



Walking in His Love

A STUDY OF JOHN'S LETTERS

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One

Being in relationship with Jesus changes us. As we read his words, letting the Spirit work on our hearts and increase our understanding of what it means to grow by grace into his image, our rough edges are smoothed down and our attitude changes. The fruit of the Spirit manifests itself more and more, with each passing day in his presence.

I've focused for over a year in my Friday Focus posts on the words Jesus spoke. Whether to the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount or alone with his disciples just prior to his death, his words changed lives then as they do today. For this reason, I'm going to start with a disciple who saw himself as one of those of the Master's inner circle—John, the Beloved. What was the impact of that relationship on John's life? Now, on this side of Pentecost and after many years of service, John writes his heart letter to believers.

What stands out in John's writing? LOVE

Let's get started:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with

the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. 1 John 1:1-4 CSB

One of the blessings of the gospels, the letters of Peter, of course the book of Revelation is that those who walked with Jesus on this earth were inspired by the Spirit to write. John's letters are no less significant, because they give testimony from a direct witness to the person and work of Christ, who he describes as "the word of life." What a treasure we hold in our hands! A letter from one of the original Twelve—so much better than Ocean's Eleven!

You can almost hear John shout as he declares about the one he has seen, known as eternal and one with the Father. He saw the Incarnated Christ, heard his voice, and is given the desire to share from his experience with others, who haven't received that intimate blessing.

He shares for a purpose—That we might be united, not only with those first disciples in faith, but directly with God the Father and Christ.

When he is able to share this written testimony and know that others receive it with glad and open hearts, John's joy is complete. Does that sound familiar? It should. We heard almost those same words come out of the mouth of Jesus when he was describing that intimate relationship with us as a vine and branches.

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

John 15:11

Jesus had joy by being at one with the Father, and in sharing that relationship with his disciples, he was enabling them to know the same joy of relationship and eternal peace. While the joy of Jesus could not be *more* complete, since his joy was perfect in union with God, our joy can increase when we share and see others come to know Christ as Savior. This is the joy John had the privilege of experiencing by writing to others about Jesus.

Have you come to experience joy in Christ? It has nothing to do with what's happening in this world or in your life's circumstances, but everything to do with faith followed by the indwelling of his Spirit. I pray today that you know that joy. If you do have that joy and peace, have you shared it with others? Want to know what bursting with joy really feels like? Share Christ with another person and as they believe, your own joy meter will shoot to the sky!

May you know complete joy by his grace and peace.

Two

John made it clear in the first four verses of his letter that he was sharing a first-person message—one he'd heard directly from the source. He was there with the Christ. He saw him, walked with him, and listened to him. And as a result, he has a message to share:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. If we say, "We have fellowship with him," and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 5-7

God is light.

Why does this fact matter? Because it mattered from the beginning. Without the reality of God's essence as light, we would not be around. It took light to get things started. You know the story:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day. Genesis 1:2-5

Without the light of God, there would be no creation, no distinction. Light was required to dispel the darkness.

The light that is God correlates directly with his holiness. Light cannot be light with any darkness, nor can holiness be holy with any sin or imperfection. Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection opened the way for us to share in the holiness of God—to be in the light as he is in the light.

This is why John goes on to say that our fellowship with God means we avoid association with darkness. If God equals light, then the world equals darkness. I cannot live in the light and love the ways of the world at the same time. As John says, that would mean we're liars and not practicing the truth.

Are you practicing the truth?

I like that phrase, practicing...or walking in...the truth. Does the way I live reflect the truth of my confession of faith in the God of light?

Thankfully, by using the word *practicing*, we understand that it doesn't mean we will never sin or be swayed by the darkness. What it does mean, however, is that in Christ, we have forgiveness of those sins when we do confess them to him and find cleansing through him. Only Christ can wash the darkness away. John will have more to say about that in following verses.

What are the benefits of walking in the light?

- Fellowship with other believers.

- Purification by the blood of Christ.

These are two constants we enjoy as Christ followers. Through faith, we gain access to a family that can be found around the world, no matter where our road may lead. And also, through faith, we gain access to forgiveness that enables us to live free from bondage.

Are you grateful for the benefits of the light of Christ?
Share those benefits with a friend and spread the light!

Three

As Christ-followers, we walk in the light of his presence within, and thus our thoughts and actions reflect that inner light to those we encounter. Yet, John continues to make clear, as we close out this first chapter, that our relationship in Christ doesn't mean we *never* sin. Listen to what he writes:

If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:8-10

Have you ever met a Christian who said they never sinned? I have, and it's hard not to laugh when they express their sincere belief in their purity. Thankfully, we have the written Word to which to turn and also the reality of man's inability to live a sinless life.

Matthew, in chapter eighteen of his book, writes what Jesus said about sin when he was speaking to his disciples. He shares a parable about a lost sheep. We know from other passages, that sheep were considered his followers, so as one strays, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to go and search for it. It would be obvious as the church began and grew that sin would be a constant struggle within the Body.

After the parable, Jesus then goes on to give instructions to the disciples on how to handle situations when a brother sins against them. There is no way to

interpret this passage other than with the understanding that believers will sin, and it can even cause pain and division in the church.

So, if we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves.

Don't pretend to be above sinning, just because you call yourself a Christian. We are all sinners saved by grace and are continually dependent on his grace to forgive us until we are fully restored to him in eternity.

Thankfully, there's hope for the sinner—it's called forgiveness.

John makes it clear that Christ is faithful to forgive as we're obedient to confess. He's not going to forgive us for something we're not sorry for, and the longer we hold on to that sin and let it fester and grow, the less room for the Spirit to work in our hearts and lives. He's still there, but he's quenched because of the sin we've refused to let go of.

Can Christians be liars?

Yes, when they refuse to acknowledge their own sin, they lie and make God look like a liar too. If we have no sin after salvation, what is the purpose of sanctification and growing in grace? As long as we're in the flesh, there is a battle waging within. The flesh will always be fighting against the spirit in Satan's last-ditch attempt to make us ineffective in our faith. That's why we must stand up and acknowledge our sin and confess it to Christ. In keeping our slate clean, we give the Holy Spirit

room to grow us more and more into the likeness of the One we follow.

So, let your life shine by walking in the light like Jesus, while giving him those areas of darkness that cast shadows on your path.

Are you a sinner? Absolutely! And so am I! All the more reason to be grateful that we're saved by his grace to live in his peace.

Four

John may have sounded harsh in his words to believers, as our first chapter drew to a close, but he continually shows in his writing his deep love for his hearers. Look at how he begins chapter 2:

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

It is obvious that his straightforward writing about the reality of sin in the life of believers is to keep them *from* sinning. He had just written that if we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just and will forgive and purify us. He reiterates this again by saying that Christ is our advocate with the Father.

Only Christ can advocate for us—plead our case—because he is righteous.

He is the only one who can stand before the Holy God and defend us, the guilty sinners. He does this because of his own righteous holiness and because of his sacrifice to atone for our sins. His sacrifice covers not just our sin, but that of the world. A one-time act of the spotless Lamb of God would cover all who believe for all time.

God's Word guides us to holy living but also shows the way to regain right standing when we do fail.

That's why John says *but if* any of you do sin...because he knows it's going to happen. This side of eternity, we are still in the battle with the flesh, but even on this side, we have hope. As a child who falls down and scrapes his knee cries out to his mother, Jesus picks us up and wipes off the stain of sin when we call out to him, confessing our fall in sin. He makes it all better.

Have you ever had a big brother or sister who was your defender? Or, maybe a best friend? What happened when you did something wrong that led your parents to grow upset? They took up for you, pled your case in all sincerity and love, knowing that you really did not want to make your parents mad. I love that picture of having a defender. Jesus is our defender before God.

Without the atoning work of Christ, God would continue to deal with us in his wrath alone. He loves us as his creation, but his justice requires a payment for sin. We have it in Christ, and until we are with him face-to-face, there is a constant advocacy required on our behalf. Our salvation is assured, and yet, on this side of eternity we must rely on his forgiveness.

This is why John must be so firm, because the battle wages on. May we all call on and be grateful for our Defender, our Advocate, our Atoning Sacrifice until the Day of his return.

Five

I think it's interesting as we press on in John's letter today that twice in the last few verses, he's used the word *liar*. The first time was to say that we lie if we say we have no sin, and this time if we say we know God but do not follow his commands. Listen to how he says it:

This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. The one who says, "I have come to know him," and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked. 1 John 2:3-6

These hard words are centered around a spiritual test we can give ourselves: How do we show we know God? By keeping his commands.

We should not judge others on what we think they should be doing.

This is an important point I want to draw from these verses, because Christians can be very judgmental of their own. It's not about what we think a good Christian looks like that matters, it's about what God's Word says. The way I walk in love and live in the light may look different from the way you do, but we should both be living in line with what God says. John's going to get more into that in the coming verses, but for now, I just wanted to throw that out there, because, while it's a

litmus test for us as believers, we need to be careful how we apply it to each other.

Keeping God's word keeps us in his love.

As we keep or live by God's word, remain obedient to his commands, we are built up and held firm in God's love. This short letter is full of confirmation of each and every sentence he writes, for later in the fifth chapter, John writes:

For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden.

1 John 5:3

It is a blessing to keep God's commands, because they are not too heavy that we cannot bear them. In his love for us, he makes following him, obeying him, and even serving him, a blessing and joy.

Have you ever done something you know God led you to do, even if it was hard, and once you obeyed, a deep, abiding love and joy filled your heart? That's the blessing of knowing and obeying God.

T. B. Maston wrote an amazing book entitled, *To Walk as He Walked*, based on verse six in this second chapter of John's letter:

The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.

The Christian life is about proclamation.

Not only do we proclaim Christ crucified and share the good news of that atoning sacrifice, but we also proclaim our allegiance to Christ by our day-to-day living. T. B. Maston laid that out perfectly in his book by illustrating the many ways Jesus *walked* on this earth. You can get a taste of what I mean, when you see these chapter titles:

- He Revealed God
- He Dignified Humanity
- He Included Samaria
- He Emphasized a Distinctive Life-style
- He Magnified Service
- He Was Compassionate
- He Touched People
- He Separated the Sinner and His Sin

Do you claim to know Christ? Live as he lived, walking in his way of light and love.

Six

As we go deeper into John's letter today, do you not feel like this aging elder is holding us by the hand and talking to us as we take a stroll down a forest path? After all, he's already called us "little children," and now he calls us "friends." This is an intimate letter to brothers and sisters in his family. Those who have come to know Christ, including those of us who will read this letter thousands of years later, are gently and continually urged by our elder to take to heart his words. After reminding us that we should live and walk as Christ Jesus did, listen to what he says today:

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the word you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 1 John 2:7-11

John's reminding us that he's not saying anything we shouldn't already know as Christ followers. The Lord Jesus himself gave that new commandment when he said:

I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:34-35

Walking as Christ walked is to walk in love.

We show the world we are different by the love we have for our brothers and sisters in Christ. John says this is nothing new, because Christ Jesus said it first. Even so, he wants to bring it to them in a new way. Because of the presence of Spirit-filled believers in the world, the darkness loses power. We are the light of the world as we live as Jesus lived. If we don't live according to the words of Christ—hating our brother or sister—then we ourselves are walking in darkness.

Love for our brothers and sisters is evidence of his light in us.

When we are living and walking in the light, we are not easily tripped up nor do our words or actions cause others to fall. Our living by His light makes the way clearer both for ourselves and others. When we live in deception, trying to hide hate, envy, jealousy, or spite for our brother, we are soon tripped up by our own lie, and we also cause others to trip and fall.

Have you ever stumbled over your own blind anger toward another? Has envy and jealousy blinded you to your own sin? Has it brought up a wall of darkness between you and a fellow believer? Are you still living in darkness in relationship with others?

Check your heart.

John doesn't beat around the bush—hatred toward another believer means you are living in the darkness yourself. The longer we stay in the darkness, the more the Spirit is quenched. If the Spirit lives in you, don't stay where you are. Confess your sin to God and to your brother, then step fully into the light.

Renewing love for your brother doesn't mean you won't disagree.

As different members of the Body, we will not always see things the same way. Each person looks at things out of their giftings and maturity in faith. That's okay. Celebrate the differences and show your appreciation for your brother or sister in the way God has made them. In all that, you can still show love toward them.

Disagreement turns to hate when pride steps in between us.

Paul said it well in his letter to another church in Galatia:

For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another. Galatians 5:13-15

To love others as Christ loved us requires the sacrifice of our flesh and pride. Ask the Father to help you live in

the light and walk in love toward your brothers and sisters. It can be accomplished through the power of the Spirit by His grace and peace.

Seven

Elder John continues this intimate, personal letter to believers; and as I read today's verses, I see him more like a grandfather sharing the wisdom of years with those he loves. You know the drill, a grandfather or grandmother gives you a word of warning or wisdom, and then says: "Now, I'm only telling you this, because I love you or because you already know better." Listen to John's words and see if you don't catch the same vibe here:

*I am writing to you, **little children**, since your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, **fathers**, because you have come to know the one who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, **young men**, because you have conquered the evil one. I have written to you, **children**, because you have come to know the Father. I have written to you, **fathers**, because you have come to know the one who is from the beginning. I have written to you, **young men**, because you are strong, God's word remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one.*

1 John 2:12-14 (Emphasis added)

In Jewish poetry, which we see in the psalms, repetition is common. Sometimes the same phrase is repeated verbatim, and sometimes it's restated in a different way for emphasis. In either case, it's a tool for memorization. The more something is repeated, the better able we are to remember it.

John does that here as he wants to emphasize why he's writing to them. Remember, he's said some hard things in the earlier part of this chapter, as he's calling out liars and those who live in darkness, while professing to live in the light. It could not have been easy to take in for the recipients of this letter: I know it's not for some of us either.

That's when his grandfatherly hat is put on and he tells them why he's writing such hard things. He addresses three groups of people: children, young men, and fathers. Don't be put off by the titles, as they are general terms to make sure everyone is covered (yes, even women). When thinking of believers in the faith, we know we have those who are new in their walk, and these would be the children, or little children, he addresses. Young men are probably the majority of believers, as they are those who are growing in their faith, having been believers for a while. Fathers are the mature believers, the elders in the church, the leaders.

Young believers have had their sins forgiven and know God the Father.

This goes back to his earlier word in chapter one: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9

He is writing to them so that they will not sin, but if they do, they can find forgiveness in Christ. When a person is new to faith in Christ, the major focus of the new life is

turning from the old. The more we are in God's Word, prayer, and fellowship, the further we move from the old ways to the new, but it is not always an easy transition, so John is urging them to remember their sins are forgiven and they are secure in God through Christ.

Mature believers have an intimate relationship with the God of Creation.

I think it's interesting that John starts with children, then goes to fathers, before coming back to young men, but this is the way of life. We begin and end life in much the same way—a simple trusting faith. Children love God out of the purity of the child-like faith that leads to trust. Mature believers love God out of a life of experience and study of who God is and how he works in the world. They've seen God in action, seen him hold true to his promises, and trust him explicitly.

John repeats the same phrase for fathers: "you have come to know the one who is from the beginning." There is a depth there that children or young believers have yet to know. Those who are mature in their faith see the God of Creation as the God who works throughout the span of time. The older I get in my walk with Christ, the more I revel in the God of Creation, the amazing work of his hands, and his steadfastness throughout time. "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is a theme for many who have walked hand-in-hand with the Master through life.

Young men or growing believers are in the midst of the battle.

John doesn't want those who are living as Christ-followers to stumble. These believers, who are past the *milk* stage of faith, are having to stand up against constant resistance in their work, marriages, and families. Satan wants them to hate their brother. He is working overtime to bring division and strife for those who are becoming the new leaders in the church and among their peers.

John knows the struggles of living for Christ, so he reminds them they have conquered the evil one and are strong because God's word lives in them. He wants them to remain strong, so he presses in on them to remember the truth: "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Walking as Jesus walked, in light and love for our brother, is for each person who knows Christ as Savior. From the newborn believer to the one who has walked with Christ for decades, all of us need to hear the message John shares. As we move forward through the letter, remember this exhortation from the elder, because you are strong by His grace and peace.

Eight

John continues his letter with a persistent exhortation to be watchful. This world is a dangerous place for the Christian, and it is so easy for us to fall into the traps Satan lays for us. That's why the love we have *cannot* be for the world. Listen to what he writes:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever. 1 John 2:14-17

The dichotomy of life lessons continues with John in these verses. Just as we cannot love God and hate our brother, we cannot love God and love the world. It's all or nothing with God. Either we're his or we're not.

Devotion is not a word the world likes or uses.

Not only is it easy to break up your marriage for the love of another, so too is it easy to not marry at all. Why do we need to commit ourselves to one person in the first place? They just disappoint. Love is fleeting, after all. Do what makes you happy. Live in the moment. You're worth it.

Happiness doesn't last. Living in the moment can lead to years of living with regret. If I truly look at myself, my life has no value.

That's why John says the world only cares about flesh, what we see, and stuff. No wonder social media has moved from people using words to pictures. Does a picture really paint a thousand words or does it simply capture your attention without any thought of consequences? When we use words, we are required to think through something, so it's obvious why Twitter only wanted you to use 140 characters. The less you say, the less you use your mind. But oh, the lust of the eyes, that's so much better for Satan's purposes.

But the world and her lusts won't last forever.

Just like happiness is fleeting, so too are all the ways the world seeks to snare you and get you to fall. There is coming a day when all that we know in this world will pass away. How much better to know that our eternity is secure because of our faith in God through Christ and our singular devotion to him.

Though Sandy, in the musical *Grease*, sang "Hopelessly Devoted to You," I think John would want our song to God to be "Hopefully Devoted to Him and Him Alone." We can be by his grace and peace.

Nine

I don't know if it was John's age at the time when he wrote this letter or his sense of the times, but you can feel the intensity build as he continues with our verses for today in chapter 2:

Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. 1 John 2:18-20

The Antichrist is a culmination of many who preceded him.

Jesus spoke of false christs and false prophets who were to come, as did Paul in his letters, while the prophet Daniel gave descriptions through the visions he shared. John, having walked with Christ Jesus, knew the importance of being alert to those whose goal was to deceive the flock. As he shares in this letter, many had already come and were already stirring up confusion and attacking those who followed the Way.

Yes, "antichrist is coming" and we know what to look for, but in the meantime, we need to be cautious not to fall prey to the little antichrists who precede him. Their damage to the cause of Christ can be disastrous to the faith of those who are not firm in the Word and

maintain fellowship with other believers. The more we separate ourselves from the love of the world, as he talked about in the earlier verses, and instead walk in Christ's love, the better we are able to spot those whose aim is to hurt the cause of Christ.

Antichrists can take the form of a fellow-believer until they show their true colors.

The closer we grow to the Day of the Lord; the more deception will come from within. Yet, as God's people remain firmly established in the Word and live by that Word, these little antichrists find no way to maintain their cover from within the church. They will become so uncomfortable in trying to pawn their deception that they will flee the Body, knowing that they've lost the game.

This requires prayer, wisdom, and discernment on our part, as we seek the Holy Spirit's help to be aware of those who twist the scriptures or seek to pull the young in faith away from the centrality of Christ. It's not impossible to spot, John tells us. Why? Because we have "an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth."

As the days grow darker, may we grow stronger—filled to the fullness of the Holy Spirit and truth. Stand firm in your anointing and be alert to the wolves in sheep clothing in your midst. Keep speaking the truth and they will surely flee.

Ten

John is so eager for believers to walk as Jesus walked—to walk in his love, that even in his warning against antichrists, he reminds them that they have been anointed by Christ and know the truth. They have what it takes, so to speak, to discern the ways of the Evil One. The verses in our passage today continue to press this point:

I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well. What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life.

1 John 2:21-25

What is the opposite of the truth we possess? Lies.

To further define and distinguish antichrists, those who he earlier said, “did not really belong to us,” John calls them liars. What does a liar say? Jesus is NOT the Christ. What makes this such a line in the sand? Because to claim that Jesus was a prophet, a good man, a great teacher, though all good and true, are not sufficient for the work of redemption. Only in acknowledging Jesus as

the Christ—the Sent One—do we testify to his purpose in coming as Savior and Lord. Sent *from* God to accomplish what no ordinary man could accomplish.

When a person denies Jesus is the Christ, he is also denying the relationship that is intrinsic in the Trinity—that between God the Father and Christ the Son. Not only does Satan seek to destroy earthly family relationships, but he does it because he wants us all to deny *the* relationship of relationships that is made known throughout Scripture.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1,14.

Let this truth remain in you.

From Genesis through Revelation, God has revealed this truth. One in Three—the God of relationship who desires relationship with us through Christ. He has made the way. Only in accepting Jesus as the Christ, acknowledging our inability to find a solution to our sin, God has granted us eternal life. That truth, in the form of his Spirit, comes and lives in us and nothing is ever the same.

As long as we focus on this truth, meditate daily upon it in our Bible study and prayer, the liars have no inroads to our heart. May you remain in the truth today and always by his grace and peace.

Eleven

We conclude the second chapter of John's first letter to believers with these words:

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him. And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. 1 John 2:26-29

It is so easy to see the deep connection between John and his Lord. Many of his words are repetitions of words Jesus used with his own disciples. Today's passage is no different, as John again gives a purpose behind his writing. "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray."

When we understand the enemy, we are no longer easily led astray.

After Jesus talked to his disciples about coming persecution and the promise of the Counselor, he said: "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray" (John 16:1 NIV). John has made clear what a counterfeit Christian looks like and how they act. Even though counterfeits are sometimes hard to see at first, we have

something as Christ-followers that keeps us from falling for their tricks—the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives believers an extra layer of discernment the world doesn't have.

Christ in us through his Spirit adds an extra-sensory device to our minds, hearts, ears, and eyes. Not only do we see the world and those who seek to deceive with new vision, but the Spirit reminds us of the words Jesus and John have used to describe those who are nefarious in their purpose toward believers and the Church of Christ. While we are blessed with this extra layer of defense against the ways of the evil one, there is something we must do to remain sharp and on alert—REMAIN IN HIM.

For those of you who walked with me through the beauty of Jesus's words in [John 15](#), you know all about what it means to remain in Christ. Leaning daily on the Lord and his word keeps our minds united with his and sharpened against attacks on our faith.

Knowing the Standard Bearer well helps us immediately spot any counterfeit.

That's what John means when he says "if you know that *he* is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right is born of him." Knowing Christ deeply and intimately, by remaining daily in his Word and living by his light, helps us know what it looks like to live for him. What a blessing it is to meet a fellow Christ-follower. We can spot them a mile away by the way they speak, love, serve, and share their faith. We know them

because they look like Jesus. In the same way, we can spot those who are trying to lead believers away by the way their words are not exactly like his, their actions more selfish than selfless, and their love is selective. They just don't measure up to Christ, because they are not of Christ.

How blessed we are to have it all spelled out for us in God's Word. I'm grateful to John, who had such love and compassion for those who did not have the privilege of having walked with Christ, that he gave clear descriptions of what we need to look for and how to stand strong in the face of opposition. May we all walk in the light of Christ today that darkness will flee and our way made smooth by his...

Twelve

John's letter to the saints (us included) just gets better and better. Chapter three in our Bibles starts with such encouragement and cause for joy:

See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children—and we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know him. Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure. 1 John 3:1-3

He has just written that we know God is righteous, and because God is righteous, those born of God are made righteous through faith in Christ. It's nothing we deserve, can earn, or justify—this righteousness, this right standing with God is made ours in Christ. It's a gift that's ours for the taking. That's why it's easy to feel John's excitement when he says,

See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children!

I want to put a question mark there to ask, "Don't you see that great love of God for us? He's made us his children after all!" Do you see it? Can you grasp how amazing it is that God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to come and pay the price for our salvation? It's out of love that he made it possible to know his righteousness—to gain right-standing with him.

But not only that, there's more to come!

If the righteousness we have with God through Christ wasn't enough, there's more—what we will be in eternity. We don't know what it will look like, but what we do know is that it will look like Jesus, because “we will be like him.” We will gain a glorified body that also enables us to see Jesus in all his splendor. How cool is that? How amazing? How awesome? There are no words adequate to describe how things will be, how we will be, when standing in his presence for eternity.

Because of this, our desire should be to live more and more to his glory today.

We live a life worthy of Christ, because we're blown away by the love that led him to redeem us in the first place. When someone puts their confidence in you to do a good job, you want to live up to that confidence by doing your best. It's the same in our spiritual journey. Because God's “invested” in us by purchasing us through the blood of his Son, we strive to live up to his expectations. It's not a works-oriented faith, but a life that does good and remains pure because of the love that has been poured in us in the first place.

Are you blown away by the love of the Father? What does that do to you? Lead you to worship? To get on your knees in gratitude and prayer? Lead you to confess your sin? Lead you to live more in the likeness of Christ?

I pray yes for this and whatever it takes to glorify God to a lost and dying world.

I'm attaching a [link](#) to a song that relates to these words of John today. Why should we gain from his reward? I have no idea other than because of his unconditional love for us. That is overwhelming and worthy of our lives.

Thirteen

John's love for the saints leads him to get even more personal in his letter today. Knowing we are God's children, that we've been lavished with his great love, should motivate us toward purity. John knows from experience, though, that it can be an uphill battle, if we lose focus. He begins to lay it out with these verses in chapter three today:

Everyone who commits sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed so that he might take away sins, and there is no sin in him. Everyone who remains in him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen him or known him. 1 John 3:4-6

John has already warned the believers about the antichrists, those who were not really a part of the Body of Christ because they did not remain in the Body. Yet, here he reminds them that anyone—believers included—are practicing lawlessness when they sin. What did Jesus tell his followers about the law? It can be summed up in two short sentences: Love God, and love your neighbor.

Sin, no matter the act or word, takes action against these two principles. When I put something before my devotion to God, I've broken the first law. When I speak against my neighbor or do harm to him, I break the second.

Sin is saying no to God's way for us.

That's why it's so important, as John points out, for us to remain in him. This letter could easily be made parallel to Jesus's words in the fifteenth chapter of John's gospel.

I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. John 15:5-6

When we remain in Christ, focus on him, draw strength and wisdom from him through his Word and Spirit, we can easily live by the Law Jesus summed up by those two commandments. When we pull away from Christ, seek to live by our own desires, and allow sin to have its sway, we wither on the vine and suffer the consequences.

Are you a child of God through faith in Christ? Live in that love by remaining in him. Let the Law of Love guide your words and deeds today and every day, to his glory.

Fourteen

John is so concerned for these believers, knowing how easy it is to be led astray and deceived by those who pervert the cause of Christ. This work of the evil one has been going on since the beginning of time, because the devil and his sin started it all. Listen to how this elderly disciple lays it out in his letter today:

Little children, let no one deceive you. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works. Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because his seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. This is how God's children and the devil's children become obvious. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother or sister. 1 John 3:7-10

When deception begins, it's sometimes hard to spot, because Satan often tricks us with an idea or act that *seems* good enough. Yet, good can quickly become evil when it turns our focus off Christ and onto self or another human being. I like how John lets us know something important.

Jesus came to destroy the devil's work.

His purpose was to undo all that sin had done and was doing in our world. He made the way for us to know righteousness—not of ourselves or from anything we

had done, but through his sacrifice on the cross on our behalf. When we are born again through faith in Christ, his seed is planted in our hearts and minds. The guarantee of our salvation is stamped in us by his Spirit, breaking the bond of sin that led to death.

In Christ an obvious distinction is made in our ownership.

Being marked by his Spirit, we no longer live in sin, letting it reign in our hearts and minds. Before Jesus came to this earth to complete his mission on our behalf, there was not a clear distinction. Man tried, through obedience to the law, to live for God, but failed to maintain the righteousness God required. The Law seemed to magnify our sins instead of wipe them out.

Only in Christ can one be distinguished from those still enslaved to sin. The way we are distinguished is manifested through our good works—our right living—our love for others. The world doesn't have this and can't keep it up on a steady basis. Without the Spirit, no one can. That's why it's easy to spot those who are from God and those who are from the devil. Easy-peasy, as far as John is concerned.

Are you easy to spot as a child of God? Why? Why not? If you don't know what to do about it, ask the One who knows.

Fifteen

John draws once again on knowledge that he believes should by now be deeply embedded in the hearts of believers. It's a message that has been conveyed from the beginning. It's not a message that comes from him or even from the beginning of this letter, but a message that Jesus Christ proclaimed to his own disciples:

"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

That's why John was able to write these words:

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

1 John 3:11-15

John knew that Christ's command for us to love our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith was what set us apart from earthly family relationships that are soiled by the sin of Cain. When he should have loved his

brother, he instead hated him to the point of murder. Only in Christ, can love overcome such animosity and give us distinction as believers.

It is our distinction in Christ—it is in our overwhelming love for each other—that leads the world to hate us.

Again, Elder John is just repeating his Master's words:

If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. John 15:18-19

Not only does this love distinguish us to the point of leading the world to hate us, but it is the sign of our eternal distinction as well.

A sign of the Spirit's seal upon our lives is the love we display for those who are in the family of God. What makes us incapable of displaying that love is the death that still reigns in our hearts. New birth brings a transformed mind and a new willingness to love despite the differences. Hate is the emotion that leads to murder and thus reflects that our ownership has yet to change from darkness to light. Love is the emotion that leads to doing good for others, demonstrating we now belong to God.

Just as John wrote—we should all know this. It's not a new message, but one from the Savior himself. The question for you today is: Do I reflect my owner's love?

Sixteen

The message John says we should know he continues to press into his readers today, showing them that its meaning and execution is found in Christ:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. 1 John 3:16-18

This is the clearest example of the vertical affecting the horizontal. Most of us have seen it illustrated by the drawing of a cross. The vertical bar is the relationship between God and man, while the horizontal is the relationship between man and his fellow human beings. The way we do anything in this life, know anything in this life is by our rooting in Christ, for he is the center of the cross. He's the one who allows us to have that vertical relationship in the first place.

How was it established? By the love that led to his sacrificial death on the cross for our sins.

The New International Version uses the phrase: "This is how we know what love is." In other words: This is love—pure love, saving love. Christ died for us. Not forced into it, but willingly gave his life. Even in those last moments on the cross, God's Word says he "yielded up his spirit." He chose the moment, he gave it up,

turning himself over to death that we might live. There is no greater love.

But John doesn't stop there. As his followers, we must model that same love.

No, we're not capable of dying to save others from their sins. That was the work of Christ alone. Our sacrificial love for our brother and sister in Christ is what God uses to draw others to Christ through us. Just the fact that I'm willing to help my brother or come alongside my sister is enough to make the world stop and take notice. Why? Because it's not normal.

Such love is also not possible without the work of the Spirit of Christ in us. Paul wrote:

*For rarely will someone die for a just person—
though for a good person perhaps someone might
even dare to die. But God proves his own love for us
in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
Romans 5:7-8

It's in that act of undeserving love, that God's love is seen in us. But woe to us, when we withhold that love from our brother or sister.

A closed heart is a sign of faithlessness.

How can God's love be in us, if we are not generously loving our fellow believers? John doesn't want Christ-followers to be people who just talk the talk, but walk the walk.

How do your deeds match the love God has instilled in you through his grace and by his Spirit? Are you quenching the love the Spirit wants to show through you to others? Is pride in the way? Does it keep you from denying self in lovingly meeting a brother or sister's need?

Ask God to help you get out of the way so he can have his way in and through you to his glory.

Seventeen

We finish the third chapter in John's letter today with these words:

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. 1 John 3:19-24

John gives us the secret of a heart at rest: Love in action

He mentioned it in verse eighteen, just prior to this section today. When we love, not in just words but in actions and in truth, then we've learned the secret to rest. Living a life of practical love for our brother and sister keeps our heart from condemning us, because we are not guilty of loving in word alone.

A guiltless person is a confident person.

John knows that a person who lives according to the law is able to live and move in confidence within society, while a guilty person, one with something to hide, stays to the shadows. In our relationship with God, it is the

same. When we love as he loved, by action and in truth, then we are able to stand confidently before the throne, because we're living in obedience to his command. Do you remember that new command he gave us? "Love one another as I have loved you."

We cannot love without first the belief in Christ himself. John makes that clear:

BELIEF + LOVE = OBEDIENCE

It's simple, really, like one plus one equals two. Yet, this simple command requires sacrifice, and what is that sacrifice? Self. That's why we need the Spirit. When we sacrifice self and replace it with belief in Christ, he doesn't just leave it there. No, he fills us with his Spirit, so we're not left to our own devices nor is Satan able to fill the void.

Without the Spirit, we cannot complete the equation of obedience. With the Spirit, we're able to live out that love and rest in the assurance of his presence.

Is your heart at rest today in Christ, or does it condemn you? In the power of the Spirit, through belief in the name of Christ Jesus, may you live, not with words or speech, but with actions and in truth to his glory.

Eighteen

As we begin the fourth chapter in John's first letter to believers, we continue to see the tension between living in obedience to Christ and remaining in the world. Just like life in an academic setting, exams are to be a part of our life on this earth. Listen to what John says:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 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; even now it is already in the world. 1 John 4:1-3

He's been telling us that the Spirit of Christ in us gives us the assurance that he's with us. When we love each other and do what pleases God, we have rest. The problem is, it's not only God's Spirit that is speaking to us—there are other spirits that work through people, even within the church, to bring confusion and division. How do we discern the difference? There are two steps to the process:

- 1. Do not believe every spirit.** Just because you hear something that sounds good, it doesn't mean it's from God. As Christ-followers, we should not be naïve and instantly believe what's being taught or preached or written in a book. This means I ponder first.

- 2. Test the spirits.** John has already been warning us about antichrists, and he continues in this passage to say there are a lot of false prophets out there. As long as we're on this side of eternity, we're still working in enemy territory and must test what we hear to see if it's really from God.

What's the bottom line for any spirit being from God?

It's a clear confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh—a recognition of the incarnated Christ. Why does that matter? Because without the acknowledgement that Jesus is more than just a man, a moral figure, a prophet, then there is no acknowledgement that he has the power to save and rule. Only God in the flesh, perfect and without defect, could serve as ransom for the sins of the world.

When the work of Christ on the cross, in the resurrection, and ascension is ignored, then the work of man is elevated, which is antithetical to grace.

The spirit of the antichrist knows no grace.

If you don't see him at work in our world today, then you need to wake up! Only in Christ Jesus do we have the perfect reality of God's grace poured out on mankind because of his love for us. Anything else is every man for himself, create your own reality, you can earn your way to heaven, you are your own god.

John tells us nothing new. You've heard, he says, that the antichrist is coming and is even now already in the

world, working from inside and outside the church to confuse, divide, and destroy.

Test, test, test—everything you hear, see, read. Don't blindly believe at first glance. Pick up God's Word and see if what you're hearing matches with what he's already given us. And, above all, confirm that there is clear acknowledgement of the Incarnated Christ as the only source of salvation.

May we all be strict in our examinations and stand firm.

Nineteen

Have you been testing the spirits this week? That's where we left John in his letter to his friends and dear children in the faith. He was reminding them of those false prophets and antichrists who would be doing all they could to twist God's Word and attack his bride. I love John's writing, because it is so full of encouragement and hope. That's what we find today, even in the midst of the tests:

You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world. Therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception. 1 John 4:4-6

Even though he'd told them the spirit of the antichrist was here, he wanted to also remind them of something of even greater importance—they have already conquered him!

Before the battle begins, we've won!

How can we win a battle we have yet to fight? Because the One in us is greater than the one in the world. Yes, Jesus, who lives in us through his Spirit, equips us with everything we need to put the devil in his place. In fact, the victory is already secured through his incarnation,

death, resurrection, and ascension. His return will seal the deal.

So, what do we do in the meantime? Keep an eye out for the trickster.

When we test the spirits, speak truth to lies, continue to meet together, and proclaim Christ as Lord, we limit the gains of the antichrist in this world. Yes, as John says, the world listens to the antichrists of our day, but his word does not satisfy. Only in Christ, do people find hope, peace, true love, and the Spirit that exposes the deception they once knew.

We are from God, and as we test the spirits, and speak truth to the Body in response, those who know God will listen. Satan cannot gain a stronghold in a church as long as there are believers testing the spirits and speaking against the deception. Yes, we've won the final battle in Christ, but there is the daily battle we must wage to hold each other accountable to the Truth of God's Word.

When someone in the church refuses to acknowledge the Truth of God's Word, he is not from God. These are times when the Body must take action and purge the falsehood and those who proclaim it. Our goal is to present a purified Bride at Christ's return. That takes work, but is not impossible through the power of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Bible.

Are we encouraged by John's word today? Absolutely! The battle is won! Is there work yet to do? Absolutely! By me and by you. May he find us faithful.

Twenty

If you haven't picked up on John's affinity to the idea of love, then listen to this passage in the middle of the fourth chapter:

*Dear friends, let us **love** one another, because **love** is from God, and everyone who **loves** has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not **love** does not know God, because God is **love**. God's **love** was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. **Love** consists in this: not that we **loved** God, but that he **loved** us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, if God **loved** us in this way, we also must **love** one another. No one has ever seen God. If we **love** one another, God remains in us and his **love** is made complete in us. 1 John 4:7-12 (Emphasis added)*

That is thirteen times he uses a variation of the word *love* in six short verses! He's talking to Spirit-filled Christ-followers here, and he wants them (you, I trust) to know several things:

- We are to love each other in the Body of Christ.
- Love is from God.
- You love because you have been born of God and know him through Christ.
- Those without love are without a relationship with God.
- God is love.

- God showed us his love through the sending of his only Son into the world, so that we could live through him.
- This is love:
 - Not that we loved God.
 - But that God loved us and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our salvation.
- Because God loved us, we must love each other.
- In loving each other:
 - God remains in us,
 - And his love is made complete in us.

When we break it out like that, it is easier to see how we are doing in relationship to God's love. I encourage you to read each bullet point and ask yourself how you're doing on the love scale of your Christian journey. It's not a matter of working your way to heaven, but it does help to remind us of the way we are to reflect Christ and glorify God in our day-to-day living.

I cannot read this passage without remembering a song learned long ago. I love the way this young girl did her own harmony on it! Take a listen via this [LINK](#) and see if it doesn't help you to reflect on the love of God throughout the day.

Twenty-One

The Love Doctor, John, finished his last portion of this letter with a statement about how God lives in us if we love one another. Now in these next few verses, he continues to share how we know that God lives in us. Listen to his words:

This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world's Savior. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love. 1 John 4:13-18

The seal of our relationship with God through Christ is the indwelling Spirit of God. What an amazing gift we've been given—the Holy Spirit in us! Prophets and priests caught glimpses of that privilege, but we have not a temporary filling, but the Spirit has a permanent home in us who believe. What does it take? Confession that Jesus is the Son of God.

God in us.

Belief in Immanuel—God *with us*, leads to the gift of God *in us* through the person of the Holy Spirit. We not only know God, as John says, but we understand the love that led God to give us such a gift. With the indwelling of the Spirit, we experience a kind of love we've never known in this world. The agape love of God now rests in us through his Spirit and enables us to love one another as he first loved us. It's not possible without his Spirit, his presence working in and through us.

Love gives us confidence.

As the Spirit makes his home in us and fills us with the love of God, we gain confidence that enables us to stand before Almighty God on the Day of Judgment. The fear of not being good enough, not being lovable enough, and not being enough for God to accept all vanishes when we know Christ and are filled with his Spirit. This *perfect love*, love that is from God alone, drives out all fear, because we understand that Christ has paid the price we could not pay. His sacrifice made the way for us to stand in his righteousness before Holy God.

If you are unsure of where you stand before God; if fear makes you think you still have something that needs proving—you have not yet been made complete in his love. Tear up your “to-do” list and grab Christ’s “done” list with both hands, confessing with a loud voice that you believe he is the Son of God who paid the price to wash away the sins that have entangled you to death.

Believe and you will be filled with the Spirit of Love that kicks fear out the door and guarantees your right standing before God.

It's a gift we don't deserve. That's his grace that gives us his peace.

Twenty-Two

The love made available to us and for us to practice is all because of God. John has made it abundantly clear that God is love—they are one and the same. Love comes from his essence, and he pours his essence in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's why John goes on to tell us today:

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister. 1 John 4:19-21

We can only love because God loved us first.

It is evident from the story of creation that we worship a God of love. God himself, even after Adam and Eve had doubted their Creator and eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he clothed them. He allowed for the first sacrifice to be made out of love for them in order to clothe them and cover their shame. He's been covering our shame ever since.

God showed us what true love is and how it works in relationship.

The love we receive and know through God has no deception. This is why John tells us we cannot *say* we love our brother or sister in Christ, but inwardly hate them. Our words have to match our hearts. Only then

will our words affect our actions toward them in a way that glorifies God and allows the world to know us by our love.

The go-to phrase for the world's rejection of Christ is the hypocrisy they see in those who claim to be his followers. Where does that idea of hypocrisy come from? It's why our words don't match our actions. How can Christians say they love others when their words are acidic, their actions show they don't want to be seen with another Christian who doesn't "fit" in their mold, and they are simply unlovely human beings? The world has every right to complain, and we have every need to hold each other accountable to the commands of Scripture.

Love God and love your neighbor.

Jesus made it very clear when talking to a legal expert:

He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

Matthew 22:37-40

Love is a two-sided coin—love God and love your neighbor. If Jesus said everything hinged on these two commands, then why do we not heed them? John obviously got the message and passed it on. May we do the same.

Twenty-Three

John has led us through the light of walking with God by loving God and loving others. As we do, we have to watch out for those working against the cause of Christ. Thankfully, we have the Holy Spirit, John tells us, who fills us and guides us and remains in us. God's love is so amazing, and that love is in us through faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son. We love because he first loved us.

Can any more be said about this love?

John says yes, as he shares with us today:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one born of him. This is how we know that we love God's children: when we love God and obey his commands. For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden, because everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith. Who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:1-5

The love of God moves us to keep his commands.

When a father is kind and loving, generous and giving, a child is much more apt to strive to please him. We obey such a father, because we're first loved by the one who brought us into this world (with the help of the mother, obviously). It's easy to please such a dad, though there

may be many of you reading this today who never had such a relationship with your earthly father. When earthly fathers do not reflect the image of our heavenly father, it makes it hard to be so easily moved to please God. It's hard, but not impossible—why? Because he pours into us of his Spirit and creates in us a new heart.

His perfect love casts out past fear.

I have witnessed countless people come to faith in Christ and give themselves wholeheartedly and joyfully to the service of the Father, because he's changed them from the inside out. We want to serve God, because he first lovingly served us.

Keeping God's commands is freeing.

A father who instills fear, commands with a harsh voice. The natural result from a child is withdrawal, crouching and rushing to quickly do what was demanded. This kind of obedience is not done to please the father but to avoid punishment. I'm so thankful our Heavenly Father is not like this. The punishment we deserved has already been paid by Christ on the cross. We're left to live in his love with anticipation of our eternal home. John tells us that God's commands are not burdensome. Because of the Spirit living in us, we have conquered the lies of this world through our faith. We know where we're headed, and nothing can stop us. In the meantime, I gladly do the good works he's prepared in advance for me to do.

Are you doing the next good thing to God's glory?
There's no weight to it, no sense of guilt. Because we

love God, we look at a task—no matter how menial—
and do it with joy. That's what brings him glory; that's
what bears fruit.

I pray that you will live and serve as a joyful conqueror
today. If you know Christ as Savior, you can, because he
now lives in you to make the way.

Twenty-Four

John speaks of two things in this final chapter that are crucial for us to understand. In our passage last week, he spoke of the **victory** that has overcome the world. What is it? Our faith! But not just any faith, but faith in a specific person with a specific qualification—Jesus as the Son of God.

Today's verses add a second point: **The Testimony**. Listen to what John writes:

Jesus Christ—he is the one who came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and these three are in agreement. If we accept human testimony, God's testimony is greater, because it is God's testimony that he has given about his Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself. The one who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:6-12

The first of these verses go even deeper into our understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. He came by water and blood. God first revealed to the world that this Jesus was his beloved Son at the point of his baptism.

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

Matthew 3:17

Not only did Jesus come to preach the Kingdom of God, but he came to die. Thus, his blood is the second aspect of his life that gives witness to his relationship to the Father. Just as his baptism set him apart for his earthly ministry, so too did the shedding of his blood set him apart for his heavenly ministry in serving as our propitiation and advocate. But John tells us there are not simply two witnesses to the veracity of Jesus as the Son of God, but a third one as well—the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who works in the heart of man to reveal the truth that Jesus is who he claimed to be.

John tells us that when we believe in this testimony, it takes root in our heart and we cannot help but make it a part of our how we share Christ with others. It is verifiable and experiential through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Just to be sure that his readers understand, John again clarifies.

This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:11-12

The testimony we proclaim to the world is not like a human philosophy, which can perhaps change one's mind in the here-and-now, but do nothing for eternity. The testimony we have is that of a person who lived,

died, and stands at the right hand of God on our behalf until the day of his return. We believe this testimony and we have life for all eternity.

No wonder we've overcome the world! It has no hold on us. No sting. No fear. For we have Jesus!

Twenty-Five

John begins to draw his letter to a close, as we begin to read these verses today:

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 the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him. 1 John 5:13-15

What are the *these things* he's written?

While it could be the entire letter, I lean more to the past couple of things we've discussed just prior to verse thirteen. The **victory**, which is our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, that has overcome the world, and secondly, the **testimony** of the water, blood, and Spirit, that eternal life is in the Son, and he who has the Son has life.

Because of our victorious faith and the testimony which corroborates Christ as Redeemer, John says we can have assurance that we have eternal life. John wants those who read his words to know they can stand confidently before man and before God. Though false prophets will come and attack, they can do nothing to change our standing before God, because we acknowledge Christ as Lord.

This faith and confirming testimony also give us right-standing before God. This unshakeable position before

the throne of God allows us to be confident as we petition him in prayer. The one who trusts Christ as Lord and Savior is the one who also delves deep into the Word, he gives us. It is this Word which reveals the heart of God and his desire for none to perish but all to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. This relationship between knowing Christ and knowing his Word enables us to pray in accordance to the heart of God with confidence. When we do, we know that he hears and responds, because we both want his will to be accomplished.

This confidence, this assurance we have in Christ comes from the words of Jesus himself, which John records:

My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:27-28

Are you resting confidently in the hand of Jesus? Are you living a life of victory over sin and deception because of your faith in Christ? Does the assurance of your faith and the testimony of the water, blood, and Spirit to the Lordship of Christ lead you to pray with confidence, knowing you're praying in accordance to the will of the Father for all to know him?

If you have doubts in any of these areas, tell him, knowing he hears and answers. That's the God who loves us.

Twenty-Six

John has concluded his letter to believers with a reminder of God's love, the testimony we have to share with others, and the assurance of our faith. Now, he adds a few personal reminders of how we are to act out our obedience and why.

*If anyone sees a fellow believer committing a sin that doesn't lead to death, he should ask, and God will give life to him—to those who commit sin that doesn't lead to death. There is sin that leads to death. I am not saying he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin that doesn't lead to death. **We know** that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the one who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. **We know** that we are of God, and the whole world is under the sway of the evil one. And **we know** that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true one. **We are in the true one**—that is, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols.*

1 John 5:16-21 (Emphasis added)

Prayer is a powerful tool.

There is nothing in Scripture that shows us that Christians are perfect this side of heaven. We have been made perfect/righteous through faith in Christ, but as long as we continue in this earthly body, there is a war waging between the natural and spiritual man. The outcome of that is sin—even in the Church. Christ gave

clear instructions about how to address sin in the church (See Matthew 18:15-19). Here John adds another aspect of the issue, which I think is part and parcel to what Jesus shared. We must pray for our fellow believers who we see committing sin. He's clear that we don't have to pray for the one who commits sin that leads to death, but there are thousands of other sins that we as believers commit that do need prayer.

I need prayer as much as my brother or sister.

The one who knows Christ has been freed from the bondage of sin and is no longer under the control of the evil one, but we need to be praying for each other that we do not hurt our witness by falling prey to Satan's temptations. We are of God as his children, but continue to live in a world that is "under the sway of the evil one," as John puts it. Without wearing the full armor of God, we are susceptible to the fiery darts of the devil. Our prayer for one another is to remind each other that we have an armor available to us. We don't have to be alone in this fight. I love that Paul says the same thing in his letter to the church in Ephesus about the armor, when he says:

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18

We must pray for those who are struggling with sin. We should request prayers from others when we are under attack. Prayer is our way of staying alert for each other. That's the power of intercession.

We KNOW what needs to be known.

John's emphasis on what we know in these verses ends with our knowledge that we are in the true one, and who is that true one? God's Son, Jesus Christ—the true God and eternal life. That's what we need to end our letter: the reminder that none of us is perfect, and we need prayer, and that we are in the True One. With that knowledge, John then goes back to his sweet moniker for the believers—*little children*. Knowing the True One, we should stay away from all idols. There's no need for idols, when we have Christ.

Are you walking in the light of Christ? Walking in his love? Are you confident of your right standing with Christ through faith in him as the true God and source of eternal life? If you are, then pray for your brothers and sisters in the faith, remain firm in what you know, and stay away from anything that would strive to take the place of Christ in your heart and mind.

Grace and Peace