

SYLLABUS

The Epistles of John

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INTRODUCTION

1 John 1:1-4

First John was written by John, one of Jesus' original 12 disciples. He was probably "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Read John 21:20 and record what you learn: _____

Along with Peter and James, he had a special relationship with Jesus. This letter was written between A.D. 85-90 from Ephesus, before John's exile to the island of Patmos. Jerusalem had been destroyed in A.D. 70, and Christians were scattered throughout the empire. By the time John wrote this letter, Christianity had been around for more than a generation. It had faced and survived severe persecution. The main problem confronting the church at this time was declining commitment: many believers were conforming to the world's standards, failing to stand up for Christ, and compromising their faith. False teachers were plentiful, and they were accelerating the church's downward slide away from the Christian faith.

John wrote this letter to put believers back on track, to show the difference between light and darkness (truth and error), and to encourage the church to grow in genuine love for God and for one another. He also wrote to assure true believers that they possessed eternal life and to help them know that their faith was genuine—so they could enjoy all the benefits of being God's children. For more about John, see his Profile.

John opens his first letter to the churches similar to the way he began his Gospel, emphasizing that Christ ("the Word of life") is eternal, that God came into the world as a human, that he, John, was an eyewitness to Jesus' life, and that Jesus brings light and life.

As an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, John was qualified to teach the truth about him. The readers of this letter had not seen and heard Jesus themselves, but they could trust that what John wrote was accurate. We are like those second and third-generation Christians. Though we have not personally seen, heard, or touched Jesus, we have the New Testament record of his eyewitnesses, and we can trust that they spoke the truth about him. Read John 20:29 _____

John writes about having fellowship with other believers. There are three principles behind true Christian fellowship. First, our fellowship is grounded in the testimony of God's Word. Without this underlying strength, togetherness is impossible. Second, it is mutual, depending on the unity of believers. Third, it is renewed daily through the Holy Spirit. True fellowship combines social and spiritual interaction, and it is made possible only through a living relationship with Christ.

The first four verses of the epistle constitute its prologue. Here the writer affirmed the tangible reality of the Incarnation of Christ and announced that the goals of his letter were fellowship and joy.

The apostle declared his subject to be that which was from the beginning. Many have thought that he referred here to an absolute beginning, such as described in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. This is possible, but in view of the epistle's concern with the original message about Jesus Christ, it seems more likely that John referred to the beginning of the gospel proclamation. If so, the usage is similar to that found in 1 John 2:7, 24; and 3:11. The writer was then asserting that what he proclaimed was the truth about God's Son that was originally witnessed by the apostles who had direct contact with Him. Numbering himself among these apostolic eyewitnesses, the author described this proclamation as one which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.

With these introductory words, the apostle directed his first shafts at the heresy with which he was concerned. The antichrists brought new ideas, not those which were "from the beginning" of the gospel era. Moreover, their denial of the reality of the incarnate life of Christ could be countered by the experiences of the eyewitnesses whose testimony was founded on actual hearing, seeing, and touching. John's message is solidly based on a historical reality.

The exact meaning of the expression concerning the Word of life has been variously explained. By capitalizing the term "Word," the NIV interprets this as a title for the Lord like that found in John 1:1, 14. But there this title has no qualifying phrase such as the expression "of life," which is used here. It seems more natural to understand the phrase in the sense of "the message about life." Read Philippians 2:16 for a parallel reference: _____

Read also Acts 5:20 _____

1 John 1:2 seems to indicate that "life," not "word," is personified. Thus John was saying that his subject matter in this epistle deals with the original and well-attested verities that concern "the message about Life"—that is, about God's Son, who is Life.

The Life which the apostles proclaimed is intensely personal. Not only has that Life appeared, but it is nothing less than the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to people. The Incarnation is unquestionably in view.

The objective John had in mind in writing about these significant realities was that you, the readers, may have fellowship with us, the apostles. Since he later, in 2:12-14, made it perfectly clear that he regarded the readers as genuine Christians, his goal was obviously not their conversions. It is an interpretive mistake of considerable moment to treat the term "fellowship" as though it meant little more than "to be a Christian." The readers were already saved, but they needed this letter if they were to enjoy real fellowship with the apostolic circle to which the author belonged. In the final analysis that apostolic fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Probably the false teachers denied that the readers possessed eternal life. If so, and if the readers would begin to doubt God's guarantees on that point, their fellowship with the Father and the Son would be in jeopardy. This, of course, is not the same as saying that their salvation would be lost; but their fellowship depended on walking in the light (1 John 1:7). The danger to the readers was that they might be allured into darkness by the siren song of the antichrists. How seductive their godless appeal was emerges in this letter. John's aim, therefore, was to furnish his readership with a necessary reaffirmation of the basic truths of their faith so that their fellowship with God would be sustained.

John rounded off the prologue with a delicate personal touch. If this letter would succeed in fulfilling its aim for the readership, the writer himself (and his fellow apostles) would reap spiritual joy. We write this to make our joy

complete. This statement is similar to one the same author made in 3 John 4: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." The apostles so shared the heart of Christ for His people that their own joy was bound up in the spiritual well-being of those to whom they ministered. If the readers retained their true fellowship with God and with His apostles, no one would be any happier than John himself.

1 JOHN 1:5 – 2:14

Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Darkness represents what is sinful and evil. The statement “God is light” means that God is perfectly holy and true and that he alone can guide us out of the darkness of sin. Light is also related to truth in that light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God. If we want to have a relationship with God, we must put aside our sinful ways of living. To claim that we belong to him but then to go out and live for ourselves is hypocrisy. Christ will expose and judge such deceit.

Here John was confronting the first of three claims of the false teachers: that we can have fellowship with God and still walk in darkness. False teachers who thought that the physical body was evil or worthless taught one of two approaches to behavior: either they insisted on denying bodily desires through rigid discipline, or they approved of gratifying every physical lust because the body was going to be destroyed anyway. Obviously the second approach was more popular! Here John is saying that no one can claim to be a Christian and still live in evil and immorality. We can't love God and court sin at the same time.

John 1:8 addresses the second claim of the false teachers: that people had no natural tendency toward sin, that they were “without sin,” and that they were then incapable of sinning. This idea is at best self-deception and at worst an outright lie. The false teachers refused to take sin seriously. They wanted to be considered Christians, but they saw no need to confess and repent. The death of Christ did not mean much to them because they didn't think they needed it. Instead of repenting and being purified by Christ's blood, they were encouraging sin among believers. In this life we are always capable of sinning, so we should never let down our guard.

The false teachers not only denied that sin breaks our fellowship with God (1 John 1:6) and that they had a sinful nature (1 John 1:8), but they also denied that their conduct involved any sin at all (1 John 1:10). That was a lie that ignored one basic truth: all people are sinners by nature and by practice. It takes humility and honesty to recognize our weaknesses, and most of us would rather pretend that we are strong. But we need not fear revealing our sins to God—he knows them already. He will not push us away, no matter what we've done. Instead he will draw us to himself.

Confession frees us to enjoy fellowship with Christ. It eases our consciences and lightens our cares. But some Christians do not understand how it works. They feel so guilty that they confess the same sins over and over; then they wonder if they might have forgotten something. Other Christians believe that God forgives them when they confess, but if they died with unconfessed sins, they would be forever lost.

These Christians do not understand that God *wants* to forgive us. He allowed his beloved Son to die just so he could offer us pardon. When we come to Christ, he forgives all the sins we have committed or will ever commit. We don't need to confess the sins of the past all over again, and we don't need to fear that God will reject us if we don't keep our slate perfectly clean. Of course we should continue to confess our sins, but not because failure to do so will make us lose our salvation. Our relationship with Christ is secure. Instead, we should confess so that we can enjoy maximum fellowship and joy with him.

Do a study on the word translated "confess." Record the result here:

If God has forgiven us for our sins because of Christ's death, why must we confess our sins? In admitting our sins and receiving Christ's cleansing, we are:

- (1) agreeing with God that our sin truly is sin and that we are willing to turn from it
- (2) ensuring that we don't conceal our sins from him and consequently from ourselves
- (3) recognizing our tendency to sin and relying on his power to overcome it.

John uses the address "dear children" in a warm, fatherly way. He is not talking down to his readers but is showing affection for them. At this writing, John was a very old man. He had spent almost all his life in ministry, and many of his readers were indeed his spiritual children. To people who are feeling guilty and condemned, John offers reassurance.

Read the following verses and record your findings here:

Romans 8:33-34 _____

Hebrews 7:24-25 _____

Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He can stand before God as our mediator because his death satisfied the wrath of God against sin and paid the death penalty for our sin. Thus Christ both satisfies God's requirement and removes our sin. In him we are forgiven and purified.

How can you be sure that you belong to Christ? This passage gives two ways to know:

1. if you do what Christ says
2. and if you live as Christ wants.

What does Christ tell us to do? John answers in 1 John 3:23: "to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another." True Christian faith results in loving behavior; that is why John says that the way we act can give us assurance that we belong to Christ.

To "walk as Jesus did" or living as Christ did doesn't mean choosing 12 disciples, performing great miracles, and being crucified. We cannot merely copy Christ's life—much of what Jesus did had to do with his identity as God's Son, the fulfillment of his special role in dying for sin, and the cultural context of the first-century Roman world. To walk today as Christ did we must obey his teachings and follow his example of complete obedience to God and loving service to people.

The commandment to love others is both old and new. It is old because it comes from the Old Testament:

Read Leviticus 19:18 _____

It is new because Jesus interpreted it in a new way. Read John 13:34-35 and record your findings here: _____

In the Christian church, love is not only expressed by showing respect; it is also expressed through self-sacrifice and servanthood. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

John 15:13 _____

In fact, it can be defined as "selfless giving," reaching beyond friends to enemies and persecutors. Read also Matthew 5:43-48: _____

Love should be the unifying force and the identifying mark of the Christian community. Love is the key to walking in the light, because we cannot grow spiritually while we hate others. Our growing relationship with God will result in growing relationships with others.

Christian love is not a feeling but a choice. We can choose to be concerned with people's well-being and treat them with respect, whether or not we feel affection toward them. If we choose to love others, God will help us express our love.

John was writing to believers of all ages, his "dear children" who had experienced forgiveness through Jesus. The older men ("fathers") were mature in the faith and had a long-standing relationship with Christ. The young men had struggled with Satan's temptations and had won. The boys and girls had learned about Christ and were just beginning their spiritual journey. Each stage of life in the Christian pilgrimage builds upon the other. As children learn about Christ, they grow in their ability to win battles with temptation. As young adults move from victory to victory, they grow in their relationship with Christ. Older adults, having known Christ for years, have developed the wisdom needed to teach young people and start the cycle all over again. Has your Christian growth reached the maturity level appropriate for your stage in life?

Since fellowship is the objective of John's letter, it was natural for him to begin with a discussion of this subject. So in 1:5-2:11 he highlighted some fundamental principles which lie at the root of all genuine fellowship with God. These principles are of immense practical value to the everyday lives of all Christians. By these principles believers may test the reality of their personal communion with God. They may also discern whether they have come to know the God with whom they commune.

Basic Principles of Fellowship

In the prologue the author asserted that he was writing about things he had heard, seen, and touched. Here he began with something he had heard. This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you. By the words "from Him," John no doubt meant from the Lord Jesus Christ whose Incarnation he had just referred to in verses 1-2. The content of this "message," as John expressed it, is that God is Light; in Him there is no darkness at all. This precise statement is not found in the recorded words of Jesus, but the author was an apostle who heard much more than was "written down." There is no reason to think that John did not mean just what he said. This is a truth he had learned from the Lord.

John frequently describes God as Light. (John 1:4-5, 7-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46; Revelation 21:23) As Light, God both exposes man's sin and condemns it. If anyone walks in darkness, he is hiding from the truth which the Light reveals. Read John 3:19-20: _____

Thus revelatory terms such as "the truth" and "His Word" are prominent in 1 John 1:6, 8, 10. It is important that the "message" John had heard is the one he directed to his readers. Not all scholars agree that the false assertions which are condemned in verses 6, 8, and 10 are those of the false teachers, or antichrists, about whom John wrote later. John continued to use the word "we" throughout as though both he and his readership were in view. When carefully considered, the kind of claims which John refuted are precisely the kind which may be made by Christians who lose touch with spiritual realities and with God. The effort to find in verses 6-10 the doctrinal beliefs of heretical teachers lacks adequate exegetical foundation in the view of many modern scholars.

Since "God is Light," it follows that a Christian cannot truly claim communion with Him while living in the darkness. As John warned, If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. John knew, as does every perceptive pastor, that Christians sometimes feign spirituality while engaging in acts of disobedience. The Apostle Paul had to deal with a case of incest in the Corinthian assembly. Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5: _____

Therefore, Paul laid down a list of sins for which church members should come under church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). Spurious claims to fellowship with God have been a tragic reality throughout the history of the church.

A Christian who says he is in fellowship with God (who "is Light") but who is disobeying Him (walking "in the darkness") is lying (1 John 2:4). Ten times John used "darkness" to refer to sin (John 1:5; 3:19; 12:35 [twice]; 1 John 1:5-6; 2:8-9, 11 [twice]).

There can be only one sphere of real communion with God—the light itself. Thus John insisted that this is where a Christian will find that communion: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. It is strange that many commentators have understood the expression "with one another" as a reference to fellowship with other Christians. But this is not what the author is discussing here. The Greek pronoun for "one another" may refer to the two parties (God and the Christian) named in the first part of the statement. John's point is that if Christians live in the light where God is, then there is mutual fellowship between Himself and them. That is, they have fellowship with Him and He has fellowship with them. The light itself is the fundamental reality which they share. Thus true communion with God is living in the sphere where one's experience is illumined by the truth of what God is. It is to live open to His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. As John stated in verse 9, this entails believers' acknowledging whatever the light reveals is wrong in their lives.

It is significant that John talked of walking *in* the light, rather than *according to* the light. To walk *according to* the light would require sinless perfection and would make fellowship with God impossible for sinful humans. To walk *in* it, however, suggests instead openness and responsiveness to the light. John did not think of Christians as sinless, even though they are walking in the light, as is made clear in the last part of this verse. For John added that the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from every sin. This statement is grammatically coordinate with the preceding one, "We have fellowship with one another." The statement of verse 7, in its entirety, affirms that two things are true of believers who walk in the light:

- (a) they are in fellowship with God and
- (b) they are being cleansed from every sin.

Only in virtue of the Savior's work on the cross can there be any fellowship between imperfect creatures and the infinitely perfect God. But when a believer is experiencing true fellowship with God he may then be tempted to think or say that he is, at that moment at least, free from sin. John warned against this self-deluding conception. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If Christians understand the truth that God's Word teaches about the depravity of the human heart, they know that just because they are not *conscious* of failure does not mean that they are free from it. If the truth is "in" them as a controlling, motivating influence, this kind of self-deception will not take place. Whether someone claims to be "without sin" for a brief period of time or claims it as a permanent attainment, the claim is false.

In view of this, Christians ought to be ready at all times to acknowledge any failure which God's light may expose to them. Thus John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Though the translation "our sins" (after the words "forgive us") is quite admissible, "our" is not in the Greek text. The phrase (*tas hamartias*) contains only an article and noun and it is conceivable that the article is the type which grammarians call "the article of previous reference." If so, there is a subtle contrast between this expression and the "all unrighteousness" which follows it. John's thought might be paraphrased: "If we confess our sins, He... will forgive the sins we confess and moreover will even cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness."

Naturally only God knows at any moment the full extent of a person's unrighteousness. Each Christian, however, is responsible to acknowledge whatever the light makes him aware of, and when he does so, a complete and perfect cleansing is granted him. There is thus no need to agonize over sins of which one is unaware.

A Christian's fellowship with God is inseparably connected with the effectiveness of the blood which Jesus shed for him.

In modern times some have occasionally denied that a Christian needs to confess his sins and ask forgiveness. It is claimed that a believer already has forgiveness in Christ. Read Ephesians 1:7 and write your thoughts: _____

This point of view confuses the perfect position which a Christian has in God's Son (by which he is even "seated... with Him in the heavenly realms" with his needs as a failing individual on earth. What is considered in 1 John 1:9 may be described as "familial" forgiveness. It is perfectly understandable how a son may need to ask his father to forgive him for his faults while at the same time his position within the family is not in jeopardy. A Christian who never asks his heavenly Father for forgiveness for his sins can hardly have much sensitivity to the ways in which he grieves his Father.

Do a word study on "confess" and write the results here: _____

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Himself taught His followers to seek forgiveness of their sins in a prayer that was obviously intended for daily use. Read Matthew 6:11-12 and write what you learn here: _____

The teaching that a Christian should not ask God for daily forgiveness is an aberration. Moreover, confession of sin is *never* connected by John with the acquisition of eternal life, which is always conditioned on faith. First John 1:9 is not spoken to the unsaved, and the effort to turn it into a soteriological affirmation is misguided.

It may also be said that so long as the idea of walking in the light or darkness is correctly understood on an experiential level, these concepts offer no difficulty. Do a word study on "darkness" and write what you learn here: _____

When a believer loses personal touch with the God of light, he begins to live in darkness. But confession of sin is the way back into the light.

However, after a believer sins, he should not deny that sin. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His Word has no place in

our lives. This statement should be read in direct connection with verse 9. When a Christian is confronted by God's Word about his sins, he should admit them rather than deny them. To deny one's personal sin in the face of God's testimony to the contrary, is to "make" God "out to be a liar." By contradicting His Word, a person rejects it and refuses to give it the proper "place" in his life.

Some of John's readers might have thought his insistence on the sinfulness of Christians somehow would discourage holiness. The opposite was John's intention as he affirmed: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. He addressed them affectionately as an apostle with a fatherly concern using teknia seven times in this epistle and once in his gospel. Read John 13:33 for context: _____

A similar word, tekna ("born ones") occurs in John 1:12; 11:52; 1 John 3:2, 10; 5:2; 2 John 1, 4, 13; and 3 John 4. On the other hand, paidia ("children") occurs only twice in 1 John. The statements in 1:8, 10 about believers' sinful tendencies do not encourage sin; they actually put perceptive Christians on guard against it. If a believer tries to make the claims denounced in 1:8 and 10, then he is most likely to fail to recognize and reject sin.

But sin is nevertheless a reality, however much John wished his readers would not commit it. So he assured them that they have One who speaks to the Father in their defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. John did not want his readers to sin, but he knew that none of them was perfect and that all would need the help available from their Advocate.

Do a word study on "advocate" and record the results _____

If God extends mercies to a sinning believer—and the believer does not reap the full consequences of his failure in his personal experience—that fact is not due to the merits of that believer himself. On the contrary, the grace obtained through the advocacy of Christ is to be traced, like all of God's grace, to His all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross. Should any sinning believer wonder on what grounds he might secure God's mercy after he has failed, the answer is found in this verse. So adequate is Jesus Christ as God's

atoning Sacrifice that the efficacy of His work extends not merely to the sins of Christians themselves, but also to the sins of the whole world. In saying this, John was clearly affirming the view that Christ genuinely died for everyone. Read the following verses and record your thoughts:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 19: _____

Hebrews 2:9 _____

This does not mean, of course, that everyone will be saved. It means rather that anyone who hears the gospel *can* be saved if he so desires.

In recent times there has been much scholarly discussion of the Greek word *hilasmos*, which the NIV renders as "atoning Sacrifice." God's wrath against sin may not be a concept easily reconciled in the modern mind, but it is thoroughly biblical. *Hilasmos* could be fittingly rendered "propitiation." Read the following verses and find the reference to a form of *hilasmos*:

Romans 3:25 _____

Luke 18:13 _____

Hebrews 2:17 _____

The Cross has indeed propitiated (satisfied) God and has met His righteous demands so thoroughly that His grace and mercy are abundantly available to both saved and unsaved alike.

1 JOHN 2:15 – 2:27

Some people think that worldliness is limited to external behavior—the people we associate with, the places we go, the activities we enjoy. Worldliness is also internal because it begins in the heart and is characterized by three attitudes:

- (1) *the cravings of sinful man*—preoccupation with gratifying physical desires
- (2) *the lust of his eyes*—craving and accumulating things, bowing to the god of materialism
- (3) *boasting of what he has and does*—obsession with one’s status or importance. When the serpent tempted Eve, he tempted her in these areas. Also, when the devil tempted Jesus in the desert, these were his three areas of attack.

Read the following verses and write your findings here:

Genesis 3:6 _____

Matthew 4:1-11 _____

By contrast, God values self-control, a spirit of generosity, and a commitment to humble service. It is possible to give the impression of avoiding worldly pleasures while still harboring worldly attitudes in one’s heart. It is also possible, like Jesus, to love sinners and spend time with them while maintaining a commitment to the values of God’s kingdom.

When our attachment to possessions is strong, it’s hard to believe that what we want will one day pass away. It may be even harder to believe that the person who does the will of God will live forever. But this was John’s conviction based on the facts of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and promises. Knowing that this evil world and our desires for its pleasures will end can give us courage to control our greedy, self-indulgent behavior and to continue doing God’s will.

We usually think of the "last days" as the time between Christ's first and second comings. The first-century readers of 1 John lived in the last days, and so do we. During this time, antichrists (false teachers who pretend to be Christians and who lure weak members away from Christ) will appear. Finally, just before the world ends, one great antichrist will arise. Read the following verses:

Revelation 13 _____

Revelation 19:20 _____

Revelation 20:10 _____

We do not need to fear these evil people, however. The Holy Spirit will show us their errors, so we will not be deceived. However, we must teach God's Word clearly and carefully to the peripheral, weak members among us so that they won't fall prey to these teachers who "come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Check these concepts against Matthew 7:15: _____

According to 2:19, the antichrists were not total strangers to the church; they once had been in the church, but they did not really belong to it. John does not say why they left; it is clear that their reasons for joining in the first place were wrong. Some people may call themselves Christians for less than the best reasons. Perhaps going to church is a family tradition. Maybe they like the social and business contacts they make there. Or possibly going to church is a long-standing habit, and they have never stopped to ask themselves why they do it. What is your main reason for being a Christian? Unless it is a Christ-centered reason, you may not really belong. You don't have to settle for less than the best. You can become personally acquainted with Jesus Christ and become a loyal, trustworthy follower.

Anointing usually referred to the pouring out of special olive oil. Oil was used to consecrate kings and special servants for service, and also was used by the church when someone was sick.

Read the following verses:

1 Samuel 16:1,13 _____

James 5:14 _____

“You have an anointing from the Holy One” could read, “The Holy Spirit has been given to you by the Father and the Son.” When a person becomes a Christian, he or she receives the Holy Spirit. One way the Holy Spirit helps the believer and the church is by communicating truth. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit guides believers to him (John 16:13). People who are opposed to Christ are also opposed to his truth, and the Holy Spirit is not working in their lives. When we are led by the Spirit, we can stand against false teachers and the antichrist.

Apparently the antichrists in John’s day were claiming faith in God while denying and opposing Christ. To do so, John firmly states, is impossible. Because Jesus is God’s Son and the Messiah, to deny Christ is to reject God’s way of revealing himself to the world. A person who accepts Christ as God’s Son, however, accepts God the Father at the same time. The two are one and cannot be separated. Many cultists today call themselves Christians, but they deny that Jesus is divine. We must expose these heresies and oppose such teachings so that the weak believers among us do not succumb to them.

Some of these Christians had heard the gospel, very likely from John himself. They knew that Christ was God’s Son, that he died for their sins and was raised to give them new life, and that he would return and establish his kingdom in its fullness. But their fellowship was being infiltrated by teachers who denied these basic doctrines of the Christian faith, and some of the believers were in danger of succumbing to false arguments. John encouraged them to hold on to the Christian truth they heard at the beginning of their walk with Christ. It is important to grow in our knowledge of the Lord, to deepen our understanding through careful study, and to teach these truths to others. But no matter how much we learn, we must never abandon the basic truths about Christ. Jesus will always be God’s Son, and his sacrifice for our sins is permanent. No truth will ever contradict these teachings in the Bible.

Christ had promised to send the Holy Spirit to teach his followers and to remind them of all that Christ had taught. Read John 14:26: _____

As a result, Christians have the Holy Spirit within them to keep them from going astray. In addition, they have the God-inspired Scriptures, against which they can test questionable teachings. To stay true to Christ, we must follow his Word and his Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit help you discern truth from error.

In the prologue John had expressed the general aim and goal of his letter. Now he told his audience the specific concerns which motivated the letter. In that sense he articulated the precise purpose of this epistle.

1 JOHN 2:28 – 3:10

The visible proof of being a Christian is right behavior. Many people do good deeds but don't have faith in Jesus Christ. Others claim to have faith but rarely produce good deeds. A deficit in either faith or right behavior will be a cause for shame when Christ returns. Because true faith always results in good deeds, those who claim to have faith *and* who consistently do what is right are true believers. Good deeds cannot produce salvation, but they are necessary proof that true faith is actually present.

Read the following verses and record your thoughts here:

Ephesians 2:8-9: _____

James 2:14-17 _____

As believers, our self-worth is based on the fact that God loves us and calls us his children. We are his children *now*, not just sometime in the distant future. Knowing that we are his children should encourage us to live as Jesus did.

Romans 8:14-17: _____

Galatians 3:26-27: _____

Galatians 4:6-7: _____

John tells us who we are—members of God's family. 1 John 3:2 tells us who we are becoming—reflections of God. The rest of the chapter tells us what we have as we grow to resemble God:

(1) victory over sin (1 John 3:4-9)

- (2) love for others (1 John 3:10-18)
- (3) confidence before God (1 John 3:19-24)

The Christian life is a process of becoming more and more like Christ. This process will not be complete until we see Christ face to face, but knowing that it is our ultimate destiny should motivate us to purify ourselves. Complete your reading for this session by reading the following verses:

Romans 8:29 _____

1 Corinthians 13:12 _____

Philippians 3:21 _____

To purify means to keep morally straight, free from the corruption of sin. God also purifies us, but there is action we must take to remain morally fit

1 Timothy 5:22 _____

James 4:8 _____

1 Peter 1:22 _____

There is a difference between committing a sin and continuing to sin. Even the most faithful believers sometimes commit sins, but they do not cherish a particular sin and choose to commit it. A believer who commits a sin repents, confesses, and finds forgiveness. A person who continues to sin, by contrast, is not sorry for what he or she is doing. Thus this person never confesses and never receives forgiveness. Such a person is in opposition to God, no matter what religious claims he or she makes.

Under the Old Testament sacrifice system, a lamb without blemish was offered as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

Read John 1:29 and record what you learn: _____

Because Jesus lived a perfect life and sacrificed himself for our sins, we can be completely forgiven (1 John 2:2). We can look back to his death for us and know that we need never suffer eternal death. Confirm by reading 1 Peter 1:18-20 _____

We all have areas where temptation is strong and habits are hard to conquer. These weaknesses give the devil a foothold, so we must deal with our areas of vulnerability. If we are struggling with a particular sin, however, these verses are not directed at us, even if for the time we seem to keep on sinning. John is not talking about people whose victories are still incomplete; he is talking about people who make a practice of sinning and look for ways to justify it.

Three steps are necessary to find victory over prevailing sin:

- (1) seek the power of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word
- (2) stay away from tempting situations
- (3) seek the help of the body of Christ—be open to their willingness to hold you accountable and to pray for you.

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin” means that true believers do not make a practice of sinning, nor do they become indifferent to God’s moral law. All believers still sin, but they are working to gain victory over sin. “God’s seed remains in him” means that true believers do not make a practice of sinning because God’s new life has been born into them.

We are “born of God” when the Holy Spirit lives in us and gives us Jesus’ new life. Being born again is more than a fresh start; it is a rebirth, receiving a new family name based on Christ’s death for us. When this happens, God forgives us and accepts us; the Holy Spirit gives us new minds and hearts, lives in us, and begins helping us to become like Christ.

Our perspective changes too because we have a mind that is renewed day by day by the Holy Spirit. Complete your reading for this session with:

Romans 12:2 _____

Ephesians 4:22-24 _____

John 3:1-21 _____

1 JOHN 3:11 – 4:6

Cain killed his brother, Abel, when God accepted Abel's offering and not his (Genesis 4:1-16). Abel's offering showed that Cain was not giving his best to God, and Cain's jealous anger drove him to murder. People who are morally upright expose and shame those who aren't. If we live for God, the world will often hate us, because we make them painfully aware of their immoral way of living.

John echoes Jesus' teaching that whoever hates another person is a murderer at heart.

Read Matthew 5:21-22 and record your thoughts: _____

Christianity is a religion of the heart; outward compliance alone is not enough. Bitterness against someone who has wronged you is an evil cancer within you and will eventually destroy you. We should never let a "bitter root" grow in our lives. Read Hebrews 12:15 for more: _____

Do a word study on the "love" of this section: _____

This love is an action, not a feeling. It produces selfless, sacrificial giving. The greatest act of love is giving oneself for others. How can we lay down our lives? When we serve others with no thought of receiving anything in return, this is true love. Sometimes it is easier to say we'll die for others than to truly live for them—this involves putting others' desires first. Jesus taught this same principle of love in John 15:13: _____

Our verses for today give an example of how to lay down our lives for others—to help those in need. This is strikingly similar to James's teaching. Read James 2:14-17 and record your thoughts: _____

Many are afraid that they don't love others as they should. They feel guilty because they think they are not doing enough to show proper love to Christ. Their consciences bother them. John has these people in mind in this letter. How do we escape the gnawing accusations of our consciences? Not by ignoring them or rationalizing our behavior, but by setting our hearts on God's love. When we feel guilty, we should remind ourselves that God knows our motives as well as our actions. His voice of assurance is stronger than the accusing voice of our conscience. Read the following verses and paraphrase what they teach:

Romans 8:1 _____

Hebrews 9:14-15 _____

So if you are living for the Lord but feeling that you are not good enough, remind yourself that God is greater than your conscience.

If your conscience is clear, you can come to God without fear, confident that your requests will be heard. John reaffirms Jesus' promise that whatever we ask for will be given to us. Read the following verses for confirmation:

Matthew 7:7 _____

Matthew 21:22 _____

John 9:31 _____

John 15:7 _____

You will receive if you obey and do what pleases him because you will then be asking in line with God's will. If you are truly seeking God's will, there are some requests you will not make.

Biblically, a person's name stands for his or her character. It represents who he or she really is. We are to believe not only in Jesus' words, but also in his very person as the Son of God. Moreover, to believe "in the name" means to pattern your life after Christ's, to become more like him by uniting yourself with him. And if we are living like Christ, we will "love one another."

The mutual relationship, living in Christ as he lives in us, shows itself in Christians who keep these three essential commands:

- (1) believe in Christ
- (2) love the brothers and sisters
- (3) live morally upright lives. The Spirit's presence is not only spiritual and mystical, but it is also practical. Our conduct verifies his presence.

Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits" means that we shouldn't believe everything we hear just because someone says it is a message inspired by God. There are many ways to test teachers to see if their message is truly from the Lord.

One is to check to see if their words match what God says in the Bible.

Read the following verses and and record three additional tests:

1 John 2:19 _____

1 John 3:23-24 _____

1 John 4:6 _____

But the most important test of all, says John, is what they believe about Christ. It is important to see if they are indeed speaking God's truth.

Some people believe everything they read or hear. Unfortunately, many ideas printed and taught are not true. Christians should have faith, but they should not be gullible. Verify every message you hear, even if the person who brings it says it's from God. If the message is truly from God, it will be consistent with Christ's teachings.

The antichrist will be a person who epitomizes all that is evil, and he will be readily received by an evil world. He is more fully described in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 and Revelation 13. Read these sections and record what you learn about the antichrist: _____

The "spirit of the antichrist" is already here.

It is easy to be frightened by the wickedness we see all around us and overwhelmed by the problems we face. Evil is obviously much stronger than we are. John assures us, however, that God is even stronger. He will conquer all evil—and his Spirit and his Word live in our hearts!

False teachers are popular with the world because, like the false prophets of the Old Testament, they tell people what they want to hear. John warns that Christians who faithfully teach God's Word will not win any popularity contests in the world. People don't want to hear their sins denounced; they don't want to listen to demands that they change their behavior. A false teacher will be well received by non-Christians.

1 JOHN 4:7-21

Everyone believes that love is important, but love is usually thought of as a feeling. The Bible often speaks of a sort of love that is a choice and an action. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 writing your thoughts here: _____

God is the source of our love: he loved us enough to sacrifice his Son for us. Jesus is our example of what it means to love; everything he did in life and death was supremely loving. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love; He lives in our hearts and makes us more and more like Christ. God's love always involves a choice and an action, and our love should be like his.

John says, "God is love," not "Love is God." Our world, with its shallow and selfish view of love, has turned these words around and contaminated our understanding of love. The world thinks that love is what makes a person feel good and that it is all right to sacrifice moral principles and others' rights in order to obtain such "love." But that isn't real love; it is the exact opposite—selfishness. And God is not that kind of "love." Real love is like God, who is holy, just, and perfect. If we truly know God, we will love as he does.

Jesus is God's *only* Son. While all believers are sons and daughters of God, only Jesus lives in this special unique relationship. Read John 1:18 and John 3:16 for confirmation: _____

Love explains:

- (1) why God creates—because he loves, he creates people to love
- (2) why God cares—because he loves them, he cares for sinful people
- (3) why we are free to choose—God wants a loving response from us
- (4) why Christ died—his love for us caused him to seek a solution to the problem of sin
- (5) why we receive eternal life—God's love expresses itself to us forever.

Nothing sinful or evil is part of God's character. He is absolute goodness. He cannot overlook, condone, or excuse sin as though it never happened. He loves us, but his love does not make him morally lax. If we trust in Christ, however, we will not have to bear the penalty for our sins. Read the following verses and record your thoughts:

1 Peter 2:24 _____

Romans 5:18 _____

If no one has ever seen God, how can we ever know him? John in his Gospel said, "God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus is the complete expression of God in human form and he has revealed God to us. When we love one another, the invisible God reveals himself to others through us, and his love is made complete.

Some people enjoy being with others. They make friends with strangers easily and always are surrounded by many friends. Other people are shy or reserved. They have a few friends, but they are uncomfortable talking with people they don't know or mingling in crowds. Shy people don't need to become extroverts in order to love others. John isn't telling us *how many* people to love, but *how much* to love the people we already know. Our job is to love faithfully the people God has given us to love, whether there are two or two hundred of them. If God sees that we are ready to love others, he will bring them to us. No matter how shy we are, we don't need to be afraid of the love commandment. God provides us the strength to do what he asks.

When we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit. God's presence in our lives is proof that we really belong to him. He also gives us the power to love. Confirm by reading the following verses:

Romans 5:5 _____

Romans 8:9 _____

2 Corinthians 1:22 _____

Romans 8:16 _____

The day of judgment is that time when all people will appear before Christ and be held accountable for their actions.

If we are afraid of the future, eternity, or God's judgment, we can remind ourselves of God's love. Romans 8:38-39 and record your thoughts: _____

We can resolve our fears first by focusing on his immeasurable love for us, and then by allowing him to love others through us. God's love is the source of all human love, and it spreads like fire. In loving his children, God kindles a flame in their hearts.

It is easy to say we love God when that love doesn't cost us anything more than weekly attendance at church. But the real test of our love for God is how we treat the people right in front of us—our family members and fellow believers. We cannot truly love God while neglecting to love those who are created in his image.

1 JOHN 5:1-21

When we become Christians, we become part of God's family, with fellow believers as our brothers and sisters. It is God who determines who the other family members are, not us. We are simply called to accept and love them.

Jesus never promised that obeying him would be easy. But the hard work and self-discipline of serving Christ is no burden to those who love him. And if our load starts to feel heavy, we can always trust Christ to help us bear it. Read Matthew 11:28-30 for more: _____

The phrase "came by water and blood" may refer to Jesus' baptism and his crucifixion. At this time, there was a false teaching in circulation that said Jesus was "the Christ" only between his baptism and his death—that is, he was merely human until he was baptized, at which time "the Christ" then descended upon him but then later left him before his death on the cross. But if Jesus died only as a man, he could not have taken upon himself the sins of the world, and Christianity would be an empty religion. Only an act of God could take away the punishment that we deserve for our sin.

The Gospels twice record God's clear declaration that Jesus was his Son—at Jesus' baptism, and at his transfiguration. Read the following verses and record your thoughts:

Matthew 3:16-17 _____

Matthew 17:5 _____

Whoever believes in God's Son has eternal life. He is all you need. You don't need to *wait* for eternal life, because it begins the moment you believe. You don't need to *work* for it, because it is already yours. You don't need to *worry* about it, because you have been given eternal life by God himself.

Some people *hope* that they will receive eternal life. John says we can *know* we have it. Our certainty is based on God's promise that he has given us eternal life through his Son. This is true whether you feel close to God or far

away from him. Eternal life is not based on feelings, but on facts.

John emphasizes God's will, not our will. When we communicate with God, we shouldn't demand what we want; rather we discuss with him what He wants for us. If we align our prayers to His will, He will listen. We can pray with confidence!

Commentators differ widely in their thoughts about what the sin that leads to death is, and whether the death it causes is physical or spiritual. Paul wrote that some Christians had died because they took Communion "in an unworthy manner" and Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead when they lied to God. Read the following verses and record your thoughts:

1 Corinthians 11:27-30 _____

Acts 5:1-11 _____

For more insight, read the following passages:

Mark 3:29 _____

Hebrews 6:4-6 _____

In most cases, however, even if we knew what the terrible sin is, we would have no sure way of knowing whether a certain person had committed it. Therefore most believe that we should continue praying for our loved ones and for our Christian brothers and sisters, leaving the judgment up to God.

Christians commit sins, of course, but they ask God to forgive them, and then they continue serving him. God has freed believers from their slavery to Satan. The world does not have the Christian's freedom to obey God. Unless they come to Christ in faith, they have no choice but to belong to Satan. There is no middle ground; people either belong to God and obey him, or they live under Satan's control. They are either citizens of the Kingdom of this World or citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

An idol is anything that substitutes for the true faith, anything that robs Christ of his full deity and humanity, any human idea that claims to be more authoritative than the Bible, any loyalty that replaces God at the center of our lives.

John presents a clear picture of Christ. What we think about Jesus Christ is central to our teaching, preaching, and living. Jesus is the God-man, fully God and fully human. He came to earth to die in our place for our sins. Through faith in him, we are given eternal life and the power to do his will. What is your answer to the most important question you could ever ask— who is Jesus Christ? Write your answer here as you conclude this section:

2 JOHN

This epistle begins in the way ancient letters usually began. The writer announced himself, stated the identity of the recipient(s), and offered a greeting. But, John did not specifically name "the chosen lady" and the text reads naturally if a church were addressed. The preamble stresses that "truth" and "love" are the two major concerns of this letter.

The elder commenced his communication by asserting that he loved this church and its members in the truth. So in fact did all who know the truth. This seems to suggest that the church addressed was well known in Christian circles. It is called "chosen." Discuss why this term was used: _____

The love of John and others for this community of believers was founded and predicated on God's truth. It arose because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever. Christian love is by no means mere sentimentalism or humanistic compassion, but is motivated by a knowledge of the truth which has been revealed in Christ. Truth is the basis of love. It is precisely this truth, on account of which the church is loved, that the church must be careful to guard.

Instead of just wishing grace, mercy, and peace for his readers, John announced that they would be experiencing these things in truth and love. (Interestingly Paul and Peter in the greetings in their epistles include only grace and peace, except for 1 and 2 Timothy, which include "grace, mercy, and peace." But the qualities of truth and love are precisely the ones John enjoined his readers to maintain. If they do maintain them, then they can expect to enjoy the "grace, mercy, and peace" which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ. The fact that these blessings stem from both the Father and the Son affirms the deity of Christ. The Father's Son is an unusual expression.

God's blessings—favor, compassion, and inner harmony and tranquillity are enjoyed in an atmosphere where "truth" and "love" are in control. John had written that truth "will be with us." He added that grace, mercy, and peace will be with us.

Getting to his point immediately, John expressed his concerns

(a) that the church would continue to be obedient to God and

(b) that the believers would resist all inroads by false teachers.

These two objectives, of course, are inseparable. Truth must be practiced

Evidently John had encountered members of this church somewhere and was delighted to observe their obedience to the truth. He used their fidelity, which he had observed, as a positive starting point. What they were doing was precisely what the Father commanded. To walk in the truth is to be obedient to the truth God has made known. John wanted the whole church to do the same.

What John wrote to the church was not some new requirement but one the church has had from the beginning. It is nothing other than the command that we love one another. As in the 1 John, the apostle encouraged his readers to follow the old ways as he sought to help them resist the innovations of the antichrists.

But what does it mean to “love one another”? The answer: This is love, that we walk in obedience to His commands. As he had also done in 1 John 5:2-3a, John defined Christian love in terms of obedience to God. A Christian who truly seeks God’s best for his brothers and sisters can only do so by obeying what God has commanded him to do. Love undirected by God’s revealed will may easily degenerate into unwise, sentimental activity.

Believers who are “walking in the truth” (2 John 4), that is, living in response to what God has revealed, love each other. Brotherly love is part of the truth God has revealed and commanded.

The latter part of verse 6 is difficult in the original. An alternative rendering would be, “And this is the command, that you walk in it as you have heard from the beginning.” Under this construction of the text, John was affirming that obeying God’s commands meant adhering to what had been commanded in the form in which it was expressed from the beginning. Taken in this way, the writer’s words were designed to warn against any “reinterpretation” of God’s will, such as the antichrists might propose.

The movement from the plural “commands” (v. 6a) to the singular command (v. 6b) is natural for John. Review 1 John 3:22-23 for confirmation.

The many specifics of God's will can be thought of as a single obligation.

Truth must be protected

The reason for John's admonition is that many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. As in the first epistle, the apostle expressed his concern that many false teachers had arisen. These teachers were "deceivers" and "ones who lead astray."

Their very number (as well as a probable variety of erroneous ideas) made them a substantial threat to Christian churches such as this one. What bound the false teachers and their views together was their unbelief and rejection of Christ's Incarnation.

The present participle "coming" (in the phrase "coming in the flesh") focuses on the principle involved in the Incarnation: Jesus taking on (coming in) and continuing with a human nature (1 John 4:2). This truth about "Jesus Christ... coming in the flesh" is what the deceivers denied. Some taught that Jesus' body was not truly human; it only appeared that way. That, of course, contradicted the truth of the Incarnation, that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. Read Colossians 2:9 for more information: _____

Such a denial marks that person as a deceiver as well as an antichrist. The word the before "deceiver" and "antichrist" could be misunderstood. The English article "a" (rather than "the") is sometimes appropriate for rendering the Greek definite article when an unnamed individual is in view. John did not mean to say here that "any such person" is *the* unique, end-time figure known as the Antichrist.

Because of the appearance of these deceivers, the readers needed to watch out for the disastrous spiritual effects which any compromise with their ideas could lead to. The danger is not loss of salvation, but, more likely, loss of reward. But the author's touch was both delicate and humble. He regarded himself as a co-laborer with his readers and their loss would be shared by him if they did not effectively resist false doctrine. The antichrists were a threat to the work of the Lord in which he and they were mutually engaged.

It should be noted that the phrase "be rewarded fully" shows that failure by the readers would not totally deprive them of reward. God would not forget what they had done for Him. But the fullness of their reward was threatened by the subversion of the antichrists. Read the following verses for more information:

Hebrews 6:10

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

The danger is now spelled out clearly. Anyone who runs ahead, or "turns aside," and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God. These words suggest strongly that the apostle was thinking here of defection from the truth by those who had once held to it. The word "continue" is familiar because of its frequent use (23 times) in 1 John in reference to the "abiding" life. A person who "does not continue" in a thing has evidently once been in it. The New Testament writers were realists about the possibility of true Christians falling prey to heresy and warned against it.

John had just cautioned his readers about possible loss of reward (2 John 8). Now, in verse 9, they were cautioned not to "overstep" the boundaries of sound doctrine, but to "remain" where they were, to "continue in the teaching of Christ." To deviate from the truth is to leave God behind. God is not with a person who does so. What such a person does, he does without God.

In contrast with the defector from the truth, whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. This says that God is with those who persist in the true doctrine about Christ. But John no doubt had more in mind than mere creedal orthodoxy. He had in mind what he also taught in John 8:31 and 15:1-7. Read those verses and record your thoughts:

For John, a person who "continues in the teaching" is one who "abides" or "makes his home" there. His connection with the truth is vital and dynamic, so he has a dynamic relationship with God whose commands he obeys. Read John 14:21-23 for another expression of this kind of relationship: _____

"Abiding" and obedience are inseparable in Johannine thought. But "continuing" in the truth about Jesus Christ calls for a firm response against those who have become purveyors of false doctrine. Hence John added, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him." In the Greco-Roman world of John's day, a traveling philosopher or religious teacher was a familiar phenomenon. Christian preachers also traveled and relied on local believers for support and hospitality. But the readers of 2 John were urged to be discriminating. If someone "comes" to them (the implication is "in the role of a traveling teacher") without also bringing sound doctrine, he should be refused help. The Greek verb for "bring" is "to carry", which continues the travel motif. If the truth is not part of his "baggage," he should receive no hospitality from those who are loyal to that truth. By contrast, hospitality *is* to be shown to true believers (3 John 5, 8.)

But a deceiver is not even to be given a greeting of welcome, since to do so would be to share in his wicked, "evil" work. "Welcome him" (2 John 10-11) is literally, "Say 'Greetings' to him." In Greek "greetings" here is related to "to rejoice, be glad." It was used as a cordial address of welcome or farewell, something like "I am glad to see you" or "I wish you well."

To some modern minds these instructions seem unduly rigid and harsh. A great part of the problem, however, lies in our modern inclination to be highly tolerant of religious differences. One must carefully face the fact that the New Testament writers did not share this spirit of toleration. Their commitment to the truth and their consciousness of the dangers of religious error called forth many stern denunciations of false teachers. Not surprisingly, this modern age, having a diminishing sense of the dangers of heresy, has lost its convictions about the truth.

But the passage ought not to be taken beyond the writer's intent. He was thinking about false teachers actively engaged in disseminating error. In this

activity they are not to be helped at all. Even a word of greeting might tend to give them a sense of acceptance that could be misconstrued. The readers were to make plain from their aloofness that they in no way condoned the activities of these men. The same must be true today. But John did not directly address the question of how efforts should be made to win such people to a recognition of the truth. Yet it is clear that any such efforts must be conducted so that they are not confused with any form affirmation.

John's farewell is similar to his words in 3 John 13. Like the format of the letter as a whole, such conclusions were probably conventional. But this in no way suggests that they were insincere. John indicated that he had much to write to them but preferred face-to-face communication. He anticipated a visit soon, when he would have more to say to them. Such a personal visit would make his joy complete. What he might have written if he had not been planning to see them can perhaps be surmised from the contents of 1 John. In some respects, 2 John reads like a condensed version of the first epistle. It is likely that the author would have amplified his admonitions in ways similar to what he had done in the larger letter.

John gave farewell greetings from the children of your chosen sister. *If* this letter were written to an actual Christian woman, one would expect the greetings to come from her sister, not from her sister's children. Because of the anonymity of the references to people, once again it seems easiest to construe this as a greeting sent by the members ("children," v. 1) of a "sister" church to the church to which John was writing; those "chosen" (elected) by God's sovereign grace. As such it gives testimony to the network of Christian interest and concern which united the members of different churches in the earliest years of the faith.

3 JOHN

John briefly greeted the recipient of this letter affectionately. This salutation is unlike most New Testament Epistles, in that it lacks the usual wish for grace and peace. However, the farewell includes "Peace to you."

My dear friend translates also as beloved and is related to the verb for love. The spirit of Christian love prevailed in the elder's attitude toward Gaius. It is precisely this same spirit which was to dictate Gaius' attitude toward traveling preachers such as Demetrius. Three times more the writer addressed Gaius with this same significant term of address.

Moreover, the apostle's love for Gaius was in the truth, that is, it was genuine and in accord with God's truth. In the same way Gaius was to express his Christian love by a hospitality that supported the truth. As in John's two earlier epistles, the thought of this letter is dominated by concern for truth and love in Christian experience.

The elder was pleased with Gaius' spiritual condition and wished that he might get along equally well on a physical level. As verses 2-6 show, Gaius was evidently an outstanding spiritual man. The words I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you are not a mere conventional expression of good wishes. The apostle was concerned for the temporal well-being of others, and not only for their spiritual welfare. He must surely have learned this from Jesus whose concern for people's physical troubles is attested in all four Gospels. Certainly this is a biblical warrant for Christians today to pray for the temporal needs of their spiritual peers.

The elder was also glad to have learned from some brothers about Gaius' loyalty to the truth. The words, "tell about your faithfulness to the truth," somewhat paraphrase the Greek which more literally reads, "witness to your truth." The apostle was saying he had heard that Gaius was a man of the truth. Quite possibly the "brothers" who brought this testimony to John had enjoyed Gaius' hospitality, the same thing which the writer apparently urged on behalf of Demetrius. The words, and how you continue to walk in the truth, elaborate what the "brothers" had said about Gaius. Gaius' style of life (his "walk") was consistent with God's truth.

Nothing made John happier than to hear that his children were walking in the truth. This wording is similar to that in 2 John 4. It is possible

that by referring to Gaius as one of his "children," John meant that Gaius was a convert of his. Paul's use of this idea is well known. Read the following verses for confirmation:

1 Corinthians 4:14 _____

Galatians 4:19 _____

Philippians 2:22 _____

On the other hand the elderly apostle may simply have thought of those to whom he ministered from a paternal perspective, with fatherly concern.

After praising the general conduct of Gaius, the writer moved directly to a matter that concerned him. Those who go forth to preach the truth need the support of Christians in the places where they travel. Unlike Diotrephes, Gaius gave this kind of assistance and the apostle wished to assure him that this was the proper course of action. This contrasts, interestingly, with the emphasis in 2 John 10-11 on *not* giving hospitality to false teachers.

Addressing Gaius again as "beloved," the writer commended his hospitality to Christians who came his way. The NIV adopts a form of text in which brothers and strangers are equated. But many manuscripts read, "for the brothers and for strangers." Read in this way, the writer would refer to the traveling preachers as "the brothers," while also asserting that Gaius' hospitality did not stop there but extended also to "strangers" (probably especially Christians) who happened to be in the vicinity.

For more regarding Christian responsibility to entertain strangers, read Hebrews 13:2: _____

About this course of conduct, the apostle declared, "You are faithful in what you are doing." That is to say, such conduct is praiseworthy because it is an act of fidelity to the truth of God. Again, as in 2 John 1-2, love stems from truth.

The report of Gaius' hospitality (your love) had reached the church where John now was. This may well have been the church at Jerusalem if the epistle was written before A.D. 66.

Undoubtedly, if this is so, Gaius would have been pleased to know that the highly respected Jerusalem congregation had heard of his service to the servants of God. But John now followed up this encouragement with an exhortation: "You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God." The words "you will do well" are idiomatic in the original and virtually equal to "please." The verb for "send... on their way" no doubt carried in general usage the connotation of making adequate provisions for one's guests, both while they stayed and at the time of their departure. The force of the apostle's words was to enjoin on Gaius an openhanded generosity toward the traveling brethren. Nothing less than such generosity would be "worthy of God," who expressed His supreme generosity in the giving of His Son.

The reason for such behavior (the verse begins in the Greek with the untranslated "for") is that those whom Gaius should help have gone out for the sake of the Name. The "Name" here is, of course, that of Jesus which was now exalted above every name. To go out on behalf of that Name was a supreme honor. Read Philippians 2:9-11 and Acts 5:41 for more information: _____

Naturally, it was inappropriate for those who did so to seek support from those who did not believe in or honor that Name. Thus the Lord's servants went out, receiving no help from the pagans. Even today, there is something unseemly in a preacher or missionary of the gospel soliciting funds from people to whom he offers God's free salvation.

But the fact that faithful Christian preachers sought no help from the unsaved meant that Christians were under a special obligation to assist them. By extending the needed help (showing hospitality to such men), Christians such as Gaius could work together for the truth. This last phrase might be better rendered "be fellow workers with the truth" (NASB). The thought is of partnership with what the truth accomplishes in people's hearts and lives. It was a noble objective for Gaius to follow.

Obviously, not everyone shared this worthy objective, however. John stated, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us." The simple reference to "the church" suggests strongly that this was the church to which Gaius belonged. It sounds as if Gaius may not have known about John's letter to the church. It may well be

that Diotrephes had suppressed it and kept it from the church's attention. Diotrephes, John observed, was motivated by a love for preeminence in the church. He was not the last church leader to be so motivated. The temptation to use a role in the Christian assembly as a means of self-gratification remains a real one that all servants of God need to resist. As a result of his personal ambitions, Diotrephes resisted the apostle's wishes. The expression, "will have nothing to do with us," may also be translated, "does not welcome us as guests." The apostle was probably thinking of Diotrephes' refusal to accord hospitality to the traveling brethren who came to the church (perhaps with the letter just mentioned), and he took Diotrephes' rejection of the brothers as a rejection of himself.

Quite possibly Diotrephes did not present himself as a personal opponent of John, but in rejecting John's representatives he was rejecting John. Read John 13:20 for more information: _____

The writer, however, knew that he could deal with this matter in person. So John said that if he came, he would call attention to what Diotrephes was doing. This assertion should probably be taken as an understatement. Here the phrase might be translated, "I will call his works to mind" with the clear implication that Diotrephes' works would be dealt with appropriately.

Diotrephes, the writer asserted, had been guilty of three things.

- First, he was gossiping maliciously. These words are literally "bringing false charges against us with evil words." No doubt that self-willed leader did his best to tear down the reputation of those whom he was not prepared to receive.
- But Diotrephes went beyond mere talk, wrong as that was. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. This was his second wrongdoing. His malicious prattle no doubt laid the groundwork for actual refusal of hospitality (in contrast with Gaius' hospitality).
- And, third, like many other ecclesiastical dictators since his time, Diotrephes did all he could to enforce his will on others. He also stopped those who wanted to do so and put them out of the church. Using his self-acclaimed authority, having a prominent position, he forced other believers to be inhospitable or, if they weren't, even prevented them from gathering with the church.

Perhaps Gaius already knew most of these facts. It is likely that John was indirectly reminding him of the potential difficulties he faced in welcoming men who served the truth. But Gaius' obvious dedication to hospitality suggests that he was a man of some means and probably in a good position to resist the authority of Diotrephes. He would be further encouraged by John's promise that he would deal with Diotrephes when he arrived.

At any rate, Gaius was not to imitate what was evil but what was good. Diotrephes' behavior was to be avoided, not copied. One's conduct clearly reflects one's relationship with God. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Conversely, anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.

Compare with the statement of 1 John 3:6: _____

The assertion should not be watered down. Evil never arises from a real spiritual perception of God but is always a product of darkness of heart and blindness toward Him. John may not have been questioning Diotrephes' salvation, but he *was* affirming that Diotrephes' conduct manifested real blindness toward God. Gaius was to be careful to shun such an experience as this.

If Gaius would indeed "imitate what is... good" he would extend hospitality to Demetrius. This is not explicitly requested, but seems the obvious implication of John's recommendation of Demetrius. In accordance with the Jewish law of witnesses (see Deuteronomy 19:15), the apostle adduced a threefold testimony to the character of Demetrius:

- (1) He was well spoken of by everyone who knew him.
- (2) He was also vouched for by the truth itself. Here the truth is personified as a "witness" and John no doubt meant that Demetrius' character and doctrine were in such conformity with that truth that the truth itself virtually spoke on his behalf.
- (3) As a third line of testimony, John wrote, we also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. John himself could personally attest the worth of this man. Thus Gaius had no reason to hesitate showing Demetrius the kind of hospitality he had shown others. (The Demetrius

of this letter is not to be confused with the Demetrius of Acts 19:24, an enemy of the gospel.)

John was now finished with what he wished to say in this short letter, but he still had much to write to Gaius. He *could* have said much more in writing, but (as he had also written in 2 John) he hoped to be able soon to communicate those things face to face.

The apostle wished Gaius peace and passed on greetings from the friends here. Similarly, he wanted Gaius to greet the friends there by name. The use of the term "friends" twice in these closing statements is perhaps one final reminder to Gaius that Christians in every place are or should be a network of friends who are ready to help one another whenever a need arises. It is part of the rich experience of Christianity that one can meet people whom he or she has never seen before, in places far from home, and discover through a shared faith an immediate bond of friendship.

