidence.

1 John 3:22 — Obedience and Prayer

“And we receive from Him whatever we ask, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him.”

John connects obedience with prayer.

This does not mean that God is required to give us everything we request.

Rather, walking closely with God changes what we desire and what we ask.

Cross References

John 15:7 — “If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask for what you need, and it will be done for you.”

Matthew 7:7 — “Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened.”

John 8:29 — “The One who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone because I always do what pleases Him.”

Bible Study

Prayer is not a way to manipulate God.

Prayer is communication and fellowship with God.

As we walk with Him, our desires increasingly become aligned with His will.

Spiritual Principle

The closer we walk with God, the more our prayers should reflect His will.

1 John 3:23 — Believe and Love

“And this is His commandment: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us.”

John summarizes God's command in two directions:

Believe in Jesus Christ.

Love one another.

Cross References

John 6:29 — “The work God wants from you is this: believe in the One He has sent.”

John 13:34 — “Love one another as I have loved you.”

John 15:12 — “This is My command: Love one another as I have loved you.”

Bible Study

Faith and love belong together.

We believe in Christ, and because Christ has changed us, we love others.

Spiritual Principle

True faith in Christ produces genuine love for others.

1 John 3:24 — The Holy Spirit's Witness

“The one who keeps His commandments lives in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: by the Spirit He gave us.”

John concludes with the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is God's presence within the believer.

Cross References

John 14:23 — “Anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching. My Father will love that person, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”

Romans 8:9 — “If God's Spirit lives in you, you belong to Christ. If someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Him.”

1 John 4:13 — “We know that we live in Him and He lives in us because He has given us His Spirit.”

Bible Study

The Christian life is not lived through human strength alone.

The Holy Spirit lives within God's people.

He convicts.

He teaches.

He leads.

He strengthens.

He produces spiritual fruit.

Spiritual Principle

The Holy Spirit is God's continuing witness that Christ lives within the believer.

V. KEY LESSONS FROM 1 JOHN 3

1. God's Love Makes Us His Children

God's love brings believers into His family.

Our greatest identity is found in Christ.

2. Holiness Is the Fruit of Sonship

God's children should desire righteousness.

A Christian may stumble, but he should not become comfortable with sin.

3. Jesus Came to Destroy the Works of the Devil

Satan works through sin and deception, but Christ has won the victory.

4. Love Is Evidence of Spiritual Life

Those who have received God's love should increasingly demonstrate love toward others.

5. Love Must Be Demonstrated

Love is more than words.

Love acts.

Love serves.

Love sacrifices.

Love gives.

6. Hatred Must Not Control the Heart

Cain demonstrates the destructive power of hatred.

Believers must deal with bitterness and hatred rather than allowing them to grow.

7. The World May Reject Christians

Believers should not be surprised when following Christ produces opposition.

8. God Knows Our Hearts

When our hearts condemn us, we can remember that God knows everything.

9. Obedience and Prayer Belong Together

Walking with God affects the way we pray and the things we desire.

10. The Holy Spirit Gives Assurance

The Spirit of God lives within believers and provides evidence that we belong to Christ.

VI. THE GREAT CONTRAST OF 1 JOHN 3

The Way of Christ

- Righteousness
- Love
- Obedience
- Truth
- Compassion
- Sacrifice
- Service
- Fellowship with God
- Confidence before God
- The work of the Holy Spirit

The Way of Sin

- Lawlessness
- Hatred
- Deception
- Rebellion
- Selfishness
- Lack of compassion
- Darkness
- Spiritual death
- The works of the devil

John places these two directions before us so that we can examine our lives.

The question is not whether we have ever failed.

The question is:

What direction is my life going?

VII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“REAL LOVE IS SEEN, NOT MERELY SAID”

Jesus did not merely say that He loved us.

He demonstrated His love by giving His life for us.

John therefore teaches believers to demonstrate love through action.

We should ask ourselves:

Can people see the love of Christ in my life?

Can they see it in the way I treat my family?

Can they see it in the way I treat fellow believers?

Can they see it in the way I respond when someone hurts me?

Can they see it when someone needs help?

Can they see it when someone is struggling?

Can they see it when forgiveness is difficult?

Christian love becomes powerful when people can see Christ through our actions.

VIII. Answers for Personal Study

Question 1

What does it mean to be called a child of God?

To be called a child of God means that through Jesus Christ we have been brought into a relationship with God as members of His family. John says, **“See how great a love the Father has given us—that we should be called the children of God!”** (1 John 3:1). This identity is not based upon human achievement. It is the result of God's love and His work of salvation through Christ.

Being God's child also gives the believer a new identity. The world may not understand or accept us, but our identity does not depend upon the world's approval. We belong to God.

Question 2

What does 1 John 3:2 teach us about the future of believers?

John teaches that believers are already God's children, but we have not yet experienced the complete transformation God has planned for us. When Christ appears, **“we shall be like Him”** (1 John 3:2).

This gives Christians a future hope. We may experience weakness, temptation, suffering, disappointment, and difficulty in this present life, but our story does not end here. Christ will return, and those who belong to Him will share in His glory.

The believer should therefore live today with his eyes on the future promise of Christ.

Question 3

How should the hope of Christ's return affect the way we live?

The hope of Christ's return should motivate us toward holiness. John says, **“Everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as He is pure”** (1 John 3:3).

Knowing that we will one day see Christ should make us want to become more like Christ now.

This means examining our attitudes, words, actions, relationships, habits, and priorities. The Christian should not use God's grace as an excuse to continue living carelessly in sin.

The hope of Christ's return should produce a desire for purity and obedience.

Question 4

What does John mean when he says that sin is lawlessness?

John means that sin is rebellion against God's authority. Sin is not merely an unfortunate mistake. It is a violation of God's righteous standard.

John says, **“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness”** (1 John 3:4).

God's Word shows us what righteousness looks like and exposes what is contrary to God's will.

Therefore, we should not allow society, culture, personal feelings, or popular opinion to become our final standard for determining right and wrong. God's Word is the standard.

Question 5

Does 1 John 3 teach that a Christian will never commit sin?

No. John is addressing the continuing practice and settled pattern of sin rather than claiming that a believer will never stumble.

The Christian can fail and commit sin. However, the believer should not willingly make persistent, unrepentant sin the direction of his life.

The person who has been born of God has a new relationship with sin. The Holy Spirit brings conviction, and the believer should respond through confession and repentance.

The important question is not, **“Have I ever sinned?”**

The important question is, **“What is the direction of my life?”**

Question 6

What does Cain teach us about hatred and jealousy?

Cain teaches us that hatred can begin inside the heart and eventually produce destructive actions.

John says that Cain murdered his brother because **“his own works were evil, and his brother's were righteous”** (1 John 3:12).

Cain's problem was deeper than the physical act of murder. His heart had already become corrupted by jealousy, anger, and resentment.

This teaches us to deal with bitterness and hatred before they become destructive.

We should ask God to search our hearts and remove attitudes that do not honor Him.

Question 7

Why should Christians not be surprised when the world hates them?

Christians should not be surprised because Jesus Himself was hated by the world.

Jesus said, **“If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me before it hated you”** (John 15:18).

Following Christ means that our beliefs and values will sometimes conflict with the values of the world.

This does not mean that Christians should intentionally create conflict or seek persecution. It means that we should remain faithful when opposition comes.

Our goal is not to receive the world's approval.

Our goal is to remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

Question 8

How does 1 John 3 define genuine Christian love?

Genuine Christian love is demonstrated through action and sacrifice.

John points directly to Jesus:

“Jesus laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16).

John then applies Christ's example to believers. If we see someone in genuine need and have the ability to help, love should motivate us to respond.

Christian love therefore involves compassion, generosity, service, forgiveness, sacrifice, and practical assistance.

Love is not merely something we say.

Love is something we do.

Question 9

What does it mean to love “with actions and in truth”?

To love with actions and in truth means that our behavior must agree with our words.

John says:

“Let us not love with words or speech only, but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

It is easy to say, “I love you,” but biblical love is demonstrated through what we actually do.

If someone is hungry, love seeks to help.

If someone is hurting, love seeks to encourage.

If someone is lonely, love seeks to be present.

If someone has wronged us, love seeks forgiveness according to God's Word.

Christian love becomes visible when our actions demonstrate what our mouths profess.

Question 10

How can believers have confidence before God?

Believers can have confidence before God because they belong to Christ, walk in His truth, seek righteousness, love others, obey His commands, and have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

John says, **“If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God”** (1 John 3:21).

Our confidence is not based upon personal perfection.

Our confidence is based upon Jesus Christ.

When our hearts are troubled, we can bring everything before God. When we have sinned, we should confess it. When we have repented, we should trust God's grace. When we are walking faithfully, we can approach God with confidence.

The Holy Spirit also gives assurance that Christ lives within us.

Personal Application

1 John 3 teaches a powerful progression:

God's love makes us His children.

Being God's children produces a desire for holiness.

Holiness produces a rejection of a continuing lifestyle of sin.

A changed heart produces love for others.

Love moves from words to actions.

Actions demonstrate the reality of our faith.

Obedience produces confidence before God.

The Holy Spirit confirms that Christ lives within us.

The message of 1 John 3 is not that Christians never struggle.

It is that **Christians have been changed.**

We have been brought from death to life.

We have been brought into God's family.

We have been given a new identity.

We have been given the Holy Spirit.

We have been called to righteousness.

We have been commanded to love.

Therefore, we should ask ourselves:

Does my life demonstrate that I belong to Christ?

Do I desire righteousness?

Do I take sin seriously?

Do I love God's people?

Do I forgive?

Do I show compassion?

Do I help those who are in need?

Do my actions agree with my words?

Do I seek to obey God's commands?

Do I have confidence before God?

Am I allowing the Holy Spirit to lead me?

The great lesson of 1 John 3 is that **our relationship with Christ should affect every area of our lives.**

We are God's children.

Therefore, we should live like God's children.

We should walk in righteousness.

We should reject the works of the devil.

We should love one another.

And we should demonstrate the love of Christ through what we say and what we do.

IX. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 1 JOHN 3

1. Our Identity Comes From God

The world does not determine who we are.

God does.

If we belong to Christ, we are His children.

2. Genuine Faith Produces a Changed Life

Salvation does not leave a person exactly as he was.

Christ begins transforming the believer from the inside out.

3. Love Must Become Action

Christian love cannot remain merely in words.

We must demonstrate love through service, compassion, generosity, forgiveness, and sacrifice.

4. Sin Should Never Become Our Master

The believer may struggle with sin, but Christ calls us to repentance and victory rather than surrender.

5. The Holy Spirit Gives Assurance

God has given His Spirit to His people.

The Spirit reminds us that Christ lives within us and leads us toward righteousness and truth.

X. FINAL APPLICATION

1 John 3 asks every believer to examine his or her life.

Who am I?

If I belong to Christ, I am a child of God.

How should I live?

I should pursue righteousness and reject a continuing lifestyle of sin.

How should I treat others?

I should love them as Christ has loved me.

What should my love look like?

It should be demonstrated through actions and truth.

What should I do when my heart condemns me?

I should bring my heart before God, remembering that God knows everything and that His grace is greater than my failures.

How should I approach God?

With confidence through Jesus Christ.

How do I know Christ lives within me?

The Holy Spirit bears witness to His presence.

The message of this chapter can be summarized in one powerful truth:

If we have been changed by Christ, the change should become visible in the way we live.

The world should be able to see something different in us.

Not because we are perfect.

Not because we never fail.

But because **Jesus Christ lives within us.**

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Your amazing love and for the privilege of being called Your children.

Thank You for sending Jesus Christ to take away our sins and to destroy the works of the devil.

Help us to take sin seriously.

Give us hearts that desire righteousness and holiness.

When we stumble, help us to confess our sins and return to You.

Remove hatred, bitterness, jealousy, anger, and unforgiveness from our hearts.

Teach us to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

Help us not to love only with words, but with our actions and in truth.

Give us compassion for those who are hurting and willingness to help those who are in need.

When the world rejects us because of our faith, give us courage to remain faithful to Christ.

When our hearts condemn us, remind us that You are greater than our hearts and that You know everything.

Give us confidence to approach Your throne of grace.

Teach us to obey Your Word and to do the things that please You.

Thank You for the Holy Spirit who lives within us and gives us assurance that we belong to Christ.

Help us to live as Your children.

Help us to walk in righteousness.

Help us to walk in truth.

Help us to walk in love.

And may the people around us see Jesus Christ through our lives.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“See how great a love the Father has given us—that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are.” — 1 John 3:1

Central Truth

Those who have been born of God should demonstrate their new life through righteousness, obedience, and genuine love for others.

1 John 3 in One Sentence

Because God's love has made us His children, we should turn from sin, walk in righteousness, love one another, and demonstrate the character of Christ through our lives.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

1 John Chapter 4 — Test the Spirits and Live in God's Love

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

1 John 4 is a chapter about spiritual discernment, the truth about Jesus Christ, the greatness of God, the love of God, assurance through the Holy Spirit, and the responsibility of believers to love one another.

John begins with a serious warning.

Not every spiritual voice comes from God.

Not every person who claims to speak for God actually represents God.

Not every religious teaching is true.

Not every spiritual experience should automatically be accepted.

John therefore commands believers:

“Test the spirits.”

The primary test centers upon **Jesus Christ**. True teaching recognizes who Jesus really is. False teaching distorts, denies, or rejects Him.

But John does not stop with doctrinal truth.

He then moves into one of the greatest discussions of love anywhere in Scripture.

John tells us:

“God is love.”

God demonstrated that love by sending His Son into the world so that sinners might receive life through Him.

Because God loved us, we should love one another.

The chapter therefore brings together two truths that must never be separated:

Truth and love.

Christians must stand firmly for truth while walking faithfully in love.

1 John 4 teaches us that genuine Christianity is seen in both **what we believe about Christ** and **how we treat other people**.

I. TEST EVERY SPIRIT

1 John 4:1 — “Do Not Believe Every Spirit”

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

John begins with the word:

Beloved.

His warning comes from pastoral concern.

He does not want believers to become spiritually gullible.

John says:

Do not believe every spirit.

Then he says:

Test the spirits.

The word “test” means to examine something carefully to determine whether it is genuine.

John understood that false prophets existed.

Some people claimed to speak for God but were actually spreading spiritual error.

Christians therefore need discernment.

Cross References

Matthew 7:15

“Watch out for false prophets. They may come to you looking harmless like sheep, but inwardly they are dangerous like hungry wolves.”

1 Thessalonians 5:21

“Examine everything carefully. Hold tightly to what is good.”

2 Peter 2:1

“False prophets arose among the people in the past, and false teachers will also appear among you. They will secretly bring in destructive teachings and may even deny the Lord who bought them, bringing destruction upon themselves.”

John's warning is extremely relevant.

A person can:

- Use Christian language.
- Quote Scripture.
- Speak emotionally.
- Claim spiritual experiences.
- Gather large crowds.
- Become popular.
- Claim that God spoke to him.

And still teach error.

The Christian's responsibility is not to believe something merely because it sounds spiritual.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual claims must be tested by spiritual truth.

God has given us His Word so that we can recognize truth and reject error.

II. THE FIRST TEST IS JESUS CHRIST

1 John 4:2 — Christ Came in the Flesh

“This is how you recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

John gives believers one of the most important tests of spiritual truth.

The test centers upon Jesus.

Specifically, John emphasizes that:

Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

Jesus was not merely an appearance.

He was not simply a spiritual vision.

He was not merely a prophet.

The eternal Son of God truly entered human history.

He became a real man while remaining the Son of God.

Cross References

John 1:14

“The Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw His glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son, full of grace and truth.”

1 Timothy 3:16

“The truth God has revealed is great: Christ appeared in human flesh, was shown to be righteous by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on throughout the world, and was taken up into glory.”

2 John 1:7

“Many deceivers have gone out into the world. They refuse to confess that Jesus Christ truly came in the flesh. Such a person is a deceiver and works against Christ.”

John's test is Christ-centered.

A teacher may talk about:

- God.
- Spirituality.
- Morality.

- Love.
- Faith.
- Miracles.

But the crucial question remains:

What does that teacher believe about Jesus Christ?

Christianity cannot be separated from Christ.

Key Truth

Any teaching that changes the biblical identity of Jesus changes the Christian message.

III. THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

1 John 4:3 — Opposition to Christ

“But every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and is already in the world.”

John now presents the opposite side of the test.

The Spirit of God points people toward Christ.

The spirit of antichrist opposes Christ.

John says this spirit was already operating in the world.

This is important.

Antichrist describes more than a future individual.

There is also a present spirit of opposition to Jesus Christ.

Cross References

2 John 1:7

“Many deceivers have gone out into the world who refuse to acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Such teaching is deceptive and opposed to Christ.”

1 John 2:22

“Who is the liar? It is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person opposes Christ by rejecting the Father and the Son.”

2 Thessalonians 2:7

“The hidden power of lawlessness is already at work, although it is being restrained until the proper time.”

False teaching often attacks Jesus in several ways.

It may deny:

- His deity.
- His humanity.
- His virgin birth.
- His sinlessness.
- His death for sin.
- His bodily resurrection.
- His Lordship.
- His return.

Whenever the truth about Jesus is distorted, the gospel itself is endangered.

Application

Ask yourself:

Do I know enough about the biblical Jesus to recognize a false Jesus?

Discernment requires knowledge.

The better we know the truth, the easier it becomes to recognize the counterfeit.

IV. GREATER IS THE ONE WHO IS IN YOU

1 John 4:4 — God Is Greater

“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

After warning believers about spiritual deception, John gives encouragement.

He says:

You are from God.

Then:

You have overcome them.

Why?

Not because Christians are naturally stronger.

Not because believers know everything.

Not because Christians cannot be deceived.

John gives the reason:

“The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

Cross References

John 16:33

“I have told you these things so that you may have peace in Me. In this world you will have trouble, but take courage—I have overcome the world.”

1 John 5:4

“Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith.”

Romans 8:31

“What should we say about these things? If God is for us, who can ultimately stand against us?”

The believer's confidence is not based upon personal ability.

It is based upon God's presence.

The enemy is real.

Deception is real.

Temptation is real.

Spiritual opposition is real.

But God is greater.

Spiritual Principle

The believer does not face spiritual opposition alone.

The God who lives within His people is greater than every force that opposes them.

V. THE WORLD LISTENS TO ITS OWN

1 John 4:5 — The World's Viewpoint

“They belong to the world; therefore they speak from the world’s viewpoint, and the world listens to them.”

John explains why false teaching can become popular.

False teachers often tell the world what the world already wants to hear.

They speak from the world's viewpoint.

Therefore:

The world listens to them.

Cross References

John 15:19

“If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. But you do not belong to the world, because I chose you out of the world. That is why the world may hate you.”

John 3:31

“The One who comes from above is greater than all. The person who belongs to the earth speaks from an earthly point of view. The One who comes from heaven is above all.”

James 4:4

“Do you not understand that friendship with the world's rebellious system puts you in opposition to God? Whoever chooses friendship with that system makes himself an enemy of God.”

This teaches us something important:

Popularity does not determine truth.

A teaching can be popular and false.

A preacher can be famous and wrong.

A message can attract large crowds and still contradict Scripture.

Important Truth

Never ask first:

“How many people believe this?”

Ask:

VI. THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR

1 John 4:6 — “We Belong to God”

“We belong to God. Whoever knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

John now identifies two opposing spiritual influences:

The Spirit of truth.

The spirit of error.

Truth leads toward God.

Error leads away from God.

John and the apostles had been entrusted with the message of Jesus Christ.

Those who genuinely knew God recognized the truth of that message.

Cross References

John 8:47

“The person who belongs to God listens to God's words. The reason you refuse to listen is that you do not belong to God.”

John 14:17

“He is the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him because it does not see Him or know Him. But you know Him, because He remains with you and will live in you.”

John 10:27

“My sheep listen to My voice. I know them, and they follow Me.”

The Holy Spirit never leads people away from God's truth.

He does not contradict Scripture.

He does not diminish Christ.

He does not glorify falsehood.

He is:

The Spirit of truth.

Application

The Christian should develop a growing appetite for truth.

Ask yourself:

What do I listen to?

What influences my thinking?

What voices shape my beliefs?

Do I compare what I hear with Scripture?

VII. LOVE COMES FROM GOD

1 John 4:7 — “Let Us Love One Another”

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

John now makes a dramatic transition.

He moves from:

Testing spirits

to:

Loving people.

But these subjects belong together.

Truth matters.

Love matters.

John says:

“Let us love one another.”

Why?

Because:

Love comes from God.

Cross References

John 13:34

“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another.”

1 John 3:11

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.”

1 Corinthians 13:4

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful. It does not become proud.”

Biblical love is not merely emotion.

Love involves:

- Patience.
- Kindness.
- Sacrifice.
- Compassion.
- Forgiveness.
- Truth.
- Service.
- Faithfulness.

Those who know God should increasingly reflect His character.

1 John 4:8 — “God Is Love”

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

This is one of the greatest statements in Scripture concerning God's nature.

God is love.

John does not say:

Love is God.

He says:

God is love.

Love is an essential part of God's character.

Cross References

John 3:16

“God loved the world so greatly that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

1 John 4:16

“We have come to know and believe the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him.”

Exodus 34:6

“The Lord passed before Moses and declared, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and overflowing with faithful love and truth.’”

God's love is:

- Holy.
- Righteous.
- Faithful.
- Sacrificial.
- Patient.
- Merciful.

God's love never contradicts God's holiness.

Key Truth

To know the God of love should make us people who love.

VIII. GOD PROVED HIS LOVE BY SENDING HIS SON

1 John 4:9 — Love Became Visible

“This is how God’s love was shown among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.”

God did not merely tell humanity:

“I love you.”

He demonstrated His love.

He sent His Son.

God's love became visible through Jesus Christ.

Cross References

John 3:16

“God loved the world so greatly that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:17

“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.”

Romans 5:8

“God demonstrates His own love toward us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Notice when God loved us.

Not after we became perfect.

Not after we cleaned up our lives.

Not after we earned His favor.

Scripture says:

While we were still sinners.

That is grace.

1 John 4:10 — God Loved Us First

“This is love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as the sacrifice that takes away our sins.”

John explains the direction of salvation.

It begins with God.

We did not first love Him.

He loved us.

We did not provide salvation.

He provided His Son.

Cross References

Romans 5:8

“God demonstrates His love for us by the fact that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.”

1 John 2:2

“Jesus Christ is the sacrifice that deals with our sins, and not only ours, but the sins of the whole world.”

Romans 3:25

“God presented Christ as the sacrifice for sin, received through faith in His blood. In this way God demonstrated His righteousness in dealing with sin.”

The gospel is not humanity climbing upward to reach God.

It is God reaching downward to rescue humanity.

Spiritual Principle

Grace begins with God.

God loved.

God sent.

Christ came.

Christ sacrificed Himself.

We receive salvation through faith.

IX. GOD'S LOVE SHOULD FLOW THROUGH US

1 John 4:11 — “We Ought to Love One Another”

“Beloved, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

John makes the application unavoidable.

God loved us.

Therefore:

We ought to love one another.

Cross References

John 13:34

“I give you this command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another.”

John 15:12

“This is My command: Love one another as I have loved you.”

1 John 3:16

“This is how we understand love: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. Therefore, we should be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

The cross becomes the standard for Christian love.

Jesus did not merely love when it was convenient.

His love was sacrificial.

Application

Ask yourself:

Is my love sacrificial?

Is my love patient?

Is my love forgiving?

Is my love practical?

Do people experience the love of Christ through me?

1 John 4:12 — The Invisible God Made Visible Through Love

“No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is made complete in us.”

No human being has seen God in the fullness of His divine glory.

Yet something remarkable happens when believers love one another.

The invisible God becomes visible through the transformed lives of His people.

Cross References

John 1:18

“No one has ever seen God in His fullness. The one and only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, has made Him known.”

1 Timothy 6:16

“God alone possesses immortality and lives in light that no one can approach. No human being has seen Him or can see Him in His full glory.”

1 John 3:24

“The person who keeps God's commandments remains in Him, and He remains in that person. We know that He lives in us because of the Spirit He has given us.”

People may not see God with physical eyes.

But they should see evidence of God in Christians.

Spiritual Application

When Christians:

- Forgive.
- Serve.
- Help.
- Show compassion.
- Love sacrificially.
- Demonstrate patience.
- Remain faithful.

They display something of God's character.

X. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES ASSURANCE

1 John 4:13 — “He Has Given Us His Spirit”

“This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us His Spirit.”

John now gives another assurance of salvation.

God has given believers the Holy Spirit.

Christianity is not merely external religion.

God actually lives within His people through His Spirit.

Cross References

Romans 8:9

“You are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if God's Spirit truly lives in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.”

1 John 3:24

“The one who keeps God's commands lives in Him, and He lives in that person. We know He lives in us by the Spirit He has given us.”

2 Corinthians 1:22

“God placed His seal upon us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee of what is still to come.”

The Holy Spirit:

- Convicts.
- Teaches.
- Guides.
- Strengthens.
- Produces spiritual fruit.
- Points believers toward Christ.
- Assures believers that they belong to God.

Key Truth

The Christian life is not lived through human strength alone.

God has given us His Spirit.

XI. JESUS IS THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

1 John 4:14 — The Apostolic Testimony

“And we have seen and testify that the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.”

John speaks as an eyewitness.

He says:

“We have seen.”

Then:

“We testify.”

The apostles did not preach a religious theory.

They testified concerning Jesus Christ.

Cross References

John 3:17

“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.”

John 1:14

“The Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw His glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son, full of grace and truth.”

John 4:42

“They said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not merely because of what you told us. We have heard Him ourselves, and we know that this Man truly is the Savior of the world.’”

Jesus is:

The Savior.

Not merely a moral teacher.

Not merely a religious leader.

Not merely an example.

He came to save sinners.

1 John 4:15 — Confessing the Son of God

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God lives in them, and they in God.”

John again returns to the believer's confession concerning Jesus.

True faith recognizes Jesus as:

The Son of God.

Cross References

Romans 10:9

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Matthew 16:16

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

1 John 5:5

“Who is the one who overcomes the world? It is the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

Faith has content.

Biblical faith is not simply:

“I believe in something.”

It is trust in the biblical Jesus Christ.

XII. LIVING IN GOD'S LOVE

1 John 4:16 — “We Have Come to Know and Believe”

“We have come to know and believe the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

Notice John's words:

Know.

Believe.

It is possible to know intellectually that God loves us while struggling to truly believe and rest in that love.

John says believers have come to both know and believe God's love.

Cross References

1 John 4:8

“The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

John 15:9

“As the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love.”

John 17:26

“I have made Your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love You have for Me may be in them, and I may be in them.”

The Christian life should be rooted in God's love.

We do not obey God in order to convince Him to love us.

We obey because He has loved us.

We do not serve to earn His love.

We serve because His love has changed us.

XIII. PERFECT LOVE GIVES CONFIDENCE

1 John 4:17 — Confidence on the Day of Judgment

“This is how love is made complete among us so that we may have confidence on the day of judgment: in this world we are like Jesus.”

John brings us forward to the day of judgment.

For many people, judgment produces terror.

But John says believers may have:

Confidence.

Why?

Because Christ has transformed them.

His life is increasingly reflected in theirs.

Cross References

1 John 2:28

“Dear children, remain in Christ so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”

1 John 3:21

“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”

2 Corinthians 5:10

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each person may receive what is appropriate for what he has done while living in the body, whether good or bad.”

Christian confidence is not based upon personal perfection.

It is based upon:

- Christ's saving work.
 - God's grace.
 - The believer's relationship with Christ.
 - The transforming work of the Holy Spirit.
-

1 John 4:18 — Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. Fear has to do with punishment, and the one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

John is speaking specifically about the fear connected with punishment and judgment.

The mature understanding of God's love replaces terror with confidence.

Cross References

Romans 8:15

“You did not receive a spirit that makes you slaves and leads you back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit who brings you into God's family, and by Him we cry, ‘Father.’”

2 Timothy 1:7

“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and sound judgment.”

Psalm 23:4

“Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, because You are with me. Your rod and Your staff comfort me.”

This verse does not mean Christians never experience fear.

It means fear does not need to control us.

There is a difference between:

The reverent fear of God

and

The terror of condemnation.

Believers should reverence God.

But those who belong to Christ do not need to live every day terrified that God is waiting to destroy them.

Important Truth

The more deeply we understand God's love, the less power the fear of condemnation should have over us.

XIV. WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US

1 John 4:19 — God Took the First Step

“We love because He first loved us.”

This verse is short.

But it summarizes the gospel of grace.

God acted first.

God loved first.

God sent Christ first.

God offered salvation first.

Cross References

John 15:16

“You did not choose Me first. I chose you and appointed you to go and produce fruit that will remain.”

Romans 5:8

“God demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Titus 3:4

“When the kindness and love of God our Savior toward humanity appeared, He acted to save us.”

Our love for God is a response.

Our love for others is also a response.

We love because we have been loved.

Spiritual Principle

Grace received should become grace given.

XV. LOVE FOR GOD MUST PRODUCE LOVE FOR PEOPLE

1 John 4:20 — The Contradiction of Hatred

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar. For whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

John uses extremely direct language.

Someone says:

“I love God.”

But at the same time:

He hates his brother.

John says:

He is a liar.

Cross References

1 John 2:9

“The person who claims to be in the light while hating his brother is still living in darkness.”

1 John 3:17

“If someone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart against him, how can God's love remain in that person?”

Matthew 22:39

“The second command is like the first: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

John is not saying Christians will never experience:

- Conflict.
- Disappointment.
- Hurt.
- Anger.
- Disagreement.

But hatred cannot be accepted as the settled condition of the Christian heart.

God calls His people toward:

- Forgiveness.
 - Mercy.
 - Compassion.
 - Reconciliation when possible.
 - Love.
-

1 John 4:21 — The Command to Love

“And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

John ends the chapter with a command.

Not a suggestion.

Not a preference.

A command.

Cross References

Matthew 22:37

“Jesus said, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’”

Matthew 22:39

“The second command is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Leviticus 19:18

“Do not seek revenge or hold a grudge against your people. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Christianity moves in two directions:

Upward toward God.

Outward toward people.

We love God.

And because we love God:

We love others.

XVI. Answers for Personal Study

Question 1

Why does John command believers to test the spirits?

John commands believers to test the spirits because not every spiritual message comes from God. He warns that **“many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1). Some people may claim divine authority while teaching spiritual error.

Testing the spirits means examining teaching carefully according to Scripture, especially what it teaches about Jesus Christ. Christians should not accept a message merely because it is popular, emotional, religious, or delivered by someone claiming to speak for God.

Biblical discernment requires us to ask:

“Does this agree with God's revealed truth?”

Question 2

What is the central test John gives for recognizing true spiritual teaching?

John directs our attention to Jesus Christ. True spiritual teaching confesses that **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** (1 John 4:2).

This means that biblical Christianity recognizes Jesus as the divine Son who truly became human.

A teaching that denies, changes, or diminishes the biblical identity of Jesus is not merely a minor doctrinal difference. The truth about Christ stands at the center of the gospel.

The Christian must therefore know the biblical Jesus well enough to recognize a false representation of Him.

Question 3

What does the “spirit of antichrist” mean in 1 John 4?

John describes the spirit of antichrist as spiritual opposition to the truth about Jesus Christ.

He explains that this influence was already active in the world (1 John 4:3). This shows that opposition to Christ is not limited only to a future individual. Whenever teaching denies, distorts, or opposes the truth about Jesus, it reflects the spirit of antichrist.

This should motivate Christians not toward fear, but toward greater knowledge of Scripture and deeper faithfulness to Christ.

Question 4

What does it mean that “the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”?

John is reminding Christians that God is greater than every spiritual power that opposes Him.

Believers may face:

- Temptation.
- False teaching.
- Spiritual deception.
- Opposition.
- Persecution.
- Fear.

But none of these things are greater than God.

The believer's victory is not based upon personal strength.

It is based upon God's presence.

The Christian can stand confidently because the God who lives within His people is greater than the enemy who opposes them.

Question 5

Why can false teaching become popular?

John explains that false teachers belong to the world and therefore speak from the world's viewpoint. Because their teaching agrees with worldly thinking, **“the world listens to them”** (1 John 4:5).

This teaches us an important lesson:

Popularity does not prove truth.

A message can attract crowds and still be wrong.

A preacher can become famous and still teach error.

A teaching can become culturally accepted and still contradict Scripture.

Christians should therefore anchor their faith in God's Word rather than human approval.

Question 6

What does John mean when he says, “God is love”?

John is describing an essential part of God's character.

God's love is:

- Holy.
- Faithful.
- Righteous.
- Compassionate.
- Sacrificial.
- Merciful.

The statement **“God is love”** does not mean that every idea people call love is automatically approved by God.

God defines love according to His own holy character.

The greatest demonstration of God's love is Jesus Christ.

God loved us and sent His Son so that we might receive life through Him.

Question 7

How did God demonstrate His love for us?

God demonstrated His love by sending His one and only Son into the world so that sinners could receive life through Him (1 John 4:9).

John makes it clear that salvation began with God.

He says:

“Not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10).

God did not wait for humanity to become worthy of salvation.

Romans 5:8 explains that Christ died for us **while we were still sinners**.

God's love was therefore demonstrated through action.

He loved.

He sent.

Christ came.

Christ died.

Salvation was provided.

Question 8

How should God's love toward us affect the way we treat other people?

John gives the answer directly:

“Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

Those who receive God's love should become people who demonstrate God's love.

This involves:

- Forgiving others.
- Helping those in need.
- Showing compassion.
- Serving others.
- Being patient.
- Refusing bitterness.

- Showing kindness.
- Speaking truth in love.
- Sacrificing for others when necessary.

God's love should not stop with us.

It should flow through us.

Question 9

What does “perfect love casts out fear” mean?

John is specifically discussing fear connected with punishment and judgment.

When believers understand and rest in God's love, they do not have to live under constant terror that God is waiting to condemn them.

Christ has provided salvation.

God has given His Spirit.

Believers have been brought into God's family.

This does not eliminate reverence for God. Christians should still honor God's holiness and take His Word seriously.

But mature faith replaces the terror of condemnation with confidence in God's grace.

Question 10

Can someone truly claim to love God while continually hating another believer?

John answers this very directly.

He says that anyone who claims, **“I love God,”** while hating his brother is lying (1 John 4:20).

Why?

Because our relationship with God affects our relationships with people.

This does not mean Christians never experience hurt, disagreement, anger, or conflict.

It means hatred cannot be allowed to become the permanent settled condition of the Christian heart.

The person who loves God is commanded to love his brother.

Personal Application

1 John 4 gives us a powerful progression:

Truth must be tested.

Testing leads us to Christ.

Christ reveals the truth about God.

God's Spirit lives within believers.

God's Spirit is greater than the spirit of the world.

God's love was revealed through Christ.

Receiving God's love leads us to love others.

Mature love produces confidence.

Confidence drives away the terror of condemnation.

Love for God becomes visible through love for people.

1 John 4 does not allow us to separate **truth from love**.

We need both.

Truth without love can become harsh.

Love without truth can become deception.

The Christian is called to:

Stand firmly in truth and walk faithfully in love.

XVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Test the Voice, Know the Christ, and Show the Love”

1 John 4 gives Christians three responsibilities.

First:

Test the voice.

Not every spiritual message comes from God.

Second:

Know the Christ.

The better we know Jesus through Scripture, the easier it becomes to recognize teachings that distort Him.

Third:

Show the love.

Christianity does not end with correct doctrine.

Truth should transform the heart.

And a transformed heart should become visible in the way we treat people.

There is a dangerous imbalance when someone claims to defend truth but continually treats people with hatred.

There is also a dangerous imbalance when someone claims to practice love while abandoning biblical truth.

God calls us to both.

Truth protects love from becoming deception.**Love protects truth from becoming cold and lifeless.**

The mature Christian holds firmly to Christ and walks faithfully in love.

XVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

1 John 4 asks us several searching questions.

What voices am I listening to?

Not every voice should have access to your mind.

Test what you hear.

Compare it with Scripture.

Examine what it says about Jesus.

Do not allow popularity to replace truth.

Then ask:

What do I believe about Jesus?

He is not merely a teacher.

He is the Son of God.

He came in the flesh.

He is the Savior of the world.

Then ask:

Am I living in fear?

John reminds us:

The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

Do not magnify the enemy until you minimize God.

God is greater.

Then ask:

Do I truly understand God's love?

God did not merely tell us He loved us.

He demonstrated it.

He sent His Son.

Christ became the sacrifice for our sins.

Then ask:

Does God's love show through my life?

It is easy to say:

“I love God.”

John asks us to look at how we treat people.

Do we forgive?

Do we serve?

Do we show compassion?

Do we hold grudges?

Do we help those in need?

Do we love our brothers and sisters?

John's message is unmistakable:

You cannot separate loving God from loving people.

Therefore:

Test every spirit.

Know God's Word.

Know Jesus Christ.

Stand against error.

Do not fear spiritual opposition.

Remember that God is greater.

Receive God's love.

Live in God's love.

And allow that love to become visible through your life.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us Your Word so that we can recognize truth and reject error.

Give us wisdom and discernment.

Help us not to believe every spiritual claim simply because it sounds religious.

Teach us to test what we hear according to Scripture.

Help us know Jesus Christ more deeply so that we can recognize teachings that distort who He is.

Thank You that Jesus truly came into the world.

Thank You that He is Your Son.

Thank You that He is the Savior of the world.

When spiritual opposition surrounds us, remind us that **the One who lives within us is greater than the one who is in the world.**

Keep us from fear.

Give us courage.

Give us faith.

Thank You for loving us before we ever loved You.

Thank You for sending Your Son as the sacrifice for our sins.

Help us understand the greatness of Your love.

Then help us demonstrate that love toward others.

Remove bitterness from our hearts.

Remove hatred.

Remove unforgiveness.

Give us compassion.

Give us patience.

Give us kindness.

Teach us to love our brothers and sisters as Christ has loved us.

May our lives demonstrate both Your truth and Your love.

May we stand firmly upon Your Word without compromise.

And may we treat people with the grace, compassion, and love of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” — 1 John 4:4

Central Truth

Believers must test every spiritual message by the truth about Jesus Christ while demonstrating the reality of their faith through genuine love for God and one another.

1 John 4 in One Sentence

Test every spirit by the truth of Christ, trust the God who is greater than the world, receive His perfect love, and let that love become visible in the way you treat others.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

1 John Chapter 5 — Faith, Victory, and Eternal Life in Christ

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

1 John Chapter 5 brings John's first letter to a powerful conclusion.

Throughout this letter, John has emphasized several tests of genuine Christian faith:

Faith in Jesus Christ.

Obedience to God's commands.

Love for other believers.

Separation from the sinful values of the world.

Confidence before God.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in Chapter 5, these themes come together around one great truth:

Eternal life is found in Jesus Christ.

John begins by connecting faith in Christ with the new birth.

He then explains that those who are born of God overcome the world through faith.

He presents the testimony of the water, the blood, and the Spirit concerning Jesus Christ.

He explains that God's testimony concerning His Son is greater than human testimony.

Then John gives one of the clearest statements concerning assurance anywhere in Scripture:

“I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Christian assurance is not based upon feelings.

It is based upon God's testimony concerning His Son.

John then teaches believers about confidence in prayer, intercession for believers who fall into sin, God's protection from the evil one, and the certainty that Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life.

Finally, John closes the entire letter with a brief but serious command:

“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”

1 John 5 therefore calls believers to:

Believe in Christ.

Walk in obedience.

Overcome the world through faith.

Trust God's testimony.

Know that eternal life is found in Christ.

Pray according to God's will.

Intercede for other believers.

Live differently from the world.

Guard the heart from idols.

I. FAITH IN CHRIST BRINGS NEW BIRTH

1 John 5:1 — “Everyone Who Believes”

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And everyone who loves the Father also loves His children.”

John begins this chapter by connecting faith in Jesus with the new birth.

The person who truly believes that Jesus is the Christ has been:

Born of God.

Christianity is more than adopting a religion.

It involves spiritual birth.

Jesus Christ is at the center of that new birth.

John also immediately connects our relationship with God to our relationship with God's children.

If we love the Father, we should also love those who belong to Him.

Cross References

John 1:12

“But to everyone who received Him and believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”

1 John 4:7

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who truly loves has been born of God and knows God.”

1 Peter 1:23

“You have been born again, not from seed that dies, but from seed that cannot perish, through the living and enduring Word of God.”

John joins together three truths:

Faith.

New birth.

Love.

A person who has been born of God believes in Christ and begins to love God's family.

Spiritual Principle

New birth produces a new relationship with God and a new relationship with God's people.

II. LOVE FOR GOD PRODUCES OBEDIENCE

1 John 5:2 — Loving God's Children

“We know that we love God’s children when we love God and obey His commandments.”

John gives an important balance.

Sometimes people define love entirely by emotion.

John does not.

Love for God's people must remain connected to:

Love for God

and

Obedience to God.

Biblical love never requires us to abandon biblical truth.

Cross References

John 14:15

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

1 John 2:5

“Whoever keeps God's Word demonstrates that God's love is being brought to maturity in that person. This is how we know that we are living in Him.”

John 14:21

“The person who has My commandments and obeys them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him.”

John teaches that love and obedience belong together.

Love for God is not merely saying:

“I love God.”

It is living in a way that takes His Word seriously.

1 John 5:3 — His Commandments Are Not Burdensome

“Loving God means keeping His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.”

John does not say obedience is always easy.

He says God's commandments are not an unbearable burden.

Why?

Because obedience flows from love.

When a person loves God, obedience is no longer merely a religious duty.

It becomes a response to the God who has loved and saved us.

Cross References

John 14:15

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

Deuteronomy 30:11

“This command I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, and it is not beyond your reach.”

Matthew 11:30

“My yoke is easy to carry, and the burden I give is light.”

God's commands are not designed to destroy His people.

They guide us toward:

- Holiness.
- Wisdom.
- Faithfulness.
- Spiritual protection.
- Fellowship with God.

Key Truth

Obedience becomes different when it grows out of love rather than mere obligation.

III. FAITH OVERCOMES THE WORLD

1 John 5:4 — “This Is the Victory”

“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

This is one of the great victory verses of Scripture.

John does not say Christians overcome the world through:

Political power.

Wealth.

Human intelligence.

Popularity.

Physical strength.

He says:

“This is the victory...our faith.”

Cross References

John 16:33

“I have told you these things so that you may have peace in Me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage—I have overcome the world.”

1 John 4:4

“You are from God, dear children, and have overcome those who oppose the truth, because the One who lives in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

Romans 8:37

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through the One who loved us.”

The world pressures Christians to:

Think like the world.

Live like the world.

Desire what the world desires.

Accept what the world accepts.

But faith gives believers the ability to remain loyal to Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Faith does not remove believers from the battle; faith gives them victory in the battle.

1 John 5:5 — Who Overcomes the World?

“Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

John answers his own question.

The overcomer is the person who believes:

Jesus is the Son of God.

Victory is inseparable from Christ.

Cross References

John 20:31

“These things have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life through His name.”

Romans 10:9

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

1 John 4:15

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God remains in God, and God remains in him.”

Christian victory is not positive thinking.

It is not confidence in ourselves.

It is faith in Jesus Christ.

IV. THE WITNESS OF WATER, BLOOD, AND SPIRIT

1 John 5:6 — Jesus Christ Came by Water and Blood

“Jesus Christ is the one who came by water and blood—not by water only, but by water and blood. The Spirit testifies to this, because the Spirit is truth.”

John now speaks about testimony.

Jesus Christ came by:

Water.

Blood.

And the Spirit testifies concerning Him.

Within the framework given in this chapter, the water points to Christ's baptism and the blood points to His sacrificial death.

Jesus' ministry was publicly identified at His baptism and fulfilled through His sacrificial death.

The Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth about Christ.

Cross References

John 19:34

“One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”

John 1:33

“I did not know beforehand which One He was, but the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One upon whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

John 14:17

“He is the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He remains with you and will live in you.”

The testimony concerning Jesus is not built upon imagination.

His life and ministry were revealed in history.

His baptism was real.

His death was real.

The Spirit's testimony is true.

Important Truth

The gospel is rooted in the real person and real saving work of Jesus Christ.

V. THREE BEAR WITNESS

1 John 5:7 — The Heavenly Witness

“For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”

The Crawford Standard Bible presents three heavenly witnesses:

The Father.

The Word.

The Holy Spirit.

And the verse declares:

“These three are one.”

The Word is the title John uses for Jesus Christ.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bear unified testimony concerning divine truth.

Cross References

Matthew 28:19

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

John 10:30

“I and the Father are one.”

2 Corinthians 13:14

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

The Christian faith recognizes:

The Father.

The Son.

The Holy Spirit.

Not three competing gods.

But one God revealed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

1 John 5:8 — The Witness on Earth

“And there are three who testify on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.”

John again emphasizes agreement.

The witnesses do not contradict each other.

They agree.

Cross References

John 19:34

“One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”

John 5:31

“If I were the only one testifying about Myself, My testimony by itself would not be the only witness.”

John 15:26

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father—He will testify about Me.”

The Spirit points to Christ.

The water points to Christ.

The blood points to Christ.

The testimony agrees.

Spiritual Principle

God has not left the identity of Jesus Christ without testimony.

VI. GOD'S TESTIMONY IS GREATER

1 John 5:9 — God Testifies About His Son

“If we accept the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. This is the testimony God has given about His Son.”

Human testimony can be persuasive.

But God's testimony is greater.

John asks us to consider something obvious:

If people regularly accept human testimony, how much more should they receive God's testimony?

Cross References

John 5:36

“I have testimony greater than John's testimony. The works the Father has given Me to complete—the very works I am doing—testify that the Father sent Me.”

Matthew 3:17

“A voice from heaven said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

John 8:18

“I testify about Myself, and the Father who sent Me also testifies about Me.”

God testified concerning Christ.

At His baptism.

Through His works.

Through Scripture.

Through the Spirit.

Through His resurrection.

The question is not whether God has spoken.

The question is whether we will believe Him.

1 John 5:10 — Believing God's Record

“Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within them. Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar, because they do not believe the record God gave about His Son.”

John uses very strong language.

Rejecting God's testimony about Christ is not neutral.

John says the unbeliever effectively accuses God of lying.

Cross References

John 3:33

“Whoever accepts His testimony has confirmed that God is true.”

Romans 3:4

“Certainly not! Let God be true even if every human being proves false.”

John 3:36

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, but God's judgment remains upon that person.”

God's testimony requires a response.

We either:

Believe God

or

Reject what God has said.

There is no neutral position concerning Jesus Christ.

VII. ETERNAL LIFE IS IN THE SON

1 John 5:11 — God's Gift of Eternal Life

“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”

John now states God's testimony plainly.

God has given:

Eternal life.

And where is that life found?

In His Son.

Cross References

John 3:16

“God loved the world so greatly that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

John 17:3

“This is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You sent.”

John 1:4

“In Him was life, and that life was the light of humanity.”

Eternal life is not merely endless existence.

It is life in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Key Truth

Eternal life is not found in religion—it is found in the Son of God.

1 John 5:12 — “Whoever Has the Son Has Life”

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

John could hardly be more direct.

There are two conditions:

Has the Son — Has life.

Does not have the Son — Does not have life.

Cross References

John 3:36

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever refuses to believe the Son will not see life.”

John 14:6

“Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

John 11:25

“Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live even though he dies.’”

Christianity does not teach that eternal life is found through many independent paths.

John places eternal life in one place:

Jesus Christ.

VIII. YOU CAN KNOW YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

1 John 5:13 — Assurance of Salvation

“I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

This is one of the great assurance verses of the Bible.

John does not say:

“So that you may hope.”

“So that you may guess.”

“So that you may wonder.”

He says:

“So that you may know.”

Cross References

John 20:31

“These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in His name.”

John 3:36

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.”

1 John 1:2

“The Life appeared, and we have seen Him. We testify and announce to you the eternal Life who was with the Father and was revealed to us.”

God does not intend His children to live every day in uncertainty about whether eternal life exists.

Assurance rests upon:

God's promise.

God's testimony.

Faith in God's Son.

The evidence of spiritual life described throughout 1 John.

Important Truth

Christian assurance rests upon God's Word rather than changing emotions.

IX. CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER

1 John 5:14 — Asking According to God's Will

“And this is the confidence we have before Him: if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

John moves from confidence concerning eternal life to confidence in prayer.

Notice the condition:

“According to His will.”

Prayer is not a way of forcing God to carry out our will.

Prayer brings our desires into submission to His will.

Cross References

John 14:13

“Whatever you ask in My name, I will do so that the Father may be glorified through the Son.”

Matthew 21:22

“If you believe, you will receive what you ask for in prayer.”

Hebrews 4:16

“Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it.”

Biblical prayer includes:

Faith.

Submission.

Confidence.

Dependence.

A desire for God's glory.

Spiritual Principle

Strong prayer does not try to bend God's will toward ours; it seeks to bring our will into agreement with His.

1 John 5:15 — Confidence That God Hears

“And if we know He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of Him.”

John's confidence is built upon the character of God.

God hears prayers offered according to His will.

Cross References

Mark 11:24

“Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that God has heard you, and trust Him concerning the answer.”

John 16:23

“Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give according to His purpose.”

Matthew 18:19

“If two of you agree on earth concerning something that is in harmony with God's will, My Father in heaven will hear their request.”

Prayer is not merely speaking into the air.

God hears His people.

That does not mean every prayer is answered:

In the way we expect.

At the time we expect.

According to our preferred method.

But believers can trust that God hears and answers according to His perfect will.

X. PRAYER FOR A BELIEVER WHO SINS

1 John 5:16 — Interceding for One Another

“If anyone sees a fellow believer commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray, and God will give life to the one who commits sin not leading to death. There is a sin that leads to death; I am not saying that you should pray for that.”

This is one of the more difficult statements in John's letter.

But the primary instruction is very clear:

When we see another believer fall into sin, our response should include:

Prayer.

John does not encourage gossip.

He does not encourage spiritual pride.

He calls for intercession.

Cross References

James 5:16

“Confess your wrongs to one another and pray for one another so that you may be restored. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

James 5:15

“The prayer offered in faith will bring restoration to the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

Matthew 12:31

“Every kind of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.”

John distinguishes between sin that does not lead to death and sin that leads to death.

The verse reminds us that sin is serious.

But it also reminds us that believers should care deeply about the spiritual condition of one another.

Application

When another Christian struggles, ask:

Do I gossip about him?

Do I condemn him?

Do I secretly enjoy his failure?

Or:

Do I pray for him?

1 John 5:17 — All Wrongdoing Is Sin

“All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.”

John refuses to minimize sin.

He says:

All wrongdoing is sin.

Cross References

1 John 3:4

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, because sin is lawlessness.”

Romans 14:23

“Whatever does not come from faith is sin.”

James 4:17

“If someone knows the right thing to do but refuses to do it, that person sins.”

We sometimes create categories that allow us to excuse certain sins.

John reminds us:

Wrongdoing is sin.

Sin should never be treated casually.

Spiritual Principle

Grace should never make us careless about sin; grace should make us desire holiness.

XI. GOD KEEPS HIS CHILDREN

1 John 5:18 — Protected From the Evil One

“We know that anyone born of God does not continue in sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot touch them.”

John again describes the person who has been born of God.

He does not say Christians never sin.

John has already taught that believers sometimes sin and need confession.

He is speaking about continuing in sin as the settled pattern of life.

A person born of God cannot be comfortable making sin his permanent way of living.

Cross References

1 John 3:9

“No one born of God continues living in sin as the settled practice of life, because God's life remains in him.”

John 17:15

“I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to protect them from the evil one.”

Jude 1:24

“God is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy.”

The believer's security ultimately depends upon God.

God guards His people.

God preserves His people.

God gives strength against the evil one.

Key Truth

The Christian's hope is not merely that he can hold on to God, but that God is able to hold on to him.

XII. WE BELONG TO GOD

1 John 5:19 — A World Under the Evil One

“We know that we belong to God, and the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

John draws a clear distinction.

Believers belong to God.

The rebellious world system lies under the influence of the evil one.

Cross References

John 17:14

“I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.”

2 Corinthians 4:4

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”

John 12:31

“Now judgment has come upon this world, and the ruler of this world will be driven out.”

This explains why Christians often find themselves moving against the direction of the culture.

The believer belongs to a different kingdom.

Application

Christians live in the world.

But Christians should not allow the world to determine:

What we believe.

What we worship.

What we value.

What we call right and wrong.

Who we are.

We belong to God.

XIII. JESUS CHRIST IS TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE

1 John 5:20 — “We Know”

“We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true—His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

John approaches the end of his letter with certainty.

Notice how often he says:

“We know.”

The Christian faith is not built upon uncertainty.

John declares:

The Son of God has come.

He has given us understanding.

We can know the true God.

We are in His Son Jesus Christ.

And John concludes:

“He is the true God and eternal life.”

Cross References

John 17:3

“This is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent.”

John 20:28

“Thomas answered Jesus, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

John 1:14

“The Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw His glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son, full of grace and truth.”

John began his letter by proclaiming the Word of Life.

He ends by proclaiming:

Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life.

The letter begins with Christ.

The letter ends with Christ.

The Christian life begins with Christ.

The Christian life continues through Christ.

Eternal life is found in Christ.

1 John 5:21 — Keep Yourselves From Idols

“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”

John's final statement may seem sudden.

But it perfectly fits the entire letter.

If Jesus Christ is:

The Son of God.

The Savior.

The true God.

Eternal life.

Then nothing else deserves the place that belongs to Him.

Cross References

Exodus 20:3

“You must have no other gods before Me.”

1 Corinthians 10:14

“Therefore, my dear friends, run away from idolatry.”

Colossians 3:5

“Put to death the sinful desires connected with your earthly nature, including sexual immorality, impurity, uncontrolled passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.”

An idol is anything that takes God's rightful place in the heart.

Idols may include:

Money.

Possessions.

Power.

Popularity.

Relationships.

Pleasure.

Success.

Career.

Self.

Even good things can become idols when they take God's place.

John's final command is therefore profoundly appropriate:

Guard your heart.

XIV. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 1 JOHN

5

1. Faith in Christ Brings New Birth

John begins with faith in Jesus Christ.

The person who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

Christianity is not merely an outward religious identity.

It involves inward spiritual life.

Ask Yourself:

Is my confidence in my religion, or is my confidence in Jesus Christ?

2. Faith Overcomes the World

The world constantly pressures believers to compromise.

John says:

“This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

Faith enables Christians to remain loyal to Christ even when the world moves in another direction.

Principle:

Victory is not escaping every battle; victory is remaining faithful to Christ through the battle.

3. Eternal Life Is Found in Christ Alone

John gives us one of the clearest statements in Scripture:

“Whoever has the Son has life.”

Life is not found through religious performance.

It is found in Jesus Christ.

Remember:

If you have Christ, you have life.

4. Christians Can Have Assurance

John says:

“So that you may know that you have eternal life.”

God does not require His children to live in endless uncertainty.

Our assurance rests upon God's testimony concerning His Son.

Principle:

Do not build your assurance upon changing feelings. Build it upon God's unchanging Word.

5. Guard Your Heart From Idols

John ends with:

“Keep yourselves from idols.”

Anything that takes God's place can become an idol.

The Christian must continually guard his heart.

Ask Yourself:

What competes with God for first place in my life?

XV. THE SPIRITUAL PROGRESSION OF 1 JOHN 5

1 John 5 gives us a spiritual progression that summarizes the Christian life.

1. Believe

Jesus is the Christ.

2. Be Born of God

Faith in Christ is connected with spiritual new birth.

3. Love

Those who love the Father should love His children.

4. Obey

Love for God produces obedience.

5. Overcome

Faith gives victory over the world.

6. Receive God's Testimony

God has testified concerning His Son.

7. Receive Life

Eternal life is in Christ.

8. Know

Believers can know that they have eternal life.

9. Pray

Those who know God can approach Him with confidence.

10. Intercede

Believers should pray for one another.

11. Stand

God guards His children from the evil one.

12. Guard Your Heart

Keep yourself from idols.

This is the movement from:

Faith → New Birth → Love → Obedience → Victory → Assurance → Prayer → Perseverance.

XVI. Answers for Personal Study

Question 1

What does 1 John 5 teach about the relationship between faith and the new birth?

John says that everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1). Genuine Christian faith centers upon the identity of Jesus Christ.

The new birth is not simply becoming more religious or improving one's behavior. It is the spiritual work of God that produces new life.

That new life begins to show itself through faith, obedience, love for God's people, and victory over the values of the world.

Question 2

How does love for God demonstrate itself according to this chapter?

John connects love for God with obedience.

He says that loving God means keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3).

This does not mean believers earn God's love by obeying Him. Rather, obedience is the response of a heart that has received God's love.

Jesus said the same thing:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

Biblical love therefore includes both affection and obedience.

Question 3

What does it mean that faith overcomes the world?

The world constantly pressures Christians to accept its values, priorities, attitudes, and sinful desires.

John says that the person born of God overcomes this world through faith (1 John 5:4).

This does not mean Christians will never struggle.

It means the world does not have to determine the believer's ultimate direction.

Faith keeps us looking toward Christ.

Faith reminds us that Jesus has already overcome the world.

Faith gives us courage to remain faithful even when obedience becomes difficult.

Question 4

What do the water, blood, and Spirit testify concerning Jesus Christ?

Within the framework of this study, the water points to Christ's baptism, the blood points to His sacrificial death, and the Spirit bears divine testimony concerning Him.

These witnesses agree that Jesus is truly the Christ.

His ministry was not imaginary.

His baptism was real.

His sacrificial death was real.

The Spirit's testimony concerning Him is true.

Together they point believers toward the historical and saving work of Jesus Christ.

Question 5

Why is God's testimony concerning His Son so important?

John says that although people accept human testimony, **God's testimony is greater** (1 John 5:9).

God Himself has testified concerning His Son.

To believe Jesus is therefore to receive God's testimony.

To reject Jesus is to reject what God has said concerning Him.

The Christian's confidence is not merely based upon what other people say about Christ.

It rests upon God's own testimony.

Question 6

Where is eternal life found?

John gives a direct answer:

“This life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11).

Then he says:

“Whoever has the Son has life.”

Eternal life is therefore inseparable from Jesus Christ.

Christianity does not present eternal life as a reward that can be earned independently from Christ.

Life is found in Him.

The person who has Christ has eternal life.

The person who rejects Christ does not possess that life.

Question 7

Can a believer know that he has eternal life?

Yes.

John specifically says that he wrote these things to believers **“so that you may know that you have eternal life”** (1 John 5:13).

This assurance does not mean Christians never examine themselves.

Throughout 1 John, John gives spiritual evidence of genuine faith:

Faith in Christ.

Love for believers.

Obedience.

A changed relationship with sin.

The witness of the Spirit.

But the foundation of assurance is God's promise concerning His Son.

Our emotions change.

God's testimony does not.

Question 8

What does it mean to pray according to God's will?

Praying according to God's will means bringing our requests before God while remaining surrendered to His purposes.

Prayer is not an attempt to control God.

It is a relationship of faith in which believers confidently bring their needs to the Father.

We can pray boldly while also saying:

“Lord, Your will is better than mine.”

The more Scripture shapes our minds, the more our prayers should begin to reflect God's priorities.

Question 9

How should Christians respond when another believer falls into sin?

John says believers should pray.

This is extremely important.

Our first response should not be:

Gossip.

Mockery.

Pride.

Condemnation.

Instead, we should care about restoration.

James 5:16 similarly teaches believers to pray for one another.

This does not mean sin should be ignored.

It means correction should be accompanied by compassion and intercession.

Question 10

What idols might compete with God for first place in a person's life?

An idol is anything that takes the place that properly belongs to God.

Modern idols may not always be carved statues.

They may include:

Money.

Career.

Possessions.

Relationships.

Pleasure.

Recognition.

Entertainment.

Political power.

Success.

Personal comfort.

Even ministry can become wrongly elevated if our identity becomes centered in ministry rather than in Christ.

John ends his letter by warning God's children:

“Keep yourselves from idols.”

Every believer should ask:

“What has the greatest claim upon my heart?”

Personal Application

1 John 5 gives believers a powerful progression:

Faith leads to new birth.

New birth produces love.

Love produces obedience.

Faith gives victory over the world.

God's testimony points us to His Son.

The Son gives eternal life.

Eternal life produces assurance.

Assurance produces confidence in prayer.

Prayer leads us to intercede for others.

God guards His children from the evil one.

Those who belong to God must guard themselves from idols.

The chapter begins with:

Faith in Christ.

And it ends with:

Faithfulness to God.

Everything between those two truths points us toward Jesus.

He is:

The Christ.

The Son of God.

The One testified to by the Spirit.

The source of eternal life.

The true God.

The One who gives victory.

The One who gives assurance.

The One worthy of first place in our hearts.

XVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“If You Have the Son, You Have Life”

Many people spend their lives searching for life.

They search for it in:

Money.

Possessions.

Success.

Relationships.

Entertainment.

Recognition.

Power.

Religion.

But John brings the search to one conclusion:

“Whoever has the Son has life.”

Life is not ultimately found in what we possess.

Life is found in whom we know.

Jesus Christ is not merely someone who gives eternal life.

He is the source of eternal life.

That changes everything.

If Christ is life, then nothing should compete with Him.

If Christ is life, then the world cannot offer anything greater.

If Christ is life, then obedience is not bondage.

If Christ is life, then faith is victory.

If Christ is life, then death does not have the final word.

If Christ is life, then believers can have assurance.

John therefore closes with exactly the right warning:

“Keep yourselves from idols.”

Why exchange the living Christ for something that cannot give life?

XVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

1 John 5 asks us some of the most important questions a person can answer.

First:

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?

Christianity begins with Christ.

Not church membership.

Not religious tradition.

Not good works.

Christ.

Then ask:

Has faith changed the way you live?

John connects genuine faith with:

Love.

Obedience.

Victory over the world.

Then ask:

What testimony are you trusting?

Human opinions change.

Culture changes.

Popular beliefs change.

God's testimony does not change.

God has testified concerning His Son.

Then ask:

Do you know that you have eternal life?

John did not write so believers would spend their lives guessing.

He wrote:

“So that you may know.”

Place your confidence in God's promise.

Then ask:

How is your prayer life?

Do you pray according to God's will?

Do you trust that God hears you?

Do you pray for other believers when they struggle?

Then ask:

What controls your heart?

John's last command is:

“Keep yourselves from idols.”

Anything that takes God's rightful place must be confronted.

Therefore:

Believe in Jesus Christ.

Love God's people.

Obey God's commands.

Walk by faith.

Overcome the world's pressure.

Trust God's testimony.

Rest in eternal life.

Pray confidently.

Intercede faithfully.

Stand against sin.

Trust God's protection.

And keep Jesus Christ first.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us eternal life through Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Thank You that salvation is not based upon our ability to earn Your favor, but upon Your grace and the finished work of Christ.

Strengthen our faith.

Help us believe Your testimony even when the voices of the world speak against Your truth.

Teach us to love Your children.

Help us demonstrate our love for You through obedience.

When the world pressures us to compromise, remind us that our faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus.

Thank You for the testimony of the Spirit.

Thank You for the sacrifice of Christ.

Thank You that whoever has the Son has life.

Give assurance to those who truly belong to You.

Help us build our confidence upon Your Word rather than upon changing emotions.

Teach us to pray according to Your will.

Give us confidence to approach You with our needs.

Teach us also to pray for brothers and sisters who struggle with sin.

Protect us from spiritual pride.

Give us hearts that seek restoration rather than condemnation.

Guard us from the evil one.

Remind us that we belong to You even while we live in a world influenced by darkness.

Give us wisdom to recognize idols in our lives.

Remove anything that has taken Your rightful place.

May Jesus Christ remain first in our hearts, our families, our churches, and our lives.

May our faith produce obedience.

May our obedience demonstrate love.

May our love point others toward Christ.

And may we live every day with the confidence that eternal life is found in Your Son.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” — 1 John 5:13

Central Truth

God gives eternal life through Jesus Christ, and those who truly believe in His Son can live with faith, assurance, victory, obedience, and confidence before God.

1 John 5 in One Sentence

Believe in Jesus Christ, overcome the world through faith, rest confidently in the eternal life God gives through His Son, and guard your heart from anything that would take His place.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 John — Walk in Truth and Love

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 John is one of the shortest books in the New Testament, but its message is extremely important.

John brings together two truths that Christians must never separate:

Truth.

Love.

Some people emphasize truth while becoming harsh and unloving.

Others emphasize love while becoming careless about truth.

John teaches us that biblical Christianity requires both.

We must:

Walk in truth.

Walk in love.

Walk in obedience.

Guard ourselves against deception.

Refuse to support false teaching.

John writes as **“the elder”** to **“the chosen lady and her children.”**

Whether John is referring to a particular Christian woman and her family or using the language figuratively for a local congregation, his message is clear: God's people must remain faithful to the truth they have received.

John rejoices because some are walking in truth.

He reminds them of the command to love one another.

Then he gives a serious warning.

False teachers were denying that Jesus Christ had truly come in the flesh.

John calls such teaching deceptive and antichrist.

He therefore warns believers not merely to recognize false teaching, but also not to participate in spreading it.

2 John teaches an important principle:

Christian love does not require Christians to support spiritual error.

Love and truth must walk together.

I. THE ELDER WRITES IN TRUTH AND LOVE

2 John 1 — “Whom I Truly Love”

“From the elder, to the chosen lady and her children, whom I truly love—and not only I, but also all who know the truth—”

John introduces himself simply as:

The elder.

He writes to the chosen lady and her children.

What immediately stands out is John's repeated connection between:

Love

and

Truth.

John says he truly loves them.

But he is not alone.

All who know the truth share this spiritual bond.

Cross References

3 John 1:1

“From the elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I truly love.”

1 Peter 5:1

“I appeal to the elders among you as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings, and one who will share in the glory that is going to be revealed.”

1 Corinthians 13:6

“Love does not rejoice when wrong is done, but it rejoices together with the truth.”

John's love is not separated from truth.

That is significant.

Biblical love never requires us to pretend that truth does not matter.

Love rejoices with truth.

Spiritual Principle

Christian love is strongest when it is rooted in God's truth.

II. THE TRUTH LIVES IN US

2 John 2 — Truth That Remains Forever

“because the truth lives in us and will be with us forever.”

John does not describe truth as a temporary idea.

He says:

The truth lives in us.

And:

The truth will be with us forever.

The Christian faith is not built upon changing cultural opinion.

God's truth does not expire.

Cross References

John 14:17

“He is the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him because it does not see Him or know Him. But you know Him because He remains with you and will live in you.”

1 John 2:27

“The anointing you received from Christ remains in you, and you do not need false teachers to lead you away. His anointing teaches you concerning the truth and is not a lie. Remain in Him as you have been taught.”

John 8:32

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Truth is not merely information that Christians memorize.

God's truth shapes:

What we believe.

How we live.

How we love.

How we worship.

How we recognize error.

Key Truth

Culture changes, opinions change, and generations change, but God's truth remains.

III. GRACE, MERCY, PEACE, TRUTH, AND LOVE

2 John 3 — Blessings From the Father and Son

“Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, in truth and love.”

John brings together several great Christian blessings:

Grace.

Mercy.

Peace.

And these are experienced:

In truth and love.

Cross References

1 Timothy 1:2

“To Timothy, my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Galatians 1:3

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jude 1:2

“May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.”

Grace is God's favor toward those who do not deserve it.

Mercy is God's compassion toward those in need.

Peace is the spiritual wholeness that comes through relationship with God.

John connects all of these blessings with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Truth and love are not enemies; they belong together in the Christian life.

IV. WALKING IN THE TRUTH

2 John 4 — “I Was Overjoyed”

“I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.”

John experienced great joy when he discovered believers walking in truth.

Notice that he does not simply say they:

Knew the truth.

He says they were:

Walking in the truth.

Truth had moved from their minds into their lives.

Cross References

3 John 1:4

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

Psalm 119:105

“Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.”

1 John 1:6

“If we say that we have fellowship with God while continuing to walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

To walk in truth means allowing God's truth to guide everyday life.

It affects:

Our decisions.

Our relationships.

Our morality.

Our priorities.

Our speech.

Our worship.

Our conduct.

Application

Ask yourself:

Do I merely know biblical truth, or am I walking in it?

Knowledge alone is not the goal.

God calls us to obedience.

V. THE COMMAND TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

2 John 5 — The Command From the Beginning

“And now I ask you, dear lady—not as if I were writing a new command, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another.”

John now reminds his readers of a familiar command.

It was not new.

Christians had heard it from the beginning:

Love one another.

Cross References

1 John 2:7

“Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command, but an old command that you have had from the beginning. This old command is the message you have already heard.”

1 John 3:11

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.”

John 13:34

“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.”

Christian love is not optional.

It is commanded.

Jesus did not say:

Love people when it is convenient.

Love people when they agree with you.

Love people only when they treat you well.

He said:

Love one another.

VI. LOVE MEANS WALKING IN OBEDIENCE

2 John 6 — What Love Looks Like

“And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love.”

John gives us a biblical definition of love.

Love is not merely emotion.

Love involves:

Obedience.

Cross References

1 John 5:3

“This is what it means to love God: we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.”

John 14:15

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

1 John 2:5

“Whoever keeps God's Word demonstrates that God's love is being brought to maturity in that person.”

Modern culture often defines love as unconditional approval.

John does not.

Biblical love walks according to God's commands.

Therefore:

Love does not require compromise.

Love does not require approval of sin.

Love does not require abandoning truth.

Key Truth

Biblical love is measured by obedience to God, not merely by emotion.

VII. MANY DECEIVERS HAVE GONE OUT

2 John 7 — Denying That Christ Came in the Flesh

“Many deceivers have gone out into the world. They do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Such a person is the deceiver and the antichrist.”

John now turns sharply from love to spiritual danger.

Many deceivers had entered the world.

Their error concerned:

Jesus Christ.

They denied that Jesus Christ had truly come in the flesh.

Cross References

1 John 4:1

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit. Test the spirits to determine whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

1 John 4:3

“Every spirit that refuses to confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist, which you heard was coming and is already active in the world.”

1 John 2:22

“Who is the liar? It is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is antichrist because he rejects the Father and the Son.”

Again John makes Christology central.

What a teacher believes about Jesus matters.

A person can use religious vocabulary and still teach spiritual deception.

Spiritual Principle

False teaching is often exposed by asking what it teaches about Jesus Christ.

VIII. WATCH YOURSELVES

2 John 8 — Do Not Lose Your Reward

“Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may receive a full reward.”

John does not merely say:

Watch false teachers.

He says:

Watch yourselves.

That is important.

Spiritual danger is not only outside us.

Believers must guard:

Their minds.

Their doctrine.

Their conduct.

Their perseverance.

Cross References

2 John 1:4

“I was greatly encouraged to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.”

Hebrews 10:35

“Do not throw away your confidence, because it carries a great reward.”

Revelation 3:11

“I am coming soon. Hold firmly to what you have so that no one takes your crown.”

John warns believers against spiritual carelessness.

Past faithfulness does not justify present compromise.

Application

Ask yourself:

What am I allowing into my spiritual life?

Am I becoming careless about doctrine?

Am I slowly accepting ideas I once knew were false?

Am I remaining faithful?

Important Truth

Spiritual vigilance is necessary because deception often happens gradually.

IX. REMAIN IN THE TEACHING OF CHRIST

2 John 9 — Do Not Run Ahead

“Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God. Whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”

John warns against people who claim to move beyond apostolic Christianity.

They may call it:

Progress.

New revelation.

Advanced knowledge.

Spiritual enlightenment.

But if someone abandons the teaching of Christ, John says that person does not have God.

Cross References

1 John 2:23

“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father. Whoever openly acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

2 John 1:4

“I rejoiced greatly when I found some of your children walking in truth according to the Father's command.”

1 John 2:24

“Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, you will remain in the Son and in the Father.”

Christianity does not need to be reinvented.

The church does not need a new Christ.

It does not need a new gospel.

It needs to remain faithful to the truth already revealed.

Key Truth

Spiritual maturity does not mean moving beyond Christ; it means going deeper into Christ.

X. DO NOT SUPPORT FALSE TEACHING

2 John 10 — Do Not Welcome False Doctrine

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not welcome him into your house or even greet him.”

This verse must be understood in its context.

John is not teaching Christians to become rude to every unbeliever.

He is addressing traveling teachers who were spreading false doctrine.

In the ancient world, hospitality could provide:

Housing.

Food.

Financial support.

A meeting place.

Public endorsement.

John warns Christians not to help false teachers spread doctrines that deny Christ.

Cross References

Romans 16:17

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and place obstacles in the way of the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”

2 Timothy 3:5

“They may maintain an outward appearance of godliness while denying its true power. Turn away from such people.”

Titus 3:10

“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, refuse to continue supporting his divisive behavior.”

Christian love does not require cooperation with false teaching.

There is a difference between:

Loving a person

and

Supporting that person's false ministry.

Spiritual Principle

Compassion for people must never become cooperation with deception.

2 John 11 — Sharing in Evil Deeds

“For whoever greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

John explains why the previous warning matters.

Supporting a false teacher can make someone a participant in that teacher's work.

Cross References

Ephesians 5:11

“Do not participate in the fruitless works of darkness. Instead, expose them.”

1 Timothy 5:22

“Do not be hasty in approving someone for spiritual leadership, and do not participate in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.”

2 John 1:10

“If someone comes to you without the teaching of Christ, do not receive him in a way that supports his ministry.”

There are forms of support that communicate endorsement.

Christians must think carefully about:

Who they promote.

Who they financially support.

Who they provide a platform for.

Whose teaching they distribute.

Important Truth

We become responsible when our support helps spread what God calls false.

XI. THE VALUE OF FACE-TO-FACE FELLOWSHIP

2 John 12 — “So That Our Joy May Be Complete”

“I have much more to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and speak face to face, so that our joy may be complete.”

John valued written communication.

After all, he was writing a letter.

But he understood that written words could not completely replace personal fellowship.

He wanted to speak:

Face to face.

Cross References

3 John 1:13

“I have many things I could write to you, but I do not want to continue communicating only with pen and ink.”

3 John 1:14

“I hope to see you soon, and then we will speak face to face.”

1 John 1:4

“We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

Christian fellowship involves more than transferring information.

It includes:

Presence.

Conversation.

Encouragement.

Prayer.

Worship.

Love.

Shared joy.

Application

Technology can help Christians communicate.

But it should not make us forget the importance of personal fellowship.

XII. FINAL GREETINGS

2 John 13 — Greetings From the Chosen Sister

“The children of your chosen sister send their greetings. Amen.”

John closes simply.

The greeting demonstrates the bond that existed among believers.

Cross References

1 Peter 5:13

“The church chosen together with you in Babylon sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son in the faith.”

2 John 1:1

“From the elder, to the chosen lady and her children, whom I truly love.”

Romans 16:16

“Greet one another with sincere Christian affection. The churches of Christ send you their greetings.”

The church of Jesus Christ is a family.

Believers may live in different places, but they belong to one spiritual household through Christ.

XIII. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 JOHN

1. Truth and Love Must Stay Together

John repeatedly joins:

Truth

and

Love.

Christianity requires both.

Truth without love can become harsh.

Love without truth can become deception.

Ask Yourself:

Am I equally committed to truth and biblical love?

2. Love Includes Obedience

John says:

“This is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands.”

Love is more than feeling.

Love obeys God.

Principle:

Never redefine love in a way that requires disobedience to God.

3. Christians Must Recognize Deceivers

John warns that many deceivers have gone into the world.

False teaching is not imaginary.

Believers need discernment.

Remember:

The most important test concerns Jesus Christ.

4. Do Not Help Spread Spiritual Error

John warns Christians not to support teachers who reject the doctrine of Christ.

That principle remains important.

Christians should not provide resources, endorsement, or influence that enables false teaching to spread.

Principle:

Love people, but do not finance, promote, or participate in deception.

5. Fellowship Produces Joy

John wanted to move beyond written communication to face-to-face fellowship.

Christian relationships matter.

Ask Yourself:

Am I building meaningful fellowship with other believers?

XIV. THE SPIRITUAL PROGRESSION OF 2 JOHN

2 John gives us a clear pattern for faithful Christian living.

1. Know the Truth

Truth is foundational.

2. Let the Truth Remain

God's truth should live within us.

3. Walk in the Truth

Truth must become practice.

4. Love One Another

Truth should produce love.

5. Obey God's Commands

Biblical love walks in obedience.

6. Recognize Deception

Not every teacher represents God.

7. Guard Yourself

Watch your own spiritual condition.

8. Remain in Christ's Teaching

Do not run beyond biblical truth.

9. Refuse Partnership With Error

Do not help falsehood spread.

10. Pursue Fellowship

Enjoy the spiritual joy of God's people.

This is the movement from:

Truth → Love → Obedience → Discernment → Faithfulness → Fellowship.

XV. WHAT 2 JOHN TEACHES US ABOUT TRUTH AND LOVE

2 John gives us an important biblical balance.

Truth

John says the truth:

Lives in us.

Will remain forever.

Must be walked in.

Must be defended.

Love

John says believers must:

Love one another.

Walk in love.

Demonstrate love through obedience.

Discernment

John warns:

Many deceivers have entered the world.

False teaching must be recognized.

Believers must watch themselves.

Separation From Error

John teaches that Christians should not support people who spread doctrines that reject Christ.

Fellowship

John values personal fellowship among believers.

The message of 2 John can therefore be summarized:

Love never requires the abandonment of truth, and truth never gives us permission to abandon love.

XVI. Answers for Personal Study

Question 1

Why does John connect truth and love so closely?

John understands that genuine Christian love must be rooted in God's truth.

Truth tells us:

Who God is.

Who Jesus Christ is.

What salvation means.

How believers should live.

Love then becomes the practical expression of that truth.

If love is separated from truth, people can begin calling sinful or deceptive things loving.

If truth is separated from love, people may defend correct doctrine with an ungodly attitude.

John refuses both errors.

Biblical Christianity requires truth expressed through love.

Question 2

What does it mean to walk in truth?

Walking in truth means allowing what God has revealed to shape everyday life.

It is possible to know biblical facts while refusing to live according to them.

John rejoiced because believers were not merely talking about truth.

They were:

Walking in it.

Walking in truth affects our:

Conduct.

Relationships.

Speech.

Decisions.

Values.

Priorities.

Spiritual commitments.

Truth becomes visible through obedience.

Question 3

Why does John say that love means obedience to God's commands?

John does not define love merely as an emotion.

He says:

“This is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands.”

This protects Christians from false definitions of love.

A person may say:

“If you really loved me, you would approve of everything I do.”

But biblical love cannot require disobedience to God.

Jesus connected love and obedience when He said:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

Real love seeks another person's good according to God's truth.

Question 4

What kind of false teaching was John warning about?

John specifically warns about teachers who refused to confess that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh.

This was a denial of an essential truth concerning Jesus.

John identifies such teaching as deception and antichrist.

This shows us that what people believe about Jesus Christ is foundational.

A teacher who rejects the biblical Christ cannot be treated as though he is simply offering another harmless Christian opinion.

Question 5

What does John mean when he says, “Watch yourselves”?

John is calling believers to spiritual vigilance.

Christians should guard:

Their doctrine.

Their spiritual influences.

Their conduct.

Their perseverance.

Their relationship with Christ.

It is easy to focus only on false teachers and forget that we must also examine ourselves.

A believer should regularly ask:

Am I remaining faithful?

Am I drifting?

Am I compromising?

Am I allowing deceptive ideas to influence me?

Spiritual protection requires continued watchfulness.

Question 6

What does it mean to “continue in the teaching of Christ”?

It means remaining faithful to the truth revealed about Jesus Christ.

John warns against people who “run ahead” as though biblical Christianity has become outdated and needs to be replaced.

Christian maturity does not consist of abandoning foundational truth.

It means growing more deeply in that truth.

The gospel does not need to be reinvented.

Believers need to remain in what God has revealed concerning His Son.

Question 7

Why does John tell believers not to welcome false teachers into their homes?

In John's historical setting, traveling teachers depended heavily upon hospitality.

Receiving someone into the home could provide:

Food.

Lodging.

Financial assistance.

A meeting place.

Public credibility.

John therefore warns Christians not to provide support that would enable false teachers to spread doctrine that denied Christ.

His concern is not ordinary kindness toward unbelievers.

His concern is partnership in false ministry.

Question 8

How can Christians apply this warning today?

Christians should consider carefully what teachers and ministries they:

Promote.

Support financially.

Invite to speak.

Recommend to others.

Distribute online.

Provide platforms for.

We should not knowingly help spread teaching that rejects essential biblical truth concerning Christ.

The principle is simple:

Do not use your resources to advance spiritual deception.

Question 9

Why is face-to-face fellowship important?

John had more to communicate, but he wanted to speak personally.

He believed this would make their joy complete.

Personal fellowship allows Christians to:

Encourage one another.

Pray together.

Share burdens.

Worship together.

Correct misunderstandings.

Build deeper relationships.

Written and electronic communication can be helpful, but it cannot completely replace embodied Christian fellowship.

Question 10

How can a believer hold firmly to truth without becoming harsh?

The answer is found throughout 2 John:

Truth and love.

The believer does not need to choose one.

We can:

Reject false doctrine without hatred.

Speak truth without cruelty.

Correct error without arrogance.

Stand firmly without becoming bitter.

Love people without approving falsehood.

Jesus perfectly embodied grace and truth.

Christians should seek the same balance.

Personal Application

2 John gives us a powerful progression:

Truth must be known.

Truth must live within us.

Truth must be walked out.

Walking in truth leads to obedience.

Obedience expresses love.

Love does not ignore deception.

Discernment protects the believer.

Faithfulness requires remaining in Christ's teaching.

Faithfulness also requires refusing partnership with error.

Truthful and loving believers enjoy genuine fellowship.

2 John teaches us that the Christian life cannot be reduced to only one virtue.

God calls us to:

Truth.

Love.

Obedience.

Discernment.

Faithfulness.

We should never become so concerned about truth that we stop loving people.

And we should never become so concerned about appearing loving that we stop defending truth.

The mature Christian does both.

XVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Sacrifice Truth in the Name of Love”

Our culture often tells us that love means approval.

Scripture does not.

John says:

Walk in love.

But John also says:

Watch out for deceivers.

He says:

Love one another.

But he also says:

Do not support those who spread false teaching.

There is no contradiction.

True love wants what is spiritually good for another person.

Therefore true love cannot celebrate what destroys people spiritually.

This principle applies in:

Families.

Churches.

Friendships.

Ministries.

Teaching.

Counseling.

Leadership.

Christian love should be warm.

But it should also be truthful.

Christian conviction should be firm.

But it should also be loving.

We do not honor God by becoming cruel in the name of truth.

And we do not honor God by abandoning truth in the name of kindness.

John teaches us:

Walk in truth and love.

XVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 John asks us several searching questions.

First:

Am I walking in truth?

Not merely:

Do I know truth?

But:

Does truth shape my life?

Then ask:

Am I walking in love?

Do I demonstrate:

Patience?

Kindness?

Compassion?

Forgiveness?

Faithfulness?

Then ask:

Does my definition of love agree with God's commands?

Biblical love never requires rebellion against God.

Then ask:

Can I recognize deception?

John warns:

Many deceivers have gone out into the world.

Christians need discernment.

Know Scripture.

Know Jesus Christ.

Know the gospel.

Then ask:

Am I spiritually watchful?

Do not become careless.

Do not assume yesterday's faithfulness guarantees tomorrow's faithfulness.

Guard your heart.

Guard your doctrine.

Remain in Christ.

Then ask:

Am I helping spread things that contradict God's truth?

Be careful what you:

Share.

Promote.

Recommend.

Finance.

Endorse.

Not every spiritual voice deserves a platform.

Finally:

Am I investing in Christian fellowship?

John desired face-to-face fellowship.

We need one another.

Therefore:

Know the truth.

Walk in the truth.

Love one another.

Obey God's commands.

Recognize deceivers.

Watch yourself.

Remain in Christ's teaching.

Refuse partnership with falsehood.

And pursue joyful fellowship with God's people.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us Your truth.

Help us not merely to know it intellectually, but to walk in it faithfully.

Teach us to love as You command us to love.

Give us hearts filled with compassion, patience, kindness, and grace.

But also give us discernment.

Protect us from spiritual deception.

Help us recognize teachings that distort the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Give us courage to stand for truth without becoming harsh.

Give us love for people without compromising what You have revealed.

Teach us to obey Your commandments.

Guard us from the temptation to redefine love according to the standards of the world.

Help us remain faithful to the teaching of Christ.

Give us wisdom concerning the teachers, ministries, and messages we support.

Keep us from participating in the spread of error.

Help us use our influence, resources, words, and relationships for the advancement of truth.

Strengthen our fellowship with other believers.

Give us relationships in which truth is spoken, love is demonstrated, faith is strengthened, and Christ is honored.

May truth live deeply within us.

May love flow freely through us.

May obedience mark our lives.

And may Jesus Christ remain at the center of everything we believe and everything we do.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love.” — 2 John 6

Central Truth

God calls believers to walk in both truth and love, remaining faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ while refusing to support spiritual deception.

2 John in One Sentence

Walk faithfully in God's truth, demonstrate His love through obedience, guard yourself against deceivers, and never support teaching that leads people away from Jesus Christ.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

3 John — Walking in Truth and Supporting the Work

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

3 John is a short letter, but it gives us a powerful picture of Christian character, ministry support, spiritual leadership, hospitality, and the importance of walking in truth.

John writes to a believer named Gaius.

Gaius is commended because he is:

Faithful.

Hospitable.

Generous.

Committed to the truth.

Supportive of Christian workers.

John then contrasts Gaius with another man named Diotrephes.

Diotrephes is proud.

He loves to be first.

He rejects apostolic authority.

He spreads malicious words.

He refuses hospitality.

He prevents others from showing hospitality.

He even removes faithful believers from the church.

Then John introduces a third man:

Demetrius.

Demetrius has a good testimony.

He is respected by others.

His life agrees with the truth.

3 John therefore gives us three living examples:

Gaius — the faithful servant.

Diotrephes — the self-exalting leader.

Demetrius — the man with a good testimony.

This small letter teaches us that Christian faith is demonstrated not merely by what we say, but by:

How we live.

How we treat people.

How we support God's work.

How we respond to spiritual authority.

What kind of testimony our lives produce.

One of the great statements of the letter is:

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

3 John teaches us that truth should not remain merely in the mind.

Truth should become a way of life.

I. LOVE ROOTED IN TRUTH

3 John 1 — “Whom I Love in the Truth”

“From the elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”

John again introduces himself as:

The elder.

He writes to Gaius, whom he calls:

“My dear friend.”

John's love for Gaius is connected to:

Truth.

This is similar to what John taught in 2 John.

Christian love and biblical truth belong together.

Cross References

2 John 1:1

“From the elder, to the chosen lady and her children, whom I truly love—and not only I, but also all who know the truth.”

Philemon 1:1

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our dearly loved friend and fellow worker.”

1 Corinthians 4:17

“For this reason I sent Timothy to you. He is my dearly loved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus.”

Christian relationships should be built upon more than personality.

The deepest Christian relationships are grounded in:

Faith.

Truth.

Christ.

Shared spiritual commitment.

Spiritual Principle

Christian friendship becomes strongest when it is rooted in a shared commitment to God's truth.

II. A PROSPERING SOUL

3 John 2 — “Just as Your Soul Prospers”

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”

John expresses genuine concern for Gaius.

He prays for:

His well-being.

His health.

His prosperity.

But John makes an important comparison:

“Just as your soul prospers.”

Apparently, Gaius was spiritually healthy.

Cross References

Psalm 1:3

“He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, producing its fruit in season. Its leaves do not wither, and whatever he does according to God's way prospers.”

3 John 1:4

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

Proverbs 3:7

“Do not consider yourself wise. Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.”

John's words raise an important question.

If our physical, financial, and outward condition matched the condition of our soul, how healthy would we be?

Some people are outwardly successful but inwardly empty.

Others have very little materially but are spiritually rich.

Application

Ask yourself:

Is my soul prospering?

Am I growing in:

Faith?

Prayer?

Obedience?

Love?

Truth?

Holiness?

Spiritual maturity?

III. WALKING IN THE TRUTH

3 John 3 — Faithfulness That Others Could See

“I was filled with joy when brothers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, showing that you walk in it.”

Others had observed Gaius.

What did they report?

They testified about his:

Faithfulness to the truth.

Even more importantly:

He walked in it.

Cross References

2 John 1:4

“I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.”

1 Thessalonians 3:6

“Timothy has now returned to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He told us that you remember us kindly and want to see us, just as we want to see you.”

Philippians 4:1

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord.”

Gaius did not merely claim to believe the truth.

His conduct demonstrated it.

This is the difference between:

Knowing truth.

And:

Walking in truth.

Key Truth

Truth becomes most convincing when it becomes visible through a faithful life.

3 John 4 — A Spiritual Leader's Greatest Joy

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

This is one of the most beautiful statements in 3 John.

John had spiritual children.

These were people whose faith and spiritual development mattered deeply to him.

What brought him the greatest joy?

Not:

Their wealth.

Their popularity.

Their social status.

Their success.

His greatest joy was:

They were walking in the truth.

Cross References

2 John 1:4

“I was filled with joy when I found some of your children walking in truth according to the Father's command.”

Galatians 4:19

“My dear children, I am again experiencing the pains of spiritual labor for you until Christ is formed in you.”

1 Corinthians 4:15

“Even if you had thousands of instructors in Christ, you would not have many spiritual fathers, because through the gospel I became your father in Christ Jesus.”

This verse gives parents, pastors, teachers, and spiritual leaders a powerful priority.

The greatest spiritual goal is not merely:

Attendance.

Achievement.

Recognition.

It is:

Faithfulness to truth.

Spiritual Principle

The greatest success of spiritual leadership is seeing people faithfully walk with Christ.

IV. FAITHFUL HOSPITALITY

3 John 5 — Serving Brothers and Strangers

“Beloved, you are faithful in whatever you do for the brothers and even for strangers.”

John now commends Gaius for hospitality.

Gaius served:

Believers he knew.

And:

Believers he did not know.

John calls this:

Faithfulness.

Cross References

Hebrews 13:2

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, because some have welcomed angels without realizing it.”

1 Peter 4:9

“Show hospitality to one another without complaining.”

Matthew 25:35

“I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed Me.”

Hospitality was extremely important in the early church.

Traveling Christian workers often depended upon believers for:

Food.

Lodging.

Encouragement.

Resources.

Protection.

Fellowship.

Gaius opened his life to others.

Application

Christian hospitality is more than entertaining friends.

It is using what God has given us to serve His people.

V. SUPPORT THE WORK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF GOD

3 John 6 — Helping Workers on Their Journey

“They have testified about your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.”

Gaius's love had become known publicly.

People testified about it before the church.

John encourages him to continue.

He tells Gaius to send Christian workers forward:

“In a manner worthy of God.”

Cross References

Romans 12:13

“Share with God's people who are in need and make hospitality a regular practice.”

Titus 3:13

“Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey, making sure they lack nothing they need.”

Acts 15:3

“The church sent them on their way, and as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria they described how Gentiles were turning to God, bringing great joy to the believers.”

Supporting God's work may include:

Financial help.

Food.

Transportation.

Housing.

Prayer.

Encouragement.

Resources.

Practical assistance.

Spiritual Principle

Those who help faithful workers continue their ministry participate in the work itself.

VI. THEY WENT OUT FOR THE SAKE OF THE NAME

3 John 7 — Serving Christ Without Depending on Unbelievers

“For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.”

These workers had gone out:

“For the sake of the Name.”

The Name refers to Jesus Christ.

Their mission was centered upon Him.

Cross References

Acts 5:41

“The apostles left the council rejoicing because they had been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus.”

1 Corinthians 9:12

“If others have a right to receive material support from you, do we not have even more? Yet we did not use this right. Instead, we endured everything so that we would not place an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”

Matthew 10:8

“Heal the sick, cleanse those who are unclean, raise the dead, and drive out demons. You received freely, so give freely.”

These workers were not traveling for personal fame.

They were not pursuing financial gain.

They went out:

For Christ.

That is the proper motive for Christian ministry.

Key Truth

The greatest reason to serve is not recognition, money, or position—it is the name of Jesus Christ.

VII. FELLOW WORKERS FOR THE TRUTH

3 John 8 — Supporting Those Who Serve

“Therefore we ought to support such people so that we may be fellow workers for the truth.”

John now states the principle clearly.

Those who support faithful Christian workers become:

“Fellow workers for the truth.”

Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:14

“In the same way, the Lord has directed that those who proclaim the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”

Galatians 6:6

“The person who receives instruction in God's Word should share good things with the one who teaches.”

Philippians 4:15

“You Philippians know that when I first began preaching the gospel and left Macedonia, no church shared with me in giving and receiving except you alone.”

Not every believer is called to travel.

Not every believer is called to preach publicly.

Not every believer has the same assignment.

But every believer can participate in God's work.

Through:

Prayer.

Giving.

Hospitality.

Encouragement.

Service.

Resources.

Important Truth

You do not have to stand behind the pulpit to become a partner in gospel ministry.

VIII. DIOTREPHESES LOVED TO BE FIRST

3 John 9 — Pride in Leadership

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to put himself first, does not acknowledge us.”

The tone changes sharply.

Gaius was faithful.

Diotrephes was proud.

John identifies the root problem:

“He loves to put himself first.”

This reveals the heart of his leadership problem.

Cross References

Matthew 20:25

“Jesus called His disciples together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the nations dominate their people and their powerful leaders exercise authority over them.’”

1 Peter 5:3

“Do not act as rulers who dominate those entrusted to your care. Instead, be examples to the flock.”

Luke 22:24

“An argument arose among the disciples about which of them should be considered the greatest.”

Pride is especially dangerous in spiritual leadership.

A leader may begin serving Christ but gradually become preoccupied with:

Position.

Recognition.

Control.

Authority.

Influence.

Being first.

Spiritual Principle

The desire to serve Christ and the desire to be first are not the same thing.

IX. THE FRUIT OF A PROUD HEART

3 John 10 — Slander, Rejection, and Control

“So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing—spreading malicious words against us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also prevents others from doing so and puts them out of the church.”

Diotrephes's pride produced visible behavior.

John lists several problems.

He:

Spread malicious words.

Rejected faithful workers.

Prevented others from helping them.

Removed people from the church.

Cross References

3 John 1:9

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, refuses to recognize our authority.”

1 Timothy 1:20

“Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I handed over for severe discipline so that they might learn not to blaspheme.”

Matthew 18:17

“If the person refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as someone who has placed himself outside the fellowship.”

John does not ignore Diotrephes's behavior.

He says:

“I will call attention to what he is doing.”

Biblical love does not require leaders to ignore destructive conduct.

There are times when wrongdoing must be confronted.

Important Truth

Unchecked pride in leadership often produces control, slander, exclusion, and spiritual abuse of authority.

X. DO NOT IMITATE EVIL

3 John 11 — Follow What Is Good

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. The one who does good is from God; the one who does evil has not seen God.”

John now gives Gaius a direct instruction.

There were examples around him.

Diotrephes represented:

What not to imitate.

Demetrius would represent:

What to imitate.

John says:

“Do not imitate what is evil.”

Then:

“Imitate what is good.”

Cross References

Romans 12:9

“Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil and hold tightly to what is good.”

Psalms 34:14

“Turn away from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.”

1 Peter 3:11

“He must turn away from evil and do good. He must seek peace and pursue it.”

We are influenced by examples.

Therefore we must choose carefully whom we imitate.

Application

Ask yourself:

Whose character am I copying?

Whose leadership style am I adopting?

Whose values are shaping me?

Are those examples bringing me closer to Christ?

XI. DEMETRIUS HAD A GOOD TESTIMONY

3 John 12 — A Reputation Worth Having

“Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.”

John now presents Demetrius.

His reputation stands in sharp contrast to Diotrephes.

Demetrius had:

A good testimony from people.

A good testimony from the truth.

A good testimony from John and his associates.

Cross References

Acts 6:3

“Brothers and sisters, choose from among you seven men who have a good reputation, who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and we will appoint them to this responsibility.”

1 Timothy 3:7

“A church leader must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil's trap.”

3 John 1:3

“I was filled with joy when brothers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth and how you walk in it.”

A good reputation does not mean everyone will like us.

Even Jesus was opposed.

But a faithful Christian should develop a testimony of:

Integrity.

Truthfulness.

Faithfulness.

Character.

Good works.

Key Truth

A godly reputation is built through consistent faithfulness over time.

XII. PERSONAL FELLOWSHIP MATTERS

3 John 13 — More Than Pen and Ink

“I have much to write to you, but I do not want to write with pen and ink.”

John again expresses the limitation of written communication.

There were things he wanted to discuss personally.

Cross References

2 John 1:12

“I have many things to write to you, but I do not want to communicate only with paper and ink.”

1 Corinthians 4:19

“But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and then I will learn not merely what these arrogant people are saying, but what power is actually present.”

3 John 1:14

“I hope to see you soon, and we will speak face to face.”

Written communication has value.

But some conversations are better handled personally.

Especially when dealing with:

Relationships.

Encouragement.

Correction.

Serious spiritual matters.

3 John 14 — “Peace Be With You”

“I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace be with you. The friends here greet you. Greet the friends there by name.”

John closes warmly.

He expresses hope for:

Personal fellowship.

Peace.

Friendship.

Individual recognition.

Notice the final phrase:

“Greet the friends there by name.”

People mattered to John individually.

Cross References

2 John 1:12

“I hope to come to you and speak face to face so that our joy may be complete.”

1 Peter 5:14

“Greet one another with the affection of Christian love. Peace be with all of you who belong to Christ.”

Romans 16:1

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea.”

Christian ministry should never become so focused on programs that people become invisible.

Names matter.

Relationships matter.

Fellowship matters.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical ministry is personal because people are not projects—they are individuals loved by God.

XIII. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 3 JOHN

1. Walking in Truth Brings Spiritual Joy

John says:

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

The greatest evidence of successful spiritual influence is not popularity.

It is faithfulness.

Ask Yourself:

Am I walking in the truth, or merely agreeing with it intellectually?

2. Hospitality Supports God's Work

Gaius faithfully helped traveling Christian workers.

His hospitality became part of gospel ministry.

Principle:

When we faithfully support those doing God's work, we participate in that work.

3. Pride Corrupts Leadership

Diotrephes:

Loved to be first.

Rejected authority.

Spread malicious words.

Refused hospitality.

Controlled others.

Removed people from the church.

Remember:

Spiritual leadership is about serving, not controlling.

4. Follow What Is Good

John tells Gaius:

“Do not imitate what is evil but what is good.”

Examples matter.

Choose carefully whom you follow.

Principle:

Character is often shaped by what we repeatedly admire and imitate.

5. A Good Testimony Matters

Demetrius was well spoken of by others and by the truth itself.

His life agreed with his profession.

Ask Yourself:

What testimony is my life producing?

XIV. THE SPIRITUAL PROGRESSION OF 3 JOHN

3 John gives us a practical pattern for faithful Christian service.

1. Love in Truth

John's relationship with Gaius was rooted in truth.

2. Prosper Spiritually

The health of the soul matters greatly.

3. Walk in Truth

Truth must shape daily life.

4. Serve Faithfully

Gaius used what he had to help others.

5. Show Hospitality

He welcomed fellow believers and strangers.

6. Support the Work

He helped gospel workers continue their ministry.

7. Reject Pride

Diotrephes demonstrates what happens when self becomes central.

8. Confront Wrong

Destructive behavior should not always be ignored.

9. Imitate Good

Believers must choose godly examples.

10. Build a Good Testimony

Demetrius shows the value of consistent character.

11. Pursue Fellowship

John valued face-to-face relationships.

This is the movement from:

Truth → Faithfulness → Service → Support → Discernment → Character → Fellowship.

XV. WHAT 3 JOHN TEACHES US ABOUT CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

3 John presents two dramatically different kinds of leadership.

Gaius

Gaius demonstrates:

Faithfulness.

Hospitality.

Generosity.

Love.

Support for ministry.

Walking in truth.

Diotrephes

Diotrephes demonstrates:

Pride.

Self-promotion.

Slander.

Control.

Rejection of faithful workers.

Misuse of authority.

Demetrius

Demetrius demonstrates:

Good character.

A good reputation.

Consistency with truth.

The contrast is powerful.

Christian leadership should never be measured merely by:

Position.

Title.

Influence.

Visibility.

Authority.

The better questions are:

Does this person walk in truth?

Does this person serve others?

Does this person support God's work?

Does this person demonstrate humility?

Does this person's character agree with his message?

3 John teaches us:

Character matters more than position.

XVI. Answers for Personal Study

Question 1

What does John's prayer for Gaius teach us about spiritual prosperity?

John prayed that Gaius would prosper and enjoy good health **“just as your soul prospers”** (3 John 2).

This suggests that Gaius was spiritually healthy.

His inner life with God was strong.

This verse reminds us that spiritual prosperity is more important than outward prosperity.

A person may have:

Money.

Health.

Success.

Possessions.

Recognition.

And still have a neglected soul.

We should therefore ask not only:

“How am I doing outwardly?”

But:

“How is my soul?”

Question 2

What does it mean to walk in the truth?

Walking in truth means allowing God's truth to shape daily life.

Gaius did not merely know truth intellectually.

Others testified that he:

Walked in it.

Truth influenced his:

Conduct.

Hospitality.

Love.

Service.

Relationships.

Generosity.

Walking in truth means that what we believe on Sunday becomes visible in how we live during the rest of the week.

Question 3

Why did Gaius bring John so much joy?

John says:

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

Gaius's faithful life demonstrated that spiritual instruction had produced fruit.

For a pastor, teacher, parent, or Christian mentor, one of the greatest joys is seeing people grow spiritually and remain faithful to Christ.

John cared more about spiritual faithfulness than outward success.

Question 4

Why was hospitality so important in 3 John?

Traveling Christian workers often depended upon believers for practical support.

Hotels and modern travel systems did not operate as they do today.

Hospitality could provide:

Food.

Shelter.

Safety.

Encouragement.

Resources.

Fellowship.

Gaius's hospitality therefore became part of gospel ministry.

His home and resources helped God's servants continue their work.

Question 5

How can Christians today become “fellow workers for the truth”?

Not every Christian has the same ministry assignment.

But believers can support gospel work through:

Prayer.

Financial giving.

Hospitality.

Transportation.

Encouragement.

Providing materials.

Helping missionaries.

Supporting faithful churches.

Assisting Christian workers.

Sharing resources.

When believers faithfully help those who proclaim truth, they participate in the work.

Question 6

What was the primary problem with Diotrephes?

John identifies the heart of the problem:

Diotrephes loved to be first.

His pride then produced other sins.

He:

Rejected apostolic authority.

Spread malicious accusations.

Refused to welcome faithful believers.

Prevented others from helping.

Removed people from the church.

This demonstrates that spiritual pride rarely remains hidden.

Eventually it produces destructive behavior.

Question 7

What does Diotrephes teach us about unhealthy church leadership?

Diotrephes provides a warning against leadership based upon control and self-exaltation.

Healthy Christian leaders should not need to:

Dominate people.

Silence disagreement through intimidation.

Destroy reputations.

Control every decision.

Remove faithful people merely because they threaten personal authority.

Jesus taught that Christian leadership is servant leadership.

Authority should be exercised for the good of God's people, not for personal power.

Question 8

Why does John tell believers not to imitate what is evil?

Examples influence us.

If believers repeatedly admire pride, power, selfishness, or ungodly behavior, they may eventually imitate those qualities.

John therefore tells Gaius:

“Do not imitate what is evil but what is good.”

We should intentionally choose examples of:

Humility.

Faithfulness.

Generosity.

Integrity.

Courage.

Love.

Christlike service.

Question 9

What made Demetrius a good example?

Demetrius had a good testimony.

Others spoke well of him.

The truth itself testified in his favor, meaning his conduct agreed with God's truth.

John and his associates also testified concerning his character.

This reminds us that reputation is built over time.

A good testimony comes when our:

Words.

Actions.

Relationships.

Faith.

Character.

Consistently agree.

Question 10

What kind of testimony is your life producing?

This question requires honest self-examination.

If people who know you well were asked about your Christian life, what would they say?

Would they describe you as:

Faithful?

Truthful?

Generous?

Hospitable?

Humble?

Loving?

Servant-hearted?

Or would they describe:

Pride?

Control?

Bitterness?

Selfishness?

Inconsistency?

The goal is not to live for human approval.

But Christians should desire lives that confirm rather than contradict their profession of faith.

Personal Application

3 John gives us a powerful progression:

Truth should live in us.

Truth should shape our walk.

Walking in truth should produce faithfulness.

Faithfulness should produce service.

Service should produce generosity.

Generosity should support God's work.

Supporting God's work makes us fellow workers for the truth.

Pride must be rejected.

Evil examples must not be imitated.

Good character should be pursued.

A faithful life should produce a good testimony.

The letter also gives us three people to examine.

Ask yourself:

Am I like Gaius—faithful and generous?

Am I developing attitudes like Diotrephes—proud and controlling?

Am I building a testimony like Demetrius—respected because my life agrees with truth?

Every believer is building a testimony.

The question is:

What kind?

XVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“You Can Support the Work Without Standing Behind the Pulpit”

Sometimes Christians think ministry only happens when someone:

Preaches.

Teaches.

Sings.

Leads publicly.

Serves on a platform.

3 John teaches something different.

Gaius helped people who had gone out:

“For the sake of the Name.”

He supported them.

John says this made him:

A fellow worker for the truth.

That means the person who:

Prays for the missionary.

Provides a meal.

Gives financially.

Offers transportation.

Opens a home.

Encourages a discouraged pastor.

Provides resources.

Helps a Christian worker continue serving.

Can participate directly in gospel ministry.

God's work requires:

Those who go.

And:

Those who help them go.

Both matter.

Not everyone has the same assignment.

But every believer can ask:

“What has God placed in my hands that can be used to advance His work?”

XVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

3 John asks us several searching questions.

First:

Is my soul prospering?

We often measure life by:

Income.

Health.

Possessions.

Success.

But John reminds us to examine the soul.

Then ask:

Am I walking in truth?

Not merely:

Do I know truth?

But:

Does truth shape the way I live?

Then ask:

Am I supporting faithful Christian work?

Maybe you cannot travel.

Maybe you cannot preach.

Maybe you cannot serve publicly.

But can you:

Pray?

Give?

Encourage?

Provide?

Help?

Then ask:

Is pride gaining influence in my heart?

Diotrephes loved to be first.

That desire eventually damaged others.

Be careful with the desire for:

Recognition.

Control.

Position.

Influence.

Then ask:

Whom am I imitating?

John says:

Do not imitate evil.

Choose godly examples.

Then ask:

What kind of testimony am I building?

Demetrius had a good testimony.

So did Gaius.

Diotrephes did not.

Character eventually becomes visible.

Therefore:

Walk in truth.

Strengthen your soul.

Serve faithfully.

Practice hospitality.

Support gospel workers.

Reject pride.

Do not misuse influence.

Imitate what is good.

Build a godly testimony.

And value people enough to know them personally.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Help us not merely to know Your truth, but to walk in it every day.

Strengthen our souls.

Help us grow spiritually even when our outward circumstances are difficult.

Give us the faithfulness of Gaius.

Teach us to use what You have given us to serve Your people and support Your work.

Show us how we can become fellow workers for the truth.

Give us generous hearts.

Give us hospitable hearts.

Give us servant hearts.

Protect us from the pride of Diotrephes.

Keep us from loving position, recognition, control, or influence more than we love You and Your people.

If pride begins growing within us, expose it and remove it.

Help those who lead Your people to lead with humility, courage, integrity, and love.

Teach us not to imitate what is evil.

Place godly examples in our lives and give us wisdom to follow what is good.

Help us build a testimony like Demetrius—a testimony of faithfulness, integrity, truth, and godly character.

Give us wisdom in our relationships.

Help us value face-to-face fellowship and remember that people matter individually.

May our lives bring joy to those who have invested spiritually in us.

May our homes, resources, finances, abilities, and influence be available for Your purposes.

And may everything we do be done:

For the sake of the Name of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

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

Central Truth

Those who walk faithfully in God's truth should use their lives and resources to support His work, reject pride, imitate what is good, and build a testimony that honors Jesus Christ.

3 John in One Sentence

Walk faithfully in the truth, generously support those who serve Christ, reject self-exalting leadership, imitate what is good, and build a godly testimony that advances the work of Jesus Christ.

Epilogue

The Evidence of a Life Changed by Christ

We have come to the end of John's three letters, but we have not come to the end of their message.

The words of 1, 2, and 3 John continue to confront us with one central reality:

True faith leaves evidence.

The Apostle John never presents Christianity as a mere religious label.

He does not define a believer simply as someone who claims to know God.

He does not rest assurance on outward association, religious vocabulary, or personal opinion.

Again and again, John asks whether the life matches the profession.

Do we walk in the light?

Do we confess our sin?

Do we obey God's commandments?

Do we love other believers?

Do we hold firmly to the truth about Jesus Christ?

Do we resist the spirit of the world?

Do we remain faithful when deception appears?

Do we possess confidence that eternal life is found in the Son of God?

These questions are not designed to teach salvation by works.

They are designed to reveal the fruit of salvation.

We are saved by grace through faith.

But the grace that saves also changes.

The Believer Is Not Sinless

One of the great misunderstandings that can arise when reading 1 John is the idea that a true believer never struggles with sin.

John teaches the opposite.

He says plainly that if we claim to have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

The Christian life is not a life of sinless perfection.

It is a life of repentance.

The difference between the believer and the unbeliever is not that one sins and the other does not.

The difference is found in the believer's relationship to sin.

The true believer cannot be permanently comfortable in darkness.

When he sins, the Spirit convicts.

When Scripture exposes him, he is called to confess.

When he falls, he is directed again to Christ.

The Christian may stumble.

But he does not build his home in darkness.

He belongs to the light.

Our Hope Is Still Jesus Christ

After examining all the marks of genuine faith, we must never make the mistake of placing our confidence in ourselves.

Our hope is not found in how perfectly we have obeyed.

Our hope is not found in how strongly we have loved.

Our hope is not found in how consistently we have resisted temptation.

Our hope remains where John continually places it:

Jesus Christ.

He is the righteous One.

He is our Advocate with the Father.

He is the propitiation for our sins.

He is the Son of God.

He is eternal life.

The marks of faith matter because they reveal His work in us.

But Christ Himself remains the foundation of our salvation.

Walking in the Light

John began his first letter with one of the great declarations of Scripture:

God is light.

Everything else follows from that truth.

If God is light, then those who belong to Him are called to walk in the light.

That means honesty before God.

It means refusing to hide our sin.

It means allowing Scripture to correct us.

It means rejecting the darkness of deception.

It means living openly before the One who sees everything.

Walking in the light does not mean pretending to be perfect.

It means refusing to live a double life.

The true believer increasingly desires that his private life and public profession agree.

Loving the Brethren

John also reminds us repeatedly that love is one of the clearest evidences of spiritual life.

This love is not sentimental.

It is practical.

It is sacrificial.

It serves.

It gives.

It forgives.

It bears burdens.

It seeks reconciliation.

It desires the spiritual good of others.

The believer who claims to love God while continually hating his brother lives in contradiction.

John will not allow us to separate love for God from love for God's people.

The vertical relationship with God must affect the horizontal relationship with others.

Where Christ rules the heart, love begins to appear.

Imperfectly.

Sometimes slowly.

But genuinely.

Remaining in the Truth

John's letters also leave us with a serious warning.

False teaching is dangerous.

Not every message that sounds spiritual comes from God.

Not every teacher who uses the name of Jesus teaches the biblical Jesus.

Not every religious movement honors the gospel.

The believer therefore has a responsibility to test what he hears.

Truth is not optional.

Doctrine matters.

What we believe about Jesus Christ is central to Christianity.

He is not merely one spiritual teacher among many.

He is the eternal Son of God who came in the flesh.

He died for sinners.

He rose again.

He gives eternal life.

Anyone who corrupts that message corrupts the foundation of the Christian faith.

The church must therefore remain both loving and discerning.

Truth and Love Together

Second John reminds us that truth and love belong together.

Some Christians are tempted to emphasize truth while neglecting love.

Others emphasize love while compromising truth.

John refuses both extremes.

Biblical love rejoices in truth.

Biblical truth produces love.

We must never become so concerned with being doctrinally correct that we become cruel.

And we must never become so concerned with appearing loving that we become indifferent to error.

The mature believer holds both together.

Conviction with compassion.

Discernment with humility.

Truth with love.

Faithfulness in Christian Service

Third John brings the message into the practical life of the church.

Gaius shows us faithfulness.

Diotrephes shows us pride.

Demetrius shows us a good testimony.

These men remind us that spiritual maturity is often revealed in ordinary relationships.

How do we treat fellow believers?

How do we respond when someone else receives recognition?

Do we support faithful ministry?

Do we serve quietly?

Do we seek control?

Do we love preeminence?

Do our actions support the truth we claim to believe?

Character matters.

Theological knowledge without humility can become dangerous.

Ministry without love can become self-serving.

Leadership without submission to Christ can become destructive.

The servant of God must continually remember that the church belongs to Christ.

Assurance Is Possible

Perhaps one of John's greatest gifts to the church is his message of assurance.

He does not want genuine believers trapped in endless uncertainty.

He tells us plainly:

These things were written so that those who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that they have eternal life.

Christian assurance is not arrogance.

It is confidence in the promise of God.

The believer can say:

I know whom I have believed.

I know that Christ died for sinners.

I know that eternal life is in the Son.

I know that those who trust Him are forgiven.

I know that God is at work in His people.

I know that nothing can replace the finished work of Jesus Christ.

That assurance does not make us careless.

It makes us grateful.

The Marks Are Not the Savior

This distinction must remain clear.

Obedience is a mark.

Love is a mark.

Truth is a mark.

Perseverance is a mark.

Righteousness is a mark.

Discernment is a mark.

Confession is a mark.

But none of these is the Savior.

Jesus Christ is the Savior.

We do not earn eternal life by displaying enough marks.

We display these marks because God has given us eternal life in His Son.

That is the difference between legalism and grace.

Legalism says:

Change your life so that God may accept you.

The gospel says:

In Christ, God saves sinners by grace, and that grace begins changing the life.

Keep Yourself from Idols

John closes his first letter with a striking command:

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

At first, the statement may seem unexpected.

But it is a fitting conclusion.

An idol is anything that takes the place that belongs to God.

It may be a physical image.

But it can also be money.

Power.

Success.

Pleasure.

Recognition.

Security.

Politics.

Religion itself.

Even ministry can become an idol if the servant begins loving the platform more than the Savior.

John's final warning therefore reaches every generation.

Guard your heart.

Do not allow anything to replace Christ.

Continue to Abide

One of John's favorite words is **abide**.

Remain.

Continue.

Stay.

Do not abandon the truth.

Do not leave Christ for the world.

Do not exchange the gospel for deception.

Do not allow suffering or pressure to pull you away.

Continue in what you have heard.

Continue in love.

Continue in truth.

Continue in fellowship.

Continue in Christ.

The Christian life is not merely about beginning well.

It is about continuing faithfully.

When You Fail

There will be days when you examine the marks of faith and become painfully aware of your weaknesses.

Your love will seem inadequate.

Your obedience will seem inconsistent.

Your prayers will seem weak.

Your faith will feel small.

Your failures will become obvious.

On those days, do not run away from Christ.

Run toward Him.

Remember John's words:

We have an Advocate with the Father.

Confess your sin.

Receive forgiveness.

Stand again.

Continue walking.

The Christian life is sustained by grace from beginning to end.

When You Doubt

There may also be seasons when doubt attacks your assurance.

In those moments, return to the gospel.

Do not build your confidence upon emotion.

Look to the promises of God.

Ask whether your trust is in Jesus Christ.

Ask whether there is evidence of His transforming work.

Even weak faith can rest in a strong Savior.

Your confidence is not based upon the strength of your grip on Christ.

It rests ultimately upon His hold upon you.

When the World Pressures You

John also prepares us for opposition.

The world may not understand biblical Christianity.

It may reject Christian truth.

It may ridicule biblical morality.

It may pressure believers to compromise.

John reminds us that this should not surprise us.

The believer belongs to another kingdom.

Yet the message is not defeat.

John declares that faith overcomes the world.

We do not overcome through political power, cultural dominance, or human strength.

We overcome through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Greatest Mark

If all the marks of true faith could be gathered into one central reality, it would be this:

A true believer belongs to Jesus Christ.

Because he belongs to Christ, he walks toward the light.

Because he belongs to Christ, he confesses sin.

Because he belongs to Christ, he loves the brethren.

Because he belongs to Christ, he values truth.

Because he belongs to Christ, he desires obedience.

Because he belongs to Christ, he resists deception.

Because he belongs to Christ, he perseveres.

Every genuine mark points back to Him.

The Final Question

As this commentary closes, one question remains.

Not:

How much information have I learned?

Not:

How many verses can I explain?

Not:

How many doctrines can I defend?

But:

Do I truly know Jesus Christ?

And if I do, is His life being revealed in mine?

That is the question John's letters place before every reader.

The answer matters for eternity.

A Final Word to the Reader

If you are in Christ, rejoice.

You have eternal life.

Your sins are forgiven.

You have an Advocate.

You are a child of God.

The Holy Spirit dwells within you.

The world does not have the final word.

Death does not have the final word.

Sin does not have the final word.

Jesus Christ does.

If you are uncertain about your relationship with God, do not ignore that concern.

Look to Christ.

Believe the gospel.

Confess your sin.

Trust the Son of God.

Eternal life is found in Him.

And if you already know Him, continue.

Walk in the light.

Love the brethren.

Guard the truth.

Reject deception.

Serve humbly.

Confess quickly.

Forgive freely.

Pray confidently.

Live expectantly.

Abide in Christ.

For the world is passing away.

But the one who does the will of God abides forever.

May your life increasingly display the evidence of grace.

May your faith grow stronger.

May your love grow deeper.

May your discernment grow sharper.

May your assurance become firmer.

And may everyone who sees your life recognize not merely your religious profession, but the unmistakable marks of someone who truly belongs to Jesus Christ.

These are **the marks of a true believer**.

Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

Thank you for opening *The Marks of a True Believer: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on 1, 2 & 3 John*.

Of all the questions a person can ask, few are more important than this one:

How can I know that my faith in Jesus Christ is real?

The Apostle John addresses that question with remarkable clarity.

He does not point us toward religious appearances. He does not tell us to trust in church attendance, Christian vocabulary, good intentions, or emotional experiences. Instead, he directs us to Jesus Christ and then shows us the evidence that appears in the life of someone who truly knows Him.

Throughout 1, 2, and 3 John, we repeatedly encounter the marks of genuine faith.

A true believer walks in the light.

A true believer confesses sin.

A true believer desires to obey God.

A true believer loves fellow Christians.

A true believer holds firmly to the truth about Jesus Christ.

A true believer learns to recognize false teaching.

A true believer does not make peace with the spirit of the world.

A true believer continues abiding in Christ.

None of these things earns salvation.

That distinction is essential.

We are not saved because we obey enough, love enough, serve enough, or become righteous enough.

We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The marks described by John are not the cause of salvation.

They are evidence of what salvation produces.

An apple tree does not become an apple tree because it produces apples. It produces apples because that is what it already is.

In much the same way, good works do not make someone a child of God. Rather, the transforming work of God begins producing spiritual fruit in the life of the person who has truly been born again.

That is why John's letters can be both challenging and comforting.

They challenge us to examine ourselves.

But they also comfort genuine believers by showing that assurance is possible.

John tells his readers that he wrote so that those who believe in the name of the Son of God may **know** that they have eternal life.

God does not want His children living every day wondering whether He will suddenly abandon them.

Our assurance ultimately rests upon Jesus Christ.

He is our Advocate.

He is the righteous One.

He is the Son of God.

He is the source of eternal life.

He is the One who cleanses us from sin.

He is the One in whom we abide.

Why I Wrote This Commentary

My purpose in writing this commentary is simple.

I want to help people understand the Word of God.

The Bible was not given only to scholars, theologians, or pastors. It was given to God's people.

Certainly, serious study is important. Historical background matters. Grammar matters. Theology matters. Context matters.

But biblical scholarship should ultimately help people understand Scripture more clearly, not make Scripture seem inaccessible.

That is why I have sought throughout this commentary to explain John's letters carefully while keeping the language understandable and practical.

My desire is that the pastor preparing a sermon can use this book.

I want the Sunday school teacher preparing a lesson to use it.

I want the Bible study leader sitting around a table with a small group to use it.

I want the new believer trying to understand Scripture to use it.

And I want the Christian who has walked with Christ for many years to discover something that strengthens faith and deepens fellowship with God.

Read the Bible Before the Commentary

There is one encouragement I especially want to give you.

Do not allow any commentary—including this one—to replace the Bible itself.

Read the biblical passage first.

Read it carefully.

Read it more than once.

Notice repeated words.

Ask questions.

Look at the surrounding verses.

Follow the cross references.

Pray for understanding.

Then use the commentary as a tool.

A commentary should help illuminate Scripture.

It should never stand above Scripture.

God's Word is authoritative.

Our explanations of God's Word are not.

Every teacher, preacher, commentator, and author must ultimately be judged by Scripture.

Let the Word Examine You

It is easy to study the Bible only to collect information.

We can learn facts.

We can memorize definitions.

We can understand historical backgrounds.

We can recognize theological terms.

Yet Bible study should do more than fill the mind.

It should reach the heart.

John's letters are especially difficult to read without becoming personally involved.

When John talks about walking in the light, we must ask whether we are walking in the light.

When he speaks about confessing sin, we must ask whether there is sin we need to confess.

When he commands believers to love one another, we must ask whether bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness has found a place in our hearts.

When he warns about false teachers, we must ask whether we are testing what we hear by the Word of God.

When he speaks about obedience, we must ask whether we are surrendering every area of life to Christ.

When he speaks about assurance, we must ask where our confidence truly rests.
That is where Bible study becomes transformation.

Do Not Be Discouraged by Your Imperfections

As you read John's tests of genuine faith, you may sometimes feel convicted.

That is appropriate.

The Word of God should correct us.

But genuine believers can sometimes become discouraged because they see how far they still have to grow.

Remember this:

John does not teach that a believer is perfect.

In fact, he says plainly that if we claim to have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

The true Christian still struggles.

The true Christian still needs grace.

The true Christian still needs confession.

The true Christian still needs the cleansing of Christ.

The question is not whether you have reached perfection.

The question is whether God has changed the direction of your life.

Do you desire Christ?

Do you believe His Word?

Do you grieve over sin?

Do you desire obedience?

Do you love God's people?

Do you want to walk in truth?

Those desires themselves can be evidence of God's gracious work.

Keep Your Eyes on Christ

Perhaps the most important thing I can say in this note is this:

Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ.

Self-examination has a place.

But endless self-examination without looking to Christ can lead to despair.

John constantly turns our attention back to the Savior.

When we sin, Christ is our Advocate.

When we fear judgment, Christ is our confidence.

When false teachers appear, Christ is the truth we confess.

When the world pressures us, Christ is the One through whom we overcome.

When death approaches, Christ is our eternal life.

Christian assurance is not confidence in ourselves.

It is confidence in Him.

Truth Matters

We live in a time when truth is often treated as something flexible or personal.

John's letters remind us that biblical truth is objective.

Jesus Christ is who He is regardless of what anyone believes about Him.

The gospel does not change because culture changes.

God's standards do not disappear because society rejects them.

The church therefore needs discernment.

We must test every message.

We must compare every teaching with Scripture.

We must reject anything that diminishes the person and work of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, we must defend truth with humility.

Winning an argument while destroying a person is not Christian maturity.

John teaches truth and love together.

We should do the same.

Love Must Be Visible

One of the strongest convictions I hope this book leaves with you is that Christian love must become practical.

It is easy to say, "I love people."

John asks whether that love does anything.

Does it serve?

Does it give?

Does it forgive?

Does it encourage?

Does it help the brother or sister in need?

Jesus did not merely tell us that He loved us.

He laid down His life for us.

That becomes the model.

Christian love is costly because Christ's love was costly.

A Word to Pastors and Teachers

If you use this commentary in preparing sermons, Bible studies, or lessons, I encourage you to keep the central message of the text in view.

It can be tempting when studying verse by verse to become so focused on individual details that we lose the larger message.

John is continually pointing his readers toward Christ.

Our preaching should do the same.

Teach doctrine clearly.

Explain the text carefully.

Warn about error courageously.

Apply Scripture directly.

But always bring people back to Jesus Christ.

Our task is not merely to produce knowledgeable Christians.

Our desire should be to see people transformed by the truth of God's Word.

My Prayer for You

As you study these three letters, I pray that God will use His Word in your life.

May He strengthen your assurance.

May He expose sin that needs to be confessed.

May He deepen your love for other believers.

May He sharpen your discernment.

May He strengthen your commitment to biblical truth.

May He give you courage when the world pressures you to compromise.

May He teach you to walk in the light.

May He help you abide in Christ.

Most of all, may you come away from these pages loving Jesus Christ more than you did when you began.

If that happens, then this book will have accomplished something far more valuable than simply explaining three New Testament letters.

It will have helped point another believer toward the Savior.

Thank you for allowing me to walk with you through the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John.

Open your Bible.

Examine every verse.

Test every teaching.

Hold firmly to the truth.

Love one another.

Walk in the light.

And never forget where eternal life is found:

“He who has the Son has life.”

May your life increasingly display **the marks of a true believer.**

Dr. Paul Crawford

A Closing Prayer

“Father, I thank You for every reader who has walked through these pages. For the one who does not yet know You, I pray they would hear Your voice and receive Your Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. For the one who already believes, I pray You would set their heart ablaze with urgency—to speak, to share, to love, and to never be silent. May we all live as faithful watchmen, sounding the trumpet until the day You call us home. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.”

THE BIBLE WAY TO HEAVEN

1. Admit you are a sinner.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

No one is good enough to go to Heaven on his own merit.

No matter how much good we do, we still come short.

2. Realize the penalty for sin.

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)

Just as there are wages for good, there is punishment for wrong.

The penalty for our sin is eternal death in a place called Hell.

3. Believe that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again for you.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)

4. Trust Christ alone as your Saviour.

"...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23b)

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Eternal life is a gift purchased by the blood of Jesus and offered freely to those who call upon Him by faith.

Anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved forever. Being saved is a one-time event.

Dr. Paul Crawford is more than just a Christian Author; His books are a source of inspiration and guidance on your spiritual journey. His books are created with a deep sense of faith and a desire to uplift and inspire all who read.

The Marks of a True Believer

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on 1, 2 & 3 John

What does genuine faith look like? In the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John, believers are called to walk in the light, stand firm in the truth, and love one another with a sincere heart.

In this verse-by-verse commentary, Dr. Paul Crawford carefully guides readers through these three powerful New Testament letters, explaining their meaning with clarity, faithfulness, and practical application. John's words reveal the marks of a true believer—obedience to Christ, love for the brethren, discernment against error, and confidence in eternal life.

Whether you are a pastor, teacher, Bible student, or devoted Christian reader, this commentary will help you better understand John's message and apply it to everyday life. Rich in biblical insight and devotional warmth, this book is a valuable resource for personal study, teaching, and spiritual growth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Paul Crawford is a Bible teacher, author, and expositor committed to making God's Word clear, faithful, and understandable for everyday readers. Through his writing ministry, he seeks to help believers grow in truth, love, and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ.



DR. PAUL CRAWFORD