

Day 1

Learn: Read 2 John and the first four verses of 1 John. In 2 John, the author identified himself as “the elder.” The early church knew him as the apostle John, one of the closest disciples of Jesus. In the beginning of 1 John, he identified himself and his associates as those who were eye witnesses to Jesus’ teaching and ministry on Earth. In 2 John, he was writing to a church [“an elect lady and her children” in v.1 (verse 1)], which he hoped to visit soon [v.12], and he sent greetings from the church where he presently was ministering [“your elect sister” in v.13]. Being “elect” in the New Testament always signals that they are genuine Christians who have come to believe in the gospel of Christ. John assumed a measure of authority over the church to which he was writing: he wrote like a father figure and pastor, clarifying what was true Christian belief, giving commands, and exhorting his readers to live up to both. In the early church, every town’s congregation had its own elders to lead them, but even these elders were under the authority of the apostles, like John, because Jesus had given to the apostles the authority to build the church.

John said he loved these people “in the truth” [v.1], indicating the connection between John and the church was through the apostolic message of the gospel truth about Christ. Telling them that this truth would reside in them forever [v.2] affirmed that they had the right gospel, and as a result Christ and his salvation was really theirs. Some of the people from the church had visited John, and he saw that they were “living according to the truth” [v.4], in other words that they were keeping faith in Christ as their savior, following the apostolic teachings instead of those of the deceivers, and thus keeping love alive within the Christian community.

Reflect: Does knowing that the author of these letters was an eye witness and disciple of Jesus help establish for you the credibility of what he wrote? If you are a Christian, would you say that you have a strong love relationship with God, one based on *both* faith in his deliverance through Christ *and* obedience to his biblical commands? Would you say that you have a strong love relationship with others in the church, one based on unconditional acceptance *and* helping each other walk in faith and obedience? Which aspect of the Christian experience would you like to see improve for yourself?

Day 2

Learn: Read 2 John again [you can try different translations at www.biblestudytools.com or see each verse in multiple translations on the “parallel” tab at net.bible.org]. John got his theology from God the Father and Christ [vv.1-3 (verses 1-3)]. Based on this revelation, John taught the true gospel of salvation through Christ [v.9], which results in grace, mercy, and peace from God, coming with truth and love from God and resulting in truth and love in our lives [v.3]. When John said this grace, mercy, and peace with God “will be” with believers [v.3], he was making a promise and was affirming that they already had the correct gospel, in contrast to the teachings of the deceivers.

The true gospel is what God has revealed about the identity of the savior [v.7] and his method of salvation. John wrote his gospel book “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” [John 20.31 NET]. In the Bible, the path to salvation *always* has been through faith in God’s promise of deliverance. Today, we know that the content of this promise is centered on two things: first, the identification of Jesus as the promised deliverer called the Messiah [Christ], who was both fully human and eternally divine as the Son of God [John called Jesus “the eternal life that was with the Father” in 1 John 1.2]; second, Jesus’ work of paying the penalty for our sins when he was sacrificed for us on the cross and resurrected afterward. If someone does not believe in either the identity or work of the savior, then that person is not really a Christian believer; but the one who does remain in this truth from and about Christ does have intimacy with both God the Father and Christ the Son [v.9]. Jesus himself said that he is the *only* way to God [John 14.6], so we need to hold fast to the apostolic teaching about Christ and his gospel [v.9]!

Reflect: Do you understand and believe who Jesus is, (1) that he has existed eternally as the Son of God [our Triune God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all of the same essence and in unity as part of one Godhead, yet each a distinct individual], (2) that he came to earth and was born as a person? Do you understand and believe what Jesus accomplished, (1) that he lived a perfectly pure life, (2) so as to be the perfect sacrifice for paying the penalty from sin for mankind by dying on the cross, (3) and that his resurrection proved his victory over sin and death and his identity as both Son of God and the savior called Christ? It is ok if you have doubts or questions! But please pray to ask God for understanding and then ask your pastor or small group leader to help you find these teachings in the Bible and understand these things fully for yourself.

Day 3

Learn: Read 2 John [repetition helps you absorb the teaching and opens up new insights!]. John said he hoped to visit soon [v.12], but he felt an urgency to write to them now, indicating how important the issues were. John was writing to

warn the church about deceivers who were spreading an unorthodox gospel [v.7]. John called these people “the deceiver” and “the anti-Christ” [sometimes plural in English translations]. Why did John call the deceivers these things? First, the deceivers based their gospel on sources other than Christ: they were “going on ahead” [v.9], which meant they were using their own information which was not from the apostles. Second, they were spreading this unorthodox teaching both inside and outside the church [vv.7-8]. So John in effect called each of them Satan [“the deceiver”] and the future anti-Christ who will come in the end times, because they were doing the work of those beings by opposing Jesus. This is extreme condemnation! The content of the unorthodox teaching was that Jesus is not the Christ and Son of God who came in the flesh [v.7]. They either did not believe the human Jesus was also a divine deliverer or did not believe the divine Christ was ever actually human. Either way, they were countering the gospel of Christ which came through the apostles. If Jesus had not been both human and divine, he could not have paid the penalty for sin through his sacrifice on the cross: only by being a perfect human could he be a worthy sacrifice, only by being divine could he bear the penalty for all sin.

Reflect: Can you see why it is important to consider the source of any supposed revelation from God? Today, we have the same choice, to believe in what God has revealed through the apostles in the New Testament or to believe in the alternate teachings of many sects who claim to be orthodox Christians and yet teach things that are different from what the apostles taught. Would you rather believe the teachings of those who knew Jesus and heard him teach or those of people who claim to be hearing something different now? Can you see why it is important to start a daily Bible study habit in your own life, so you can tell when a teaching is biblical truth and when it is unorthodox?

Day 4

Learn: Read 2 John [only thirteen verses!]. The deceivers claimed to be orthodox Christian believers and were trying to spread their false teachings about Jesus [vv.7-10]. Some English translations begin v.7 with “For,” noting the connection in Greek: the church must share love with the apostle and his followers instead of the deceivers; the church must walk in the truth contained in the commandment to love; the church must stay close together, clinging to each other in love and to God in truth; *only then* could they defend against the deceivers. John wanted the church to recognize these deceivers for what they were: unorthodox opponents of Christ, who did not confess the true gospel [v.7].

John said the church should not receive the deceivers, nor extend a greeting to them [v.10]. The churches depended in part on traveling ministers, who in turn depended on the church they visited, for food and shelter, but also for credibility in the Christian community there. This is not a command to not love our friends and family who believe false gospels, rather it is about not encouraging, helping, or giving a platform to them for their false ministry. Whole church communities would repay hospitality to each other’s people, as part of connecting to the greater church outside the city; this church should have such a relationship with John, but not with the deceivers. John also said that if the church accepted these deceivers as orthodox then the church would share in their evil deeds [v.11], by giving them credibility and thus a stronger voice, which would result in losing ministry success [v.8] as people were deceived! Thus, the church was not to welcome, accept, or help these unorthodox deceivers [vv. 10-11].

Reflect: Today, many claim to be Christian, yet teach something different than the apostles did about the identity of Christ: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarian and Unity Churches, Christian Scientists, liberal denominations... even people in our own church! Why must we not pretend these people are orthodox Christians? In what ways might we inadvertently give them credibility in our church and country? How can we avoid this problem but still show love?

Day 5

Learn: Recite 2 John from memory [☺; ok, read it again]. Instead of aligning with the deceivers, we must live according to the truth of Christ [v.4], which will result in living by Christ’s commandments [v.6; see John 15.10-12]. John said the church must emphasize the commandment of Christ to love one another [v.5]. Part of his emphasis was on sharing love with the apostle and thus identifying with his orthodox teaching, and part was that we in the church should be showing love to each other. Christian love is not a feeling, it is *active* caring for others, and we are to *live this out*, not just agree with it [v. 6]. Obedience leads to love, and love encompasses obedience. Keeping God’s commands not only results in love for others, obedience is itself showing love to others, by our example, and because God’s commands show us *how* to love in a *godly* way, including warning each other when someone is straying from God’s truth in belief or deed.

Reflect: Do you see that the most loving thing we can do for others is to live a life of obedience to God before them? Do you see that only if we understand the commands of Scripture can we truly understand how God wants us to show love, otherwise we will be relying only on our feelings or the flawed thinking of our culture? Do you agree that we have an obligation to lovingly warn each other if we are concerned about false beliefs or sinful actions? If you disagree with any of these three things, please pray about it, search scripture for yourself, and talk with a pastor or your small group leader.

Day 1: Memorize: Pick one or two verses and try to memorize them this week.

Learn: Read 1 John 1.1-4. John began by emphasizing Christ [verses 1.1-2], for only by believing in the apostolic teachings about Christ could this church come to the truth about other issues. John proclaimed Christ is the “eternal life which was with the Father” [1.1-2; see John 1.1-2]. Christ is part of the *Triune Godhead* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an eternal individual, yet so bound in unity and of the same essence that they are *one God*, not three. Christ is the “Word of Life” [1.1], the source of true and eternal spiritual life: through him we can have true spiritual awakening right now and eternal life with him after physical death. John also stressed the historical reality to the *incarnation*, that the Son of God came and was born into flesh as the human Jesus. Jesus was a man whom his disciples heard teach, saw minister, and even touched [1.1-2]. If the incarnation were not true – if there was not a historical Jesus who was both God and man – we could have no salvation, because the only acceptable sacrifice for the sins of mankind is a *perfect* human.

Reflect: What are your thoughts on the miracle of the incarnation? Do you believe Jesus was fully human, with flesh and blood? Do you believe the Son of God came to earth and was born as the baby Jesus? Like everything having to do with our infinite and amazing God, this can be confusing. Christ always existed as the Son of God, and after his birth he was Jesus, both divine and human; is that hard for you to accept? What questions do you have? How could you find answers?

Day 2: Memorize: Practice your memorization verse! Take it with you in the car or to work or school!

Learn: Read 1 John 1.1-4. John and his associates were proclaiming Christ to the church so that the church might have fellowship with them, and thus also with God the Father and Christ, making their joy complete [1.3-4]. Note that only by accepting the truth about Jesus – the true gospel of Christ which the apostles taught – can a person enter into fellowship with the orthodox [true] church. True Christians *can* share spiritual fellowship with those who disagree on even important doctrinal issues [for example, whether baptism is only for believers or whether it is ok to baptize infants and confirm their faith later], but we *cannot* share spiritual fellowship with those who deny any of the central affirmations of the faith which define orthodoxy. It is only by entering into fellowship with the apostles and their followers – the true orthodox church – that a person can enter into fellowship with God and Christ. People who believe in false gospels not only are not in fellowship with the real church, they are not in fellowship with God or Christ either. *The only path to intimacy with God and the church is through accepting the apostolic teachings about the gospel of Christ.*

Reflect: We learn the apostolic teachings in the New Testament. What is *your next step* to learn more about them? Sometimes it is hard to accept that there is only one way to God and salvation. The biblical truth is that we all deserve condemnation, so we should be thankful that God made even one way of salvation. The way he designed fits everything else taught about God in the Bible: God initiated the process to fulfill his promises; the Son of God came to be the deliverer, but came as a man to be a suitable sacrifice; through the sacrifice, God’s sense of justice is satisfied, so he can forgive us without injustice. Are you thankful there is a way of salvation that is free [all we do is accept the gift in faith]? or are you not convinced Jesus is the only way? or do you think it is unfair there are not more ways? Share your thoughts with someone in the church, maybe your small group leader or – if you have serious doubts – one of your pastor/elders.

Day 3: Memorize: Practice your memorization verse!

Learn: Read 1 John 1.5-9. John also proclaimed a message *from* Christ. He started by saying that God is light [pure and good] with no darkness in him at all [1.5]. It was common in John’s day to use light and darkness as a metaphor for good and evil. John’s first observation about this was that *only by walking in the light can we have fellowship with God* [1.6-7; see also John 3.19-21]. If we choose to sin, we break our fellowship with God. Those who are walking in darkness – who willfully choose to keep on sinning – are lying when they say they have fellowship with God, because there is no darkness in God, yet they choose to walk in darkness and not practice walking in God’s truth [1.6]. Walking in the light and practicing truth means to believe and obey what the apostles taught in Christ’s name. We must seek to live a life of faith and obedience; if we do not, if we choose to live a life of willful sin, we will not be walking with God in the light, instead we will be choosing to walk with evil in the darkness! If we do walk in the light, we will be in fellowship with each other and Jesus’ blood will be cleansing us from all our sins [1.7]. The Greek text makes clear that cleansing is a present and ongoing process: we all continue to make sinful mistakes, but if we are living in faith and trying to obey [and confessing, as we shall see], then we will be receiving ongoing cleansing. *The only path to intimacy with God and the church is through accepting the apostolic teachings about the gospel of Christ and obeying the apostolic teachings from Christ.*

Reflect: Download and listen to the song “In the Light” by DC Talk [or by Charlie Peacock for a lighter version]. Is there an area of your life in which you have not submitted to Christ? Are you choosing to ignore any aspect of biblical teaching

and willfully choosing to sin in that area? Don't just say, "no"; seriously reflect on this, for it is a common problem! We can be super-spiritual in many ways yet choose to go our own way on certain issues. Pray and let God root out anything that needs to come under his authority. Then repent – turn around in your thinking – and follow Christ in all things! Don't choose to walk with evil in the darkness, instead trust Christ with your lifestyle, just as you trust him with your life!

Day 4: Memorize: Practice your memorization verse!

Learn: Read 1 John 1.5-9. John's second observation was that *only if we confess our sins can we have intimacy with God*. Confession is an ongoing process, since our messing up is an ongoing process. Those who say they do not bear guilt from sin – whether because they claim to not be sinning or because they think God will overlook their sins – are deceiving themselves and do not carry God's truth in them [1.8; see also Romans 6]. We are all guilty of sin [to "have sin" is to bear guilt of sin in this context] and must confess our need for Christ's salvation and ongoing cleansing [1.8, 10]. Biblical confession of sin usually is public [Matthew 3.6; James 5.16; Acts 19.18]. The context of John's call for confession is in contrast to those who "say" they have no guilt from sin, so it is possible he meant a public confession of sins too. Certainly part of what he wanted was public admission of our sinfulness and need for Christ's ongoing deliverance. If we confess our sins, God is *faithful* and *righteous* to forgive and cleanse us [1.9]. God is faithful in that he fulfills his promise of deliverance through Christ. God is righteous because – having initiated our deliverance by sending Christ to pay our penalty – he can extend mercy without sacrificing his justice. Being forgiven means we have no further debt or penalty. We can be cleansed of our unrighteousness, allowing us to be in intimacy with God in whom there is no darkness, and freeing us of the lasting spiritual effects of our sinful mistakes.

John wanted the church to understand that we must not treat sin lightly, for sin cuts us off from intimacy with God. We are not in danger of losing salvation, but sin brings negative effects on ourselves, our lives, and our relationships with God. There is no license to sin under grace! God's truth was incarnate in Christ, who lived a pure life as an example. Christ does not ask us to achieve anything to be right with him, he just asks us to accept his teaching, believe in it, submit to it, and live by it. *The only path to intimacy with God and the church is through accepting the apostolic teachings about the gospel of Christ, obeying the apostolic teachings from Christ, and confessing our sins when we have failed.*

Reflect: When we are exposed to the light in our church community, we should not shrink away to hide our sinfulness; rather we should all admit our sinful state and need for deliverance, and seek God's cleansing together. Are you prepared to admit your need for forgiveness and cleansing? Read James 5.16: are you willing to confess your sins to someone else in the church so you can have accountability, encouragement, and prayer support, which lead to cleansing and healing?

Day 5: Memorize: Practice your memorization verse!

Learn: Read 1 John 1.10-2.2. John's third observation was *we must admit our need for Christ and depend on him to overcome the effects of our sin*. Those who say they have not sinned make God out to be a liar [1.10], since scripture makes clear the sinfulness of all [see Romans 3.23], and this defiant attitude shows the lack of God's word in them. We must measure our actions by God's standards: what we think is tolerable because of our culture, upbringing, or fleshly thinking, might not be permissible to God. John wrote so people in the church would not sin [2.1], so they would choose to walk in the light with God instead of in the darkness with evil. But John also told them that when they messed up – when they did sin – Jesus would be their mediator with God [2.1]. Because Jesus lived a pure human life and died as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins, God has *justified* us – he has accounted Christ's righteousness to us! – so when we sin and deserve condemnation, Jesus steps forward to say, "I paid for that" [see Romans 8.34]. This is not a perfect illustration, but it shows how God the Father set up a process to provide a just way to forgive us sinners.

Christ can be our mediator because he was our *atoning* sacrifice [2.2]. Atonement is reconciliation with God through satisfying God's demand for justice. Christ is our *propitiation*: he makes peace with God. The Old Testament concept of atonement was both *expiation* [cleansing from sin] and *propitiation*. Jesus paid the penalty for all sin, so he is the only one who can advocate for us before God. Jesus has paid the penalty for all sin in the world [2.2], though only those who accept his gift in faith benefit. Someday, Jesus will redeem the world itself. *The only path to intimacy with God and the church is through accepting the apostolic teachings about the gospel of Christ, obeying the apostolic teachings from Christ, and confessing our sins when we have failed, all of which is possible because of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross and his continued mediation for us based on his righteousness which God now accounts to us.*

Reflect: Did you know that Christ's work continues in Heaven? While he sits next to God the Father, waiting for the time when he will return, he *continues to save* us through *applying* his sacrifice to us in an ongoing way. While we never want to choose to sin, how is it comforting to know that when you mess up you have a mediator before God? Can you explain why, even with this mediation and assurance of salvation, a Christian still should never choose to sin?

Day 1: Memorize: Choose one verse from this passage to memorize this week [we suggest 2.3 or 2.6]. Work on it!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.3-5: John did not define what he meant by the idea of “knowing God,” instead stressing the moral implications of it. In the Bible, to “know” God involves learning about God’s character and vision for us, responding to God’s promises and commands [to “keep his word” is to trust and obey], and developing a spiritual and relational intimacy with God. If we have come to know God through Christ, then we have experienced rebirth in spirit, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we are being increasingly transformed [*sanctified*] to be more like the image of God which we were created to be, and we are growing in our love relationship with God. If all that is the case, we Christians *should* be increasingly eager to obey God’s biblical commands.

If we are eager to obey, this encourages us that we are in a saving relationship with God. Obedience does not earn us salvation – that was a gift of grace by God which we accepted in faith – but obedience can indicate that we have received this salvation. Sometimes we might wonder whether our born-again experience was real or whether we truly believed enough. Our growing desire and ability to obey God is one source of evidence for our salvation. On the other hand, if we do not experience this growing tendency to obey God, then we should question whether we really are in this saving relationship with God. At the least, there is a problem in our relationship with God, since we are walking in the darkness instead of in the light with God [see v.1.6]. At the worst, we might not even have a saving relationship with God, though we thought we did and though we have been going to church for many years. Why would someone desire to walk in the darkness if they had been given the light?

Reflect: Looking back over the past since you started believing in Jesus Christ, can you see evidence of real change in your character? How about in the past year, can you see evidence of a growing desire and ability to obey? While our obedience will not improve at a constant rate, we should be able to see real evidence of transformation of character and lifestyle, both in the long run and in the shorter time period of the previous year. What does your evidence tell you? What can you do to improve your knowledge of God’s commands and obedience to them? How can the church help?

Day 2: Memorize: Keep working on memorizing your chosen verse. Don’t forget to practice last week’s verse too!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.3-6. The last half of v.5 could point forward to v.6: “By this we know that we are in God: the one saying he abides in God ought to live just as Christ lived.” If we really are believers who want to abide in [remain in good relationship with] God the Father, then we should seek to live as Christ did. First, we need to keep in mind that Christ is the Son of God, he is our Savior, he is the one whom God the Father has anointed to be the king of this world and judge of all people. Thus, we should be willing to submit to Christ, who has all authority and power, and who loved us enough to offer us salvation. Second, we need to keep in mind that when Christ walked the earth as the man Jesus, he lived a perfect and pure human life. Thus, we can look at how he lived to see how we should live; he was the true image of God that all people were created to be; as we become more like Christ, we become more like who God created us to be.

What does it mean to live like Christ? *First, it means adjusting our attitudes:* gone must be our selfishness, consumerism and materialism, tendencies toward bitterness, envy, revenge, etc.; and in their place must grow a willingness to put God first in our lives, to put others before ourselves, to sacrificially give so others might benefit, to forgive, be content, trust in God’s justice, etc. *Second, it means adjusting our priorities:* showing love to God, representing Christ well to others, experiencing spiritual transformation, and serving others all must become higher priorities, while our self-indulgent activities must take a lesser priority. *Third, it means adjusting our behavior:* we must stop thinking the end justifies the means or that anything can justify our choice to sin; we must stop cheating on our taxes, taking supplies from work, lying to avoid embarrassment; we must start basing our relationships on truth spoken in love and being intentional about encouraging and helping people, about sharing with people the truth we learn about God.

Reflect: From the lists above, do you think your attitudes and priorities match up well with Christ’s? Think about how you allocate your money and your time, how you treat other people. Jesus not only avoided any sinful actions, he also did the things God asks people to do. How are you doing at following Christ on both of those, avoiding sinful actions and doing the things commanded in Scripture? What do you need to change most? Pray about it and seek help if you need it!

Day 3: Memorize: Memorizing scripture allows the Holy Spirit to bring it to mind in times of need. Keep working!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.7-11. What John was teaching them was not something he invented, they were principles laid out by God throughout human history and reiterated by Christ and his apostles for the church. Jesus called the command to love one another “new” [John 13.34], so John did too, even though it was an old command that the church had learned from the beginning. It is new in the sense that it can be carried out in a new way in this time period after Christ’s

resurrection. Because we are experiencing some of the New Covenant blessings [such as the Holy Spirit's indwelling and progressive transformation (*sanctification*) of each believer's character to be like Christ], we are empowered to obey and love better than people were before Christ came. When Christ came, the true light – the true revelation of God's pure character – came into the world [John 1.4-9]. The world is still characterized by darkness [a place where sin is rampant], but there are pockets of light where believers represent Christ, seeking purity in an obedient lifestyle, and showing his love to each other in the church and others outside the church. These New Covenant blessings should remind us that their ultimate fulfillment will come when Christ returns, and we are working to become ideal citizens in the kingdom of God.

Reflect: Those who have studied spiritual transformation in modern churches and those who have studied it in the Bible agree that one of the most important catalysts for such transformation of character is studying the Bible. The Holy Spirit interacts with scripture to enlighten our minds, soften our hearts, break our wills, and change our characters, so that we become more like Christ. Whether you are not sure about Jesus, are relatively new to faith, or have been a believer for many years, God's vision for you is to become more like Christ, so you can walk in the light and learn to love as God loves you. Read a little of the Bible every day, if you can. It is ok if you don't understand everything, the Holy Spirit will enlighten you as much as you need for that day. You might understand more if you have a readable translation, such as NLT, NIV, or ESV, with good study notes. You can get a Bible atlas if you learn graphically: Aharoni's *Carta Bible Atlas* and Beitzel's *Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* and are two good ones. If you like to listen to sermons, ask your pastor for good internet resources [and keep going to church!]. What do you need to do to learn more about living as Jesus did? Do you need to increase your frequency of getting into God's Word or improve the tools you have for study or both?

Day 4: Memorize: Practice saying your verse not only to yourself but also to others!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.9-11. Our relationships with other church members [and others in the greater community] are revealing of our character and relationship with God. If we are really showing to others the kind of love Christ shows us, then that is a sign that we are on the right track, walking in the light of God's truth. If we are not, then we are walking in darkness. Remember from vv.1.5-7, that darkness is a metaphor for sin. If we are truly experiencing a relationship with God and the transformation of our character by the Holy Spirit such that we are becoming more eager to obey the biblical commands, then one result will be that God's love will become ever more evident in us. As we grow to be more like Christ, we will love more like him: we will focus more of our time, energy, and material blessings on helping others instead of on consuming for ourselves; we will sacrifice not just our time and money, but also our pride, our "rights," and anything else it takes, to help others, instead of insisting on what we want; we will love others unconditionally, even when they are most unlovable, even when they do not love us back and do not treat us well in return.

Reflect: Do you see change in your life, that over time you are becoming more willing to devote time, energy, and money to help others? Are you good at loving even the unlovable, those in the church who obviously are most in need of our acceptance and encouragement? Is your attitude about church that you will do whatever you can to help the ministry? If you are not like Christ in these things, what should you do to cultivate that kind of selflessness love?

Day 5: Memorize: For most of us, memorizing is hard and not fun, but you can do it! God will bless you! Keep on...

Learn: Read 1 John 2.3-11. The word translated as "hate" in vv.10-11 is the Greek word μισέω [pronounced "miss-EH-oh"]. It's most common meaning was to hate or detest someone; it is possible John had in mind the people who were opposed to him and his associates. This word also was used in the New Testament to mean disregarding someone [John 12.25] or loving someone less than someone else [Luke 14.26]. Maybe John was not saying that you have a problem only if you outright detest someone, but even if you are negligent of others and their needs or if you continue to value yourself more than them. God's radical kind of love is sacrificial: if you are not willing to sacrifice to meet the needs of others in your church, then you value yourself more than them, which is "hate" in God's perspective. John reminds us that the Christian life is not just avoiding sinful actions, but also doing the loving things God commands. If we see God's kind of love [sacrificial and unconditional] growing in us along with improving obedience, this encourages us that we truly are in a saving relationship with God. We cannot earn salvation by being nice to people, but having a heart that is growing to be truly loving is an indication that the Holy Spirit really is at work in us and that we are becoming like Christ in character, so we can take that as evidence that we are in this saving relationship. If we lack this sense of growing love, then we should question why. At the least, there is a problem in our relationship with God; at the worst, we might not even have a saving relationship with him, though we thought we did and are church members.

Reflect: Are you neglecting to help meet needs in your church? Are you still focused on yourself instead of on helping others? What step should you take to begin cultivating Christ's kind of love in your life? You might want to rent or buy the movie, *The Gospel of John* [2003; narrated by Christopher Plumber]. As you watch, absorb the attitudes, priorities, and behaviors of Jesus that come through in what he taught and lived out.

Study Guide for 1 John 2.12-17 [Five days, about fifteen minutes each]

by Will Groben

Day 1: Memorize: If one of these verses strikes you, work on memorizing it this week [v.15 or v.17 might be good reminders about our materialism]. Continue to practice throughout the week the ones you already learned.

Learn: Read 1 John 2.12-17. John was writing to people who had accepted the gospel of Christ, the gospel which John and the other apostles preached. He knew they were true believers, real Christians. But he also knew there were others who were preaching different gospels about a false view of Jesus. So John wrote to assure the people of this church of their salvation and their relationship with God through Christ. Some English translations say, “I am writing to you, little children, *because* your sins have been forgiven” [NASB] and others say, “I am writing to you, little children, *that* your sins have been forgiven” [NET]. In Greek, the same word [ὅτι, pronounced “HOT-ee”] can mean “that” or “because.” Given the context of this letter, it seems John was writing to assure his readers *that* they did have the true gospel, *that* they really were saved and really were in a relationship with God and Christ. If your translation says “because” in vv.12-14, it is not wrong, but you need to understand how the causality worked for John. It was not that the forgiveness of their sins *caused* him to write, it was that he wrote *because* he wanted to assure them of the forgiveness of their sins.

Some scholars believe John referred to all in the church as “children”: He was the “elder” and they were his “children” in the faith; and as children, they needed to depend on his guidance in spiritual matters. Other scholars see John addressing three groups in the church, those young in faith, those mature in faith, and those in between. In any case, John said their sins were forgiven because of Christ’s name [see also 3.23; 5.13 for the name of Christ]. In John’s day, this was a typical expression: to do something because of [or for] the name of a person was to do it because of [or for] that person himself. So John was saying that God forgave their sins because of [or for] Christ. His assurance to them was that if they truly believed in the gospel of Christ as handed down by the apostles, then God had truly forgiven their sins because of Christ’s sacrificial payment of the penalty for their sins on the cross. Some English translations say their sins “are forgiven” and some say “have been forgiven.” Both are correct: the Greek perfect verb in this case signifies something that already has been accomplished and still has lasting results. So John was saying that believers [even new ones] can be sure that God already has forgiven their sins when they accepted the gospel about Jesus and his atoning sacrifice [2.3], and that this state of affairs continues on thanks to Jesus’ continued mediation with God on their behalf [2.1].

Reflect: How important is it to you to have assurance that your forgiveness from God continues? Some teach that you can lose your salvation; how is it beneficial to you to know that this is *not* what the Bible teaches? This assurance is only if you believe in the gospel the apostles taught, about who Jesus is and what he accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection. How can you ensure you have believed in the true Jesus and in the truth about what he did?

Day 2: Memorize: Continue to practice your memory verses!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.12-14, looking especially at the parts about “knowing.” John addressed both the old and the young in the church in a stylish way. He affirmed for them that they knew [in the Greek perfect tense, the meaning is like, “you have come to know and still know”] Christ [the one who was from the beginning] and that they had come to know God the Father too. This could only be true if they had accepted the true gospel of Christ as taught by the apostles [1.1-3], so what John said was further assurance of their salvation. Still, to have an ongoing fellowship with God, we have to walk in the light of his revelation, we have to choose to be like him instead of like the rest of fallen humanity. To have a true relationship with God, we need to learn about him by reading his revelation in the Bible, we need to communicate with him through various types of prayer, and we have to respond to his promises in faith and to his commands with obedience.

Reflect: Sometimes, when we teach on salvation in the church, we stress the moment of conversion when we believed in the gospel and God forgave our sins, and we stress the ultimate end result of going to be with God when we die instead of going to a place without God. *But there is so much more to salvation!* New life and salvation begins *right now*, and it launches many blessings, such as the opportunity to have an intimate relationship with God right now. How important is such a relationship to you? Are you ready to invest in it by spending time daily in the Bible and in prayer? What about making God the center of your life instead of just a component? What do you think would be the difference in you and your life down the road if you made [or increased] these commitments now?

Day 3: Memorize: Continue to practice your memory verses!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.12-14; look especially at the parts addressed to “young people.” When John said, the “Evil One,” he was referring to Satan, the fallen angel who is the prime instigator for evil in the world. John again used the Greek perfect tense: they had already overcome Satan and this victory was still in effect. In his crucifixion and resurrection, Christ proved his victory over sin, death, and evil. When we accept salvation through Christ, we gain Christ’s victory for

ourselves. One aspect of this is that we are saved from punishment for our sins, forgiven by and reconciled to God. We are reborn spiritually, so we can be set apart for God's purposes, purified and transformed in character to be like Christ. Furthermore, Satan cannot condemn us now because Christ has saved us, and Satan cannot control us now because Christ has freed us. This means we can resist temptation and the lures of false teachings that we might find more comfortable than the truth. In 4.4, John wrote that the people of this church had overcome the false teachers because they had God in them [the Holy Spirit indwells all believers] and God is greater than Satan [who was empowering the false teachers]. In 5.4-5, John wrote that by walking in faith they could overcome the lures of their sinful culture. Here, in 2.14, John wrote that they had overcome Satan in part because they were strong in faith and the Word of God abided in them, meaning they had learned and internalized the teachings and character of Christ by walking in the light.

Reflect: Had you ever thought about having already overcome Satan and his evil schemes? You still don't want to go hunting for trouble in dark alleys; but if you have been reborn through faith in the gospel of Christ, then you not only are assured of your eternal salvation – which itself is a victory over the schemes of Satan! – you also have the tools for victory over sin, temptation, and deception in your daily life. Now you have to learn how to avail yourself of those tools. If you struggle with recurring sin – whether it be stretching the truth, adultery, addiction, or anything else – you can experience victory now, through faith, the empowerment of God, and the truth in his revelation. Are you ready to experience the victory Christ achieved for you? Are you ready to let the body of Christ – the church – help by providing the teaching, counseling, and fellowship the Bible says we need to experience victory in life? If you are ready, ask a pastor or your small group leader for help. If you mostly are walking in this victory already, what can you do to help others do so?

Day 4: Memorize: Continue to practice your memory verses!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.12-16. John wrote that if they were forgiven, in a relationship with God, and in victory over sin and evil, then these blessings should lead them to realize the difference between godly things and worldly things, and to choose the godly. John was not saying we should abandon caring for the environment, nor that we should avoid loving those who are of different beliefs, nor that we should forgo the innocent pleasures of life in this world. In v.16, John defined what he meant by the world in this context: the sinful ways of our culture, exemplified here by inappropriate desires, covetousness, and the arrogance that comes with prosperity [thinking we achieved it on our own, thinking we have a right to it, thinking it validates us]. John said we should not love [cherish/esteem] these aspects of our culture, because they are not from God; they are examples of walking in the darkness, not the light. In fact, later in this letter John would write that the culture of the world is under the influence of Satan [5.19]. Every day, we have a choice to follow God and Christ or to follow the ways of the world which is walking apart from God in rebellion. If we choose to follow the ways of the world we show that we do not love God [v.15; many translations read "love of God," which is a technically correct translation, but does not make clear that John was talking about a person's love *for* God being absent].

Reflect: Can you see any evidence that our culture is working to influence people away from God and his ways? Think about what you see in the media, what you hear in politics, workplace culture, what is taught in schools and colleges. What attitudes, priorities, and behaviors does our culture promote? Are these Christ-like? Pray for God to show you any ways you are choosing to walk like the world instead of like Christ. Can you think of ways you make this choice? Do you understand how choosing the ways of the world instead of the ways of God, after all God has done for you, is to deny your love for him? How can you resist the lures of our culture to walk more in the light?

Day 5: Memorize: Continue to practice your memory verses!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.15-17. John made clear the choice between walking in the ways of God and in the ways of the corrupted world. He said if we choose to go the way of the world, then we are showing we do not really love God [v.15]. He gave another reason to choose the way of God: The believer is destined for eternal life with God, but the world and its corrupted ways are destined for destruction, and that has already been set in motion. When Christ came the first time, it signaled the beginning of the process that would bring an end to darkness, evil, sin, and corruption of character. When the time is right, Christ will return and renew the earth for his kingdom. There is a judgment on the ways of the world, so the believer should choose to walk with God in the light. We are the evidence of Christ's light in this world, as we learn to walk with God and shine his light, and experience the transformation of character promised in the New Testament.

Reflect: It always is tempting to live for now, but God asks us to live for eternity, to learn to live his way as we will in his kingdom. This means giving up anything sinful, anything impure or against the teachings of God in the Bible. It also means sacrificing to adopt Christ's attitudes, priorities, and behaviors: giving more to those in need, supporting the ministry with your time and treasure, praying for those who are against you instead of retaliating, putting others before yourself, having integrity in everything you do, sharing biblical truth with others... how are you doing in these things?

Day 1: Memorize: You should have some verses from 1 John and 2 John memorized. Keep practicing them a couple of times this week. If you are enjoying the memorizing work, pick a verse from this passage that strikes you as important.

Learn: Read 1 John 2.18-27. John called his time period “the last hour” [2.18]. Before Christ came, all of history was building to that event. Now that he has come, we are in the “last hour,” or the “last days,” which was the phrase used by Peter [Acts 2.17; 2 Peter 3.3], James [James 5.3], Paul [2 Timothy 3.1], and the author of Hebrews [Hebrews 1.2]. Everything has changed with Christ’s coming! God’s people now can have the Holy Spirit within, can be transformed [*sanctified*] to be more like Christ, and can be assured of their salvation if they accept the gospel of Christ. This is a unique time period, when we can enjoy the fruits of Christ’s first coming and we must work to prepare for his return, when he will judge everyone and eventually renew the earth and set up his world-wide kingdom.

Near the end of this “last hour,” evil will rise up to even greater heights, led by one John called the “antichrist” [the “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2.1-12]. John’s immediate concern was that even now there are many who are doing the work of evil by working against Christ. These “antichrists” were trying to deceive the church with a false teaching about Christ [2.26]. Most startling, in John’s day these were people who had been in the church but now had gone to set up their own church [2.19]. Worse than the church hopping people often do today, this was leaving orthodox Christianity to join a heretical cult with a false gospel and a false teaching about Christ. John said the fact that they would leave the true church with apostolic doctrine to go to a heretical cult proved that they never had been saved in the first place. They might have thought they were Christians, they must have said they believed, but in reality they were still Satan’s tools. *The first way to recognize false teachers is that they distance themselves from the biblically based orthodox church.*

Reflect: Could some of us in this church not really be saved? Could you be one of them? How sure are you about what the gospel says and what you have believed? If you have questions or doubts, talk with a pastor! How vulnerable are we all to false teachings? Consider the books, some by scholars, which cast doubt on the accuracy of the Bible and assert their own false gospels; consider the television specials that air on CNN, Discovery Channel, History Channel, and the major networks, which deny the divinity of Jesus and assert the early church distorted the New Testament. You might have heard that Thomas Jefferson once cut and pasted to keep only the parts of the New Testament he liked; the same is true with the scholars behind these shows: for example, the Jesus Seminar group created arbitrary criteria for judging each verse, then threw out about half of the gospels, including almost all the supernatural aspects! They remade Jesus in their own image. Are you influenced by these shows, books, or the churches that agree with them?

Day 2: Memorize: In times of stress, the Holy Spirit can bring a memorized verse to mind for comfort and wisdom!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.18-23. This church faced a schism: many left to form a heretical cult, while many others stuck with the apostolic teachings. John said those who kept to the real gospel knew the truth [v.21], because they had an anointing from the Holy One so they could “understand” [or “know” v.20]. Jesus [the Holy One] promised that he would grant to believers the blessing of the Holy Spirit indwelling them, and that the Spirit would testify about Christ [John 14.16-17; 15.26-27; 16.13-14]. This is the “anointing,” and every true believer receives it the *moment* he accepts Christ’s gospel in faith. These people had accepted the true gospel in faith and received the Holy Spirit, so they knew the truth. Because they knew the truth, they were able to detect the lie in the false gospels. All this was proven by their willingness to cling to the true gospel instead of joining the deceivers. *The second way to recognize false teachers is that they deviate from the true gospel which is attested by the apostolic teachings in the New Testament and by the Holy Spirit within you.*

Reflect: Do you know the content of the gospel of Christ well enough to detect false teachings? Here is what the apostle Paul emphasized in his many New Testament letters: *Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day, all as the Old Testament prophesied, and he appeared to hundreds of people after his resurrection* [1 Corinthians 15.1-8]; *Christ is both divine and human* [Romans 10.9, 13¹]; *We have sinned [gone against God’s will], but can be made righteous in God’s sight by grace [an unmerited gift] through being redeemed from sin and death by Christ* [Romans 3.21-24]; *The punishment earned by sin is eternal death, but God gives eternal life through Christ* [Romans 6.23]; *Salvation is by grace through faith, not by our own efforts* [Ephesians 2.8-9]; *God saves us to eternal life not by our works, but by grace given through Christ and administered by the Holy Spirit* [Titus 3.3-7]. This week, as you have time, look up a few of these passages and reflect upon them. You need to own these for yourself!

¹ Romans 10.13 quotes Joel 2.32, which says [NET], “It will so happen that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD [Yahweh, in the Hebrew] will be delivered.” So Paul is equating Jesus with God, and in Romans 10.9 he is saying that we have to confess Jesus as God [Yahweh] to be saved.

Day 3: Memorize: When you memorize scripture, you internalize it so that you can better apply it to your life!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.22-23. The deceivers in John's day were teaching that Jesus was not the promised Messiah [Christ] and Son of God [2.22; see also 4.2-3]; either they believed he was just a man or they believed he was a manifestation of God that was not human at all. If they denied Jesus was the Son of God who came as a man, then they had to deny that he came as the deliverer to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. John said that by denying the *incarnation* [the Son of God coming as human], they were denying God the Father too, for not only did the Father send the Son [4.10] and testify about him [5.9-10], but the correct doctrine of God is that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [Matthew 3.16-17; 28.18-20; John 14.16-17; 2 Corinthians 13.14]. These deceivers said they had fellowship with God and walked with God, but they lied [1.6], for there is no reconciliation with God except through Jesus [John 14.6]. *The third way to recognize false teachers is that they deny the biblical identity of Jesus as both God and man.*

Reflect: John wrote if we confess the Son, we will have the Father too. We might wonder what it means to confess the Son. John said he wrote his gospel book to point to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and Christ, emphasizing the need to believe in Jesus' true identity to be saved [John 20.30-31]. Understanding what that identity means requires understanding what these titles implied from the Old Testament: Jesus is *the Deliverer from Satan* [Genesis 3.15]; *the Prophet and Deliverer Greater than Moses* [Deuteronomy 18.18-19; Acts 3.18-26]; *God's Son, Eternal Priest, and Anointed King* [Psalms 2.1-12; 110.1-4; Zechariah 6.13]; *both Divine and Human, and the King and Deliverer for Israel* [Isaiah 7.14; 9.6-7; "Immanuel" means "God with us"; Jeremiah 23.5-6; John 1.1, 14]; *the Savior from Sin and Atoning [reconciling] Sacrifice who had to be crucified* [Isaiah 53.5-6; John 3.14-18]. Look up these passages over the next few days, and reflect on them. Will you deny or confess these things? Are you in or out of the apostolic church?

Day 4: Memorize: When you practice a verse you have memorized, reflect on it too!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.24-26. John said the apostolic gospel of Christ which the church had heard from the beginning of their walk with Jesus must continue to be the basis of their faith. This is the antidote to heretical teachings by those who want to deceive us [2.26]: know, believe, cling to the true gospel. If you are holding onto the true gospel, you can be sure of your salvation to eternal life. This salvation is a relationship with God that is eternal [John 17.3]. After physical death, believers will be with God in Heaven [what Jesus told the convict on the cross, Luke 23.43], and be bodily resurrected when Christ returns [John 5.28-29]. This eternal life starts right *now!* and continues beyond death [5.13; John 5.24-29].

Reflect: Keep reflecting on the verses from the past couple of days, about the true gospel of Christ. What questions do you have about the identity of Jesus or what he accomplished on the cross? How can you get answers? Are you conscious of which groups in your community are teaching false gospels and presenting false images of Christ? How can you protect yourself from their influence? Are you experiencing new life with Christ? How is it different than your life before? You should be able to see changes in yourself and in your relationship with God...

Day 5: Memorize: You can use memorized verses in your prayers and to help facilitate confession!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.18-27. When John said the Holy Spirit [the anointing] teaches members of the church "all things," he referred to the things considered in this passage, about the identity and gospel of Christ [the Holy Spirit does not teach physics or provide lotto numbers]. When John said they had no need for anyone to teach them, he was saying that *they already knew the truth*, because they had been taught the true gospel by the apostles or disciples of the apostles [including their own pastor-elders], and the Spirit would attest to that truth. We get the true gospel in the apostolic writings collected in the New Testament. If you have read the New Testament, been taught by godly people trained in interpreting the Bible, and feel a strong conviction by the Holy Spirit that what you have learned is true, then you should not be tempted to believe false teachers. John also might have been alluding to Jeremiah 31.31-33 – that God would forgive and write his morals on the hearts of his people, in a new covenant relationship, with those who would genuinely know him, without the need for the mediating teachers of the old [Mosaic] covenant – because in Christ, God forgives and the Holy Spirit indwells and leads his people, in a new covenant relationship, with those who genuinely know God, without the need for outside mediating teachers [Beale & Carson: *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old*, 1065-1066].

Reflect: Most in the church will not be led astray, but we might have doubts. The truth we know which protects us from being led astray should also protect us from accepting doubts cast by these false teachers. Don't let anyone weaken your faith! If you hear something that seems credible but casts doubt on Jesus or the gospel, investigate! Search the Scriptures for truth and find out the basis for their ideas, until you can defend the true gospel and Triune God successfully! If you have not looked up all the scriptures in days two and three, continue to do that today. Being armed with the truth is the only way to defend against the lies; and only by accepting the truth of the true gospel can we be reconciled with God and enjoy fellowship with him. Think about the advantage for believers today to have peace with God through Christ!

Day 1: Memorize: Choose one of these five verses to memorize this week, and then get started!

Learn: Read 1 John 2.28-3.3. Salvation is not just about whether we go to Heaven or Hell, it is about our relationship with God and it is about the present life. Christ is the source of our hope [3.3] as the evidence of God's great love and mercy [3.1]; thus we have to place our faith in – trust our eternal life to – the true gospel of Christ. Those who place their faith in the true gospel have become children of God right now [3.1-2]! In v.29, it is God the Father who brings us into his family as his children, to become brothers and sisters of Christ, who is the unique Son of God. Look at what John wrote in his gospel: John 1.12-13 [NLT]: “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn-- not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.” Eternal life, true spiritual awakening, intimacy with God, transformation of our character to be like Christ, all begins the moment we accept the true gospel! Spiritual life begins now! That is why John [and your pastors] are so adamant about walking in the light with God. First, if you really have been made alive by Christ, why would you want to continue living like a person dead in his/her sins? Second, if you choose to live like a dead person, you miss out on all the joys, blessings, and excitement that comes with walking with God and experiencing his power at work to transform you.

Reflect: What does it mean to you to know that God looks at you as one of his children, as a member of his family? Do you think you have a real and intimate relationship with God right now? Do you live as someone who is spiritually alive? If others don't see a cross around your neck or a fish on your car, can they tell you are a Christian anyway?

Day 2: Memorize: Practice your memory verse for this week. Remember to practice the ones you already learned.

Learn: Read 1 John 2.28-3.3 again [repetition helps with learning!]. While the Bible is a little skimpy on the details of our future state after death, we do know one thing for sure: we will become fully perfected [fully *sanctified*], to be in character exactly like Christ, who himself has always been perfectly pure [3.2-3]. God created people to be his image: to be like him in character and to represent him on Earth [Genesis 1.26-27]. Jesus has been the only person to truly live up to that image, to truly reflect the image of God on Earth, because – being the divine Son of God himself – he was the only person since Adam and Eve before the Fall to be without a corrupted nature and he was the only person who was able to live a sinless and pure life [remember, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three unique entities who are all so unified in essence and character that they each are all God and yet all are God together]. So we when we are made to be like Christ in Heaven, we will – for the first time! – be fully who God created us to be, his image.

This process of becoming God's image, of becoming the person God created us to be, begins in this life. The process is called *progressive sanctification*. God sanctifies us, which means he sets us apart for his purposes – to represent him well on Earth! – by transforming our characters to be more like Christ, the one person who was like God in every way because he is the Son of God himself. This does not mean you will lose your uniqueness! In fact, God desires to make your uniqueness useful for his mission in the church and in the world. This also does not mean you will lose your personality! However, while God will help you exploit your strengths, he also will help you mitigate your weaknesses, all so you will be more useful to him.

Reflect: What are your thoughts about God's intention to purify you for his purposes? How could you better be God's representative in your life right now? What strengths do you have in spiritual gifts [if you know them], passions, abilities, personality, and experience that you could focus for ministry? What weaknesses or flaws might God want to work on?

Day 3: Memorize: Practice your memory verse for this week. Remember to practice the ones you already learned.

Learn: Read 1 John 2.28-3.3 [no complaining, it is only five verses!]. Because we are children of God right now [3.1] – with new spiritual life thanks to Christ and the opportunity to be intimate with God – and because we have the hope that comes from anticipating eternal life with Christ and our ultimate perfection in character to be fully the people God created us to be [3.2], we true Christians seek right now to follow Christ by being as pure as we can be [3.3]. That means we honestly assess ourselves in the light of God's revelation in the Bible, and then we stop doing the things God says are sinful and we start doing the things God says reflect his character; we change our attitudes, our priorities, our behaviors, to be more like those of Christ.

Our experience of transformation [*sanctification*] to be like Christ is the result of the Holy Spirit working on us. But just as it is the Holy Spirit who saves someone *through* the efforts of God's people sharing the gospel, so too God has shown

us that the Holy Spirit uses human activity as the *means* to help us experience spiritual transformation. God has revealed in the Bible that certain activities will accelerate our spiritual transformation: consciously submitting to Christ's leadership in our lives, studying the Bible, praying, worshipping, serving others, living in biblical community and sharing all the "one-another" commands with each other [like loving, accepting, encouraging...], obeying both the positive ["Go do!"] and negative [Don't do!] commands of Scripture, confessing our failures to obey fully, actively resisting the lure of culture and fleshly desires so we can focus on what is good and right, learning to live in spiritual freedom and emotional health, defending your faith publicly and sharing the gospel with others, and more.

Reflect: Are you willing to stop doing anything and everything that God says is wrong in Scripture? Are you willing to learn how to do and begin doing anything and everything that God says is good in Scripture? If so, declare this to God right now! If you are holding something back, what is it, and why? Talk with a pastor or your small group leader about it. Which of the activities listed above as the means the Holy Spirit uses for our spiritual transformation are you willing to try now? Remember, you should never plateau in your spiritual transformation, so if you are not seeing progress in your character or life, you should be asking why!

Day 4: Memorize: Practice your memory verse for this week. Remember to practice the ones you already learned.

Learn: Read 1 John 2.28-29 [whew! are you glad we shortened the reading today? ☺]. We are to continuously remain in God or in Christ. This means we are to keep our faith in the true gospel for our salvation and we are to live out our salvation by learning to be like Christ. Just as this was John's antidote to the risk of false teachings, so too it is his antidote to the risk of false lifestyles. Someday, Jesus will again be revealed in that he will return to Earth, this time as an all powerful judge and king. Everyone will come before him for judgment. You will enter his royal presence, but will you be joyfully engaging with your king or will you shrink back in fear and disgrace [see 4.17]? If we continue to walk with God in the light right now, we can be confident when we meet Jesus face to face that we have been experiencing the Holy Spirit's transformation, instead of being ashamed that we continued to walk in the darkness of sin. If we increasingly are doing what is right by biblical standards, this is a source of assurance that we are in a right relationship with God, experiencing his salvation, transformation, and fellowship.

Reflect: If Jesus returns today, will you feel confident or ashamed before him? Is there still some sin in your heart that you need to root out? Pray for God to reveal such sin to you and for God to help you change. Confess any known sin issues and again ask God to help you be victorious over sin. Remember at all times that you cannot save yourself: your obedience does not save you, only your faith in the identity and work of Christ saves you! so keep your faith for salvation in Jesus! That is the trust part of trust and obey. Don't neglect the other part either: increasing obedience is an expected result of salvation and the subsequent transformation [*sanctification*] process, and the progress we see in ourselves is evidence of our saving relationship with Christ.

Day 5: Memorize: Practice your memory verse for this week. Remember to practice the ones you already learned.

Learn: Read 1 John 3.1. John says that the world does not know Christ, so they will not know us either. By "the world" here, John means the bulk of humanity, and the cultures they have created. There are three important implications from this for those of us who do know Christ. First, though many aspects of our culture are good, we have to realize that much of our culture is sinful. Sometimes it is completely anti-God, denying God's existence or triune nature, denying the identity and work of Christ, and so on. Sometimes it is outright sinful, promoting things like self-centered and self-indulgent lifestyles, drunkenness, lust and sex outside of marriage, abortion, greed and materialism, et cetera. Sometimes it is more subtle, simply not reflecting the realities of a God who is creator, sustainer, and deliverer.

Second, we have to realize that this darkness in the world provides an opportunity for us to shine God's light. People need to hear the gospel! Communities need reform to protect the weak, heal the sick, help the under-privileged, and ensure fairness and honesty in commerce and politics! We need to be active in these ministries! Third, we have to realize that because the world rejected Christ, they also will reject us. Sometimes we collectively are successful in bringing someone to Christ or in achieving social reform, but we will always face a pervasively hostile environment, because of the darkness in which others walk. Jesus warned his original disciples that the world would not only reject them, but even persecute them [John 15.18-21].

Reflect: Do you see how our culture often is working against God and his purposes? Do you ever face persecution for your beliefs? There is an old saying that if you are not facing persecution, you are not doing enough for Christ. In what ways can you be a light for Christ in this world?

Day 1: Memorize: Keep practicing the verses you have learned already!

Learn: Read 1 John 3.4. John makes clear that sin is rebellion against God. The word translated as “lawlessness” is used in the New Testament to represent lacking in faith, digressing in character, and being unrighteous, ungodly, empowered by Satan, and opposed to God and Christ. When you sin, you are being unrighteous, and thus you are being unlike Christ. When you sin, you are being ungodly, doing the opposite of what God wants and failing to shine his light in this world. When you sin, you are showing that you lack faith: lawlessness is associated with those who lack faith in Christ, but your own sin is at least an admission that you do not trust that the ways of Christ are the best ways for you, even if you have already trusted him for salvation. When you sin, you contribute to the corruption of your character, doing real damage that feeds a spiral downward, directly opposite of the cleansing and healing spiral of purification [*sanctification*] which God wants for you. When you sin, you are siding with Satan, the primal enemy of God and cause of evil in this world. When you sin, you are standing in opposition to God and Christ and what they desire to see in this world and in you.

Reflect: Consider those truths about sin for a few minutes; read them over a couple of times. After considering these truths, what is your general attitude about sin in your life? Do you sense a conviction that you should change some specific things about how you live?

Day 2: Memorize: Practice the verses you have learned already.

Learn: Read 1 John 3.5, 8. Christ is completely pure himself, totally sinless [3.5]. One of his primary purposes in coming the first time was to take away sins [3.5]. He did that by offering himself as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins, so we could be reconciled with God the Father and have eternal life. Part of that eternal life is that we are born again spiritually and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, so that we will experience a transformation [*sanctification*] of our character and lifestyle to become more like Christ over time. If Christ is pure and we are becoming more like him, then we should sin less and less over time. If Christ cared about our sin issue enough to come to earth as a human, live a perfectly pure life, and then die to take on the burden of our penalty, then we should take our sin very seriously. If Christ wants to eradicate sin in us, then we should do our best to cooperate; recall that the verse just before this passage says we should seek to purify ourselves. When we sin, we are siding with and acting under the influence of Satan, the evil fallen angel who leads the charge against Christ; and Christ came to destroy the works of Satan [3.8]. Knowing this, we should side with our good and sinless Savior, not with his enemy.

Reflect: We all slip up from time to time. But we need to become more conscious of our willful choices to side with Christ’s enemies instead of with him. Anytime we choose to do what is forbidden by God, we side with Satan. But you know, our choice to sin more often takes the form of not doing what God has called us to do! Are we really *focusing our lives* on making disciples of Christ, leading them to faith and teaching them all that he commanded? Are we really *giving sacrificially* of our time and money to those in need? Are we really worshipping God not just with our voices but with *submission in all* our life choices? Pray about these things concerning yourself.

Day 3: Memorize: Practice the verses you have learned already!

Learn: Read 1 John 3.7, 10. The Bible discusses several related types of righteousness. When a person accepts the gospel of Christ in faith, part of the salvation process is God declaring that new believer to be legally righteous in his sight [we call this “*justification*”]; what happens is that God accounts the righteousness of Christ to that new believer. The new believer then begins the process of transformation [*sanctification*] to become more righteous in character, like Christ. And as the believer’s character is transformed to be more righteous, the believer makes lifestyle changes to reflect that transformation, and thus the believer lives a more righteous life. There is a strong connection here: the one who is *justified* will be *sanctified* which will lead to a more righteous life. John says that if you are not practicing righteousness – including sacrificially and unconditionally loving fellow believers – then you need to wonder if you really are one of God’s people. James put it another way: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can this kind of faith save him?” [James 2.14 NET]. In other words, true faith leads to truly following Christ. While you do not need to do anything except believe in the gospel to become saved, true saving faith will result in a changed person and thus in a changed lifestyle, to reflect that you are following Christ. If you do not see this transformation happening over time, you have to wonder if it started at all.

Reflect: How different is your lifestyle from those you know who are not Christians? If someone looked at your financial spending or how you spend your time, would that person deduce that you are a follower of Christ? Are there things you should improve in your character or lifestyle? Pray and strive for these things.

Day 4: Memorize: Practice the verses you have learned already.

Learn: Read 1 John 3.4-10. Now that we have considered some of the specifics of this passage, we can look at the whole thing and figure out the statements that raise our eyebrows. It will help to keep in mind the audience John was addressing: he was writing to true believers who had their salvation: they had their forgiveness [2.12], knew God and Christ [2.13-14], had victory over Satan through strong faith and the Word of God abiding in them [2.13-14], had God's anointing of the Holy Spirit [2.20], knew the truth of Christ's gospel [2.21], remained in God and Christ for eternal life by keeping faith in the gospel [2.24-25], and were children of God [3.1]. To these believers, John asserted that everyone has sinned [1.10] and everyone has guilt from sin [1.8], and thus everyone has a need for Christ's salvation. If we confess our sins, God forgives and cleanses us [1.9]. We are commanded to not sin [2.1] and to not love the sinfulness of the world [2.16], but if we mess up we have Christ as a mediator [2.1], applying to us his *atonement* [reconciliation with God; 2.2].

John emphasized the need for righteous behavior, manifested in obedience to God and love for one another. God is righteous, so we can see we are his saved people if we seek to do what is righteous [2.29]. There is no darkness in God, so we fellowship with him only when we walk in his pure light [1.5-6], which is to love others [2.9-10] and obey God's commandments [2.4-6]. If we know God, love God, and abide in God, then we should keep his commandments and live like Christ [2.3-6]. We can anticipate our perfection to be like Christ in Heaven and in his kingdom [3.2], so we seek to purify ourselves to be like Christ now [3.3]. All this is the background for what John says here.

Look again at 3.6, 9. Those who are saved ["fathered by God"] do not practice sin, in fact are not able to sin [3.9], and those who are sinning have not known God at all [3.6]. Yikes! What does John mean by this? It is a challenge to interpret. But we know, given the background of this letter in 1.1-3.5, that John cannot be saying that a believer never sins; in fact, he acknowledged that even believers mess up and need Christ's ongoing mediation [2.1].

Many scholars interpret these verses as referring to only willful sin, to only habitual sin, or to residing in a state of sin. The idea would be that, while believers still are imperfect and screw up occasionally, they will not willingly stay in a state of open rebellion against God by continuing to choose to sin. This is theologically consistent with other teachings in Scripture and there are arguments from the Greek why this might be what John meant. On the other hand, there also are contextual and grammatical arguments against it. In the immediate context, John said all sin is lawlessness and no believer will do it; he said nothing here about patterns of behavior or the distinction between willful and otherwise. Other scholars have thought that John was specifying one particular sin, such as that believers would not turn away from their faith or would not fail to love others. Both those issues are prominent in this letter, yet John seems to be referring to all sin in this context. Tomorrow we will consider more theories.

Reflect: Whether or not these theories were John's focus, they are theologically consistent with Scripture as a whole, so let's reflect on them. First, do you see any patterns in the ways that you sin, any common mistakes or decisions that go against what you think is right? If so, why do you do these things? Do you need help to stop [or to start doing good things]? Second, do you still have any doubts or questions about God, Christ, or the gospel? If so, who can help you figure these things out? Third, are there ways you could be helping people more, through serving in the church, sharing God's truth with other believers or non-believers, giving more to the needy and to the ministry, or otherwise?

Day 5: Memorize: Practice the verses you have learned already.

Learn: Read 1 John 3.4-10. Let's think some more about 3.6, 9. The other main theories consider John's language to be hyperbolic, meaning he was taking a situation to an extreme to make his point. In this whole letter, he has emphasized that there is no middle ground: you are with God or against him, in the light or in the darkness, doing what is righteous or what is evil. We know that John's adversaries – those who were deceiving the people in the church – were not only preaching a false gospel [not trusting in the real Christ], they also were morally indifferent [not following Christ]. John made clear that tolerating sin in your life is not acceptable. We know Christ will complete our perfection in the end [3.2], and because of that we prepare ourselves by seeking purity now [3.3]. We can pursue transformation to purity [*sanctification*] because we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us [the metaphor of God's seed, here] and a new birth to spiritual life. Implicit in John's extreme statements are a command *to live up to what we believe*. While believers seek purity and thus experience progressive transformation to be more like Christ, unbelievers seek sin and thus experience progressive corruption to be like Satan. To John, you are on one path or the other, and every person has to choose.

Reflect: All week, you have been seeing that you have a choice: will you walk with God or rebel? will you align with Christ or with Satan? will you practice righteousness and love or reveal you are under Satan's influence? will you reflect God's light and Christ's character to the world or dwell in sin? will you grow to be like Christ or allow the corruption of your character to develop further? *Have you made a 100% commitment to live for God, to seek intimacy with him, to worship him, to obey him in every respect, and to learn to live the life he designed for us and revealed in the Bible?*

Day 1: Memorize: There are lots of memorable verses in this passage. Pick one that speaks to you and work on memorizing it this week. Continue to practice any other verses you have memorized.

Learn: Read 1 John 3.11-24. As he progresses in this letter, John is consistent in his themes: there are integral links between faith, love, and righteous behavior. If we truly believe in the gospel of Christ, we are regenerated spiritually and begin to be transformed in our character [*sanctified*] by the Spirit, which leads us progressively to an ever greater desire to show love to others in the church and to walk in both faith and obedience on a daily basis. John's ultimate command is in v.23: to put your faith in Christ and to love one another.

We have seen already that our growing love for others in the church is an evidence of our salvation, and we see it here again in v.14, which echoes language Jesus used in John 5.24 [and also his sentiment in John 13.35]. In contrast, if we do not see this growing love in ourselves, we should question whether we might still be dead in sin and not connected to Christ at all. When John wrote, for this church this test was mostly about whether they would remain in loving relationship with each other and with the apostles through John or would join the deceivers who left the church; but John made clear that there were other important aspects to this test too. First he shows us what love looks like: Christ laying down his life for our benefit, so that we could have salvation [v.16]. Jesus himself used this illustration for true love on more than one occasion [John 10.11; 15.13]. Christ's love is sacrificial: it means being willing to give up what one has – material wealth, pride of place, even one's life – to help those in need. And here is a shocker: as believers, we are called to be like Christ [1 John 2.6], and thus to be willing to lay down our lives for others in the church [v.16; John 15.12-13]!

Reflect: None of us can offer salvation to someone else by dying. But if you were in a situation – such too few life preservers on a sinking boat – in which you could offer your life to save another's, would you do it? Are there qualifications on when you would or would not do this? Are there other considerations? There are people in the world who are willing to die in order to *kill* others, because of their strong [though misplaced] faith in deliverance; should we as Christians be any less willing to die in order to *save* others when we have Christ as our savior and deliverer?

Day 2: Memorize: You will be surprised how often the Spirit will call a scripture to mind! Keep memorizing!

Learn: Read 1 John 3.11-18. After illustrating love with Christ's sacrifice and calling on the church to have the same loving attitude as Christ [v.16], John fleshes out what he means in the following two verses. Right now, every day, we can sacrifice for others in the church by meeting their needs. In the US, even the lower-middle class is wealthy by the world's standards, so every one of us can find more ways to give more money to those in need, to the needy in our local church and to the needy in the church around the world. We also can give of our time, energy, and abilities, by serving in church ministries, working with under-privileged children and teenagers, and visiting the elderly and sick. John asks how we can think we love God if we turn away from these needs [v.17; see also 1 John 4.19-20]... and yet we often willingly live with blinders such that we fail to see these needs all around us. Sometimes we get overwhelmed, knowing we cannot fix everything, but that should not stop us from contributing what we can – and increasing the amount we give over time – and we can make use of the local church and other ministry organizations to coordinate our giving so as to make it most effective. It is not enough to be speak kindly to someone [v.18] or even just to pray for them, we need to do what we can to help them too [v.18; see also Deuteronomy 15.7-9; James 2.15-16].

Reflect: Giving up one latte can feed three local people; the cost of a couple eating out for lunch could go instead to feeding a baby overseas for a month; the price of a CD or DVD is the same as for a chicken. And these are not great sacrifices on our part, right? Jesus calls us to *sacrificial* love... is it enough, do you think, to sacrifice a little luxury, or should we be digging deeper and giving up more? Christ gave his life for you; are you willing to give up more time and possessions for his people who are in need? Consider that, in Christ's perspective, when you help [or neglect] Christ's people it is as though you were helping [or neglecting] Christ himself [Matthew 25.31-46]!

Day 3: Memorize: From little girls to old men, everyone can benefit from internalizing the Word of God!

Learn: Read 1 John 3.11-15. In contrast to the sacrificial love Christ showed is the extreme selfishness of Cain, who murdered his brother simply because his brother was righteous [v.12]. John has just said that the unbelieving world does not know/understand us because it does not know Christ [1 John 3.1], and now he says that the unbelieving world will hate us [v.13]. After the last supper, Jesus gave a long discourse to his closest disciples, including instruction on loving one another, and he too mentioned that the world would persecute believers because of being associated with him [John 15.18-21]. John says we should not be disturbed by this persecution [v.13]; in fact, it can be reassuring to be persecuted because of Christ! It is a sign that the world has rejected us because we are walking with Christ and those in the world

cannot accept that. Sometimes this persecution comes from obviously secular sources; sometimes from heretics who have abandoned the orthodox faith to promote their own cults; sometimes from people within the church who are not yet really believers. As we discussed in an earlier devotion, in God's economy if you do not show sacrificial love to someone – if you neglect someone's needs – then you effectively hate that person. And if you hate someone, in God's eyes you are a murderer at heart [v.15]. And if you are a murderer, you are satanic, walking in the darkness [1 John 2.9-11], not experiencing eternal life [v.15].

Reflect: Do you have animosity toward anyone in the church? Do you get upset when others thrive or rejoice when they struggle? If you answered yes to any of these, it should give you pause: these are not Christ-like attitudes, so their existence in your heart is a terrible thing. Maybe you do not actively “hate” anyone, but your love is tepid. Should you be satisfied with that level of love when Christ calls us to be generous, even sacrificial? In what ways can you start to show love to others even when you don't always feel it? What might help you feel it more?

Day 4: Memorize: If you memorized one verse each week, at the end of the year you would have much wisdom!

Learn: Read 1 John 3.18-21. Verses 19-20 are difficult to translate and interpret in a way that both honors the Greek form and makes sense to us today. Renowned scholar I. Howard Marshall has done the best with it. He sees the verses as follows: ¹⁹*And by these acts of love we will know that we are of the truth. And we will persuade our hearts when [in prayer] before God – that if our hearts should condemn us – that God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.* Marshall's explanation is as follows: Showing sacrificial love gives us evidence of our salvation [vv.18-19a]. But we periodically will have a crisis in which we wonder if we really are saved, and in that moment of self-assessment, we might find ourselves coming up short, not loving others enough, and thus doubting our salvation [vv.19b-20a]; at that point, our only comfort is to remind ourselves that only God is our judge, and he knows of our salvation and our hearts' desire to obey and love [v.20b; this is similar to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4.3-5]. Then, with this persuaded heart, we can come before God in confidence [v.21].

Half the time in this letter, John sought to assure true believers of their salvation; the rest of the time, he sought to give a wake up call to those who think they are saved but really are not. Here, he provided a diagnostic test for both groups: if you love your fellow believers sacrificially, then you can be sure you are saved; if you don't, you should doubt your salvation. But it is almost like he knows this is a fuzzy test, that the truth is that none of us love as much as we should, that we all could be giving more of ourselves and our wealth to those who would benefit from it; and so he offered advice about what to do when we wonder: throw yourself on the mercy of God.

Reflect: Do you ever doubt your salvation? Does the amount of sacrificial love you show [or how much it has increased over time] provide a great deal of evidence of your salvation? The Christian should be quite humble: we know we deserve condemnation in Hell for our acts of sin and our sinful neglect of doing the right things; we know we are saved only because God decided to give us a gift through the sacrifice of Christ. So we can go before this pure and righteous God, when we are still tainted and still failing at what he asks of us, only because we know that he sees us through the lens of Christ, that he attributes Christ's righteousness to us. But what if the evidence of this is lacking, then what can we do except throw ourselves on his mercy, ask for forgiveness, and reiterate our faith in Christ's salvation? Pray about these things; seek God's mercy, forgiveness, and strengthening as you confess your sins to him.

Day 5: Memorize: Remember to share your memorized verses with others. Good for them and more fun for you!

Learn: Read 1 John 3.21-24. Knowing we are saved and that God sees us as righteous because of Christ, we can go confidently to him in prayer [v.21] and receive what we ask because we are doing his will [v.22]. Look at a few passages that deal with answered prayer: John 14.13-15; 15.16-17; 16.23-27; Psalm 37.4-5. Notice the connection between getting the desires of your heart and having a heart after God? Notice the connection between getting what we ask and pursuing God's will? To do something *in Christ's name* is to do what he commands, for his glory, and under his direction. Thus, to ask for something *in Christ's name* is to seek a result that fulfills what he commands, for his glory, under his direction. We might be disappointed that God might not grant our request for better looks or a new car. Still, we can be encouraged that God will grant our request when it has to do with allowing the Spirit to guide us in fulfilling our scripturally given obligations from God for the glory of Christ.

Reflect: Can you think of some of your prayer requests that do not come under this guarantee? Can you think of some of your prayer requests that do come under this guarantee but have not yet been granted by God? Does this promise give you encouragement in those latter situations? Taking this promise as guidance, what sorts of things should we be praying to receive? Are you ready to start praying for God to do amazing things through you to bless others?

Day 1: Memorize: We suggest you memorize v.4.1 this week, but if another really speaks to you, learn it instead!

Learn: Read 1 John 4.1-6. Read v.1 again. John warned that “many false prophets have gone out into the world,” meaning (1) these false teachers had left the church community to be part of something heretical, and (2) they had gone out as false evangelists or false missionaries to corrupt the thinking of other people in the world. It is important for you to always remember that not everyone who says s/he is speaking with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit really is. When John said, “do not believe every spirit,” he meant do not be gullible enough to believe that the Holy Spirit is inspiring every person who is speaking about spiritual things, because some of those people are inspired by demons, by their own fleshly and faulty ideas, or by the part of our culture that is wayward in its thinking. This is true even for people in churches! In fact, we know that John’s concern in this letter was that there had been false teachers *inside* the church who then left to spread their false teachings beyond the church. When people say they feel led by God to speak, we should test what they say [which we will discuss over the next two days].

Reflect: John earlier said that if we compared the true gospel to the false ones, the Holy Spirit would testify to the true one and help us know which was which [2.24-27]. Here he says we need to examine what people say and see if it comes from the Holy Spirit or otherwise. As the Spirit bears witness to the truth, so too the truth will bear witness to the Spirit, because God will never contradict himself: the Word of God and the Spirit of God will be consistent with each other. Read Acts 17.10-12: how did the Bereans check to see if Paul and Silas were speaking by the Holy Spirit? What does this suggest for how you should evaluate what people say about spiritual things? What does this suggest about how much time you invest in Bible study each week?

Day 2: Memorize: Keep working on your memory verse and the ones you learned previously!

Learn: Read 1 John 4.1-3. In v.2, note that this test is *contextual*. In other words, John was dealing with a specific problem: secessionists [the false prophets who left the church] were teaching that the eternal Christ and the human Jesus were not the same, so the test John gave was whether or not a person confessed the eternal Christ as having come in the flesh. Today, if you encounter someone who is a false prophet, s/he might lie to you and act like a true believer. Read 2 Corinthians 11.14-15! For example, there are some churches who no longer teach Jesus was the unique divine-man, but their websites still say they do. Therefore, you must carefully check the consistency of a person’s [or a church’s] teachings and see if they agree with the Bible. Also, there are false prophets who might believe in the true Christ, but teach alternative ways to salvation [which is true of the Roman Catholic Church] or some other heresy. So it is vital that we examine what they are saying by comparing it with what we know is true.

Reflect: The easiest way to grow a big church today is to lie: to say that Christianity is about believers prospering, that God will heal all who believe [and give] enough, that the essence of the gospel is doing social good, or that you can hear from God directly *without* worrying about what the Bible says. The churches that espouse those false doctrines consistently grow large in our country today. What is the surest way to lose people in your church? It is to tell them the biblical truth: that God will not condone their sex outside of marriage, that their gossip is a hate crime, or that God calls everyone including them to evangelize. Read 2 Timothy 4.3-4: How vulnerable are you to wanting your ears tickled? How resistant are you to what your orthodox pastor/elders are teaching you from the Bible?

Day 3: Memorize: Be sure to memorize where each verse is found [for example, “1 John 4.1”], not just its content!

Learn: Read 1 John 4.1-3. When John says “does not acknowledge Jesus” he means in the way he described in v.2. It is absolutely true that any person who denies that Jesus is both divine and human is a heretic who is not inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is not even a true Christian. Satan was attacking the church in John’s day by encouraging false teachers to impersonate the real church, by saying they were Christian while denying the dual nature of Christ [divine and human], because Satan knew that people who did not believe in the identity of Christ were not believing in God’s gospel and thus would not be saved. Salvation is a gift from God [*grace*], but we come to salvation by accepting God’s offer in faith. If we don’t believe in the details of that offer – the identity of the savior or his saving work on our behalf – then we have been misled. Today, the church is experiencing the same attack [among others]: many false teachers are identifying themselves as Christian but attacking the doctrine of Christ’s identity or the triune nature of God. John says they are guided by “the spirit of the Antichrist”: in other words, they are guided by demons and their work is evil. John says they

certainly do not speak by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and just as certainly they do not share some “higher” spiritual knowledge; in fact, they are not even merely intellectually wrong, rather they are demonically supporting the age-old rebellion against God the Father and against his anointed representative in Christ.

Reflect: Some of the cults who use the Bible wrongly or refer to Christ but in heretical ways include the Unity Church, Christian Science, Worldwide Church of God, Way International, Unification Church, Unitarian/Universalist Church, Children of God, EST, Theosophy, Transcendental Meditation, Mormonism [Church of the Latter Day Saints], Jehovah’s Witnesses [Watchtower Bible and Tract Society], Hare Krishna, and Metaphysical Christianity [Sarasota Center of Light]. Also the writings of Judaism and Islam both acknowledge the human Jesus but deny his divinity, and some polytheistic religions such as Hinduism and its derivatives are willing to accept the Christian God or a divine Jesus, but only as one of many gods. People who belong to these groups and espouse these beliefs can be wonderfully kind people who do many good things. Nevertheless, how should we view the inspiration for their beliefs? How should we see their acts of evangelism, simply as “kind though misguided” or as the work of Satan in fostering rebellion and preventing salvation?

Day 4: Memorize: Keep working on your memory verse and the ones you learned previously!

Learn: Read 1 John 4.4-6. If you are a true child of God [a true believer in the true Christ], then you have overcome the false prophets, because you have clung to the true gospel instead of believing their false teachings. How have you been able to do this? By the grace of God! By the power of the Holy Spirit who is in you. The Holy Spirit indwells every true Christian [Romans 8.9; 1 Corinthians 3.16; 6.19]. John said the Holy Spirit who is in you is greater than the one in the world. By “the one in the world” he meant the evil at work in the world, the spiritual inspiration of the Antichrist, which is Satan himself. Jesus called Satan the ruler of the world for the present time [John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11], and he is the one deceiving and falsely inspiring non-believers [2 Corinthians 4.4; Ephesians 2.1-2]. It is Satan and his demon followers who are inspiring the false teachers [including the secessionists of John’s day] to try to deceive even those of us who really believe.

Reflect: If you are a Christian, did you already know that the Holy Spirit somehow mystically was indwelling you? What does that imply about how dependent you should be on God every hour of every day? What does that imply about your access to God anytime, anywhere? What does that imply about how you should behave, even when “nobody” is looking [see 1 Corinthians 6.19-20]?

Day 5: Memorize: You can practice at red lights, while brushing your teeth, or anytime you have thirty seconds!

Learn: Read 1 John 4.4-6. Those who teach false doctrines are not from God, rather they are influenced by worldly and fleshly ideas instead of God’s revelation, and so their teaching reflects the flesh and the world instead of God. Therefore the unbelieving world loves them! The unbelieving world does not love us when we speak God’s truth. Absolute truth and absolute morality do not sit well with the unbelieving world today. But we can see who are the true believers in Christ, because they *do* respond to biblical teaching, and because they *are* walking in God’s light.

In this passage, John gave us two tests for evaluating other people. The first is what they teach: do they confess the true triune God, the true divine-human Christ, and the true gospel? The second is how they respond to the teaching of these doctrines: do they rejoice, worship, and eagerly learn when they hear what the real church teaches?

Reflect: If you have been one of those people who thought church and Bible study was optional or who was sporadic in attending church and to Bible study, have you changed your attitude now? How will you respond to what you have been learning in 1 John? Do you know people who say they are Christians, but think they don’t need to go to church regularly? Do you know people who say they are Christians, but think they don’t need to listen to the apostolic teachings every day through reading the Bible? What would you say to those people after reading v.6?

Day 1: Memorize: There are many verses good for memorizing this week! Pick one and get to work on it.

Learn: Read 1 John 4.7-21. Each day this week, we will see that John reiterates a theme of this letter, but with new information added. This passage has “bookends,” meaning the first verse [4.7] and the last verse [4.21] have the same theme, which is that Christians should love one another. This obviously continues a theme we have already seen in this letter. John also reminded his readers of some reasons why we should love: first, that love itself is a godly quality [4.7]; second, that our growing love for each other is one form of evidence of our being born again by God and of knowing God [4.7]; third, that we should reflect to others the love we have received from God and Christ [4.10-11, 19].

John added some new things to consider too. First, he said, “God is love” [4.8, 16]. Do not be confused and think that God and love are interchangeable: John is not saying that God is love and love is God. Rather, “love” is qualitative, expressing a supreme quality in the essence of God. John previously wrote about God’s *holiness* [purity; 1.5], so there are two emphases about God’s character in this letter: God is perfectly holy and God is perfectly loving. These qualities are 100% perfectly realized in God, unlike in us. You might think holiness and love would work against each other sometimes – like “How could a loving God judge his creatures to go to Hell?” or “How could a holy and righteous God forgive his creatures for their terrible sins?” – but in fact it is the cooperative interaction of these qualities that brought us salvation! God’s holiness requires judgment for sin, while his love requires rescuing us, and that is why God the Father sent Christ the Son to come die for us [4.10]. Another new concept is that if we have received God’s love through his saving grace, then it will transform us to be more like Christ, and thus more pure and more loving; we love because we were loved by God [4.10-11, 19].

Reflect: In us love and holiness work together too. We might think it is hard for this to happen, because if we are intolerant of sin then we seem unloving and if we show unconditional love then we seem tolerant of sin and not pure. But in the letter of 2 John, John said that love involves walking absolutely in God’s light of purity. When we reflect God’s holiness, we provide the best example for others to follow, we represent God in their lives, and we show them love the way the Bible teaches. Turn it around and we can see that if we are truly obedient then we will show unconditional and sacrificial love, because that is one of the commands of Christ. The key when dealing with others is to share truth in love: don’t shy away from confronting someone about their sin or lack of faith, but do it with the intention of helping them, with love in your heart and your manner; continue to accept and love them unconditionally, but be upset by their waywardness. Encourage them in faith and in obedience, but not with a whip. Keep in mind how gentle, forgiving, and merciful God has been to you! Are there any relationships in your life that need a better balance of this holiness and love?

Day 2: Memorize: Keep practicing the new and old verses. Memorize where they are found, not just the content.

Learn: Read 1 John 4.7-10. In some older translations, the phrase “only begotten” describes Jesus in 1 John 4.9 [and John 1.14-18; 3.16-18; Hebrews 11.17]. This translation has led to much confusion. Most newer translations correctly translate the Greek word μονογενής [mah-nah-geh-NACE] with “one and only” or “unique.” On the other hand, Jesus really is referred to as “begotten” in three other passages [Acts 13.33; Hebrews 1.5; 5.5], but they are metaphorical. All three quote Psalm 2.7, in which God is talking to the king and says on this special day he has “begotten” [Greek verb γεννάω (gen-NAH-oh)] the king. The king already existed and was alive, but on that day God would anoint him as his ultimate representative on Earth, the king of God’s people. So the original use of the term was metaphorical, not about a literal birth or creation. In Acts 13.33, Paul said that this verse prophesied about Jesus’ resurrection, that it was in that moment that Jesus became God’s anointed king. Of course, Jesus was already alive; in fact, he had been alive, dead, and now was resurrected to life again! In Hebrews 1.5, the author showed Christ’s unique relationship to God the Father as the only Son of God. He was not talking about a literal birth or creation, he was talking about a designated relationship. In Hebrews 5.5, he showed that it was God the Father who glorified Christ by calling him Son and anointed king. Be assured that Christ is eternal as the Son of God, part of the triune Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He was born to Mary when he chose to come to earth as a man named Jesus, so that he could die to pay the penalty for our sins, but this does not change the eternity of Christ and has nothing to do with the term “begotten” in the Bible. When the term occurs in the Bible, it refers to God the Father anointing Christ as king in Psalm 2; all other occurrences – like in 1 John 4.9 – more properly should be translated as “one and only,” as they are in most modern translations.

John again said that Jesus’ *atonement* sacrifice – his death on the cross which paid the penalty for our sins and thus *reconciled* us with God – gives us the supreme example of love [4.10]. He previously had said that *Jesus laying down his life for us* showed us what love is [sacrificial and beneficial] because it revealed *Christ’s* love for us [3.16]. Here he said that *God sending Christ to be that sacrifice* showed us what love is [forgiving and gracious] because it revealed *God the Father’s* love for us [4.9-10]. John also revealed some new implications of this love and sacrifice: Because of this

sacrifice, we can become spiritually alive through Christ, and thus experience God's love in us and God manifesting his love through us to bless others [4.9-17].

Reflect: Think about how much God the Father must love you if he was willing to provide for your salvation even though you were his enemy [Romans 5.10], without faith in him, without any attempt to be obedient to him. Think about the magnitude of what God the Father and Christ the Son did, that Christ the Son would leave Heaven and come to Earth, enter our timeline, our history, our species, so that he could live among us and then die for us and take on the penalty for our sin! Think about how much love that implies. When you are done reflecting on God's love, then write your thoughts about the implications: This love requires our response to love others for three reasons: first, in gratitude, we follow the example of Christ and God the Father; second, in obedience, we follow the command of Christ and God the Father; third, we experience a transformation of our character such that we cannot help but share the love that is building within us. Consider these things for a few minutes...

Day 3: Memorize: Keep practicing the new and old verses. Practice new ones throughout the day.

Learn: Read 1 John 4.11-16. Here we see several reminders of things John has already taught in this letter. First, the love in our hearts and our fellowship with God are integrally related [4.12, 16], so we should not fool ourselves into thinking we can be right with God while we are not loving others. Second, God's love is perfected in us when we love one another [4.12], because then we reflect the love [part of his character] which he has shown to us, and we respond to the transformative power of that love and thus become more like Christ [who reflects God the Father's character perfectly]. Third, the Holy Spirit testifies to us about the correctness of the true gospel and indwells us to provide us with two evidences of our salvation [4.13]. Fourth, the fact that we continue to have faith in the apostolic gospel of Christ and are not swayed by the heretical teachings of others is another evidence of our salvation [4.14-15]. Then John said, "And we have come to know and have believed in the love which God has among us" [or "in us"; 4.16]. God's love is experiential, which strengthens our faith: as we experience his love and allow it to transform us, we grow stronger in faith. Furthermore, we experience his love in part by experiencing the love of the body of Christ, the church; and we experience his love in part by sharing that love with others in the church.

Reflect: It is difficult for us to understand the depth of God's love, that we are unconditionally accepted, unconditionally and sacrificially loved, welcomed with true hospitality into God's presence, loved enough to be given both affirming encouragement and accountability, forgiven and shown mercy... unless we actually experience these things in the context of the biblical community God hopes for the church to become. This is one reason why there are dozens of "one another" commands in the New Testament: as we learn how to love one another – which also will make us more obedient and more reflective of God's character – we will provide ourselves and others with a way to actually fathom the depths of God's love for us and thus grow in faith. Think about your part in the church community and how it could be better.

Day 4: Memorize: Memorizing can be like prayer in this way: that you have a set time to sit quietly and focus on it, but you also do it whenever you have a moment.

Learn: Read 1 John 4.17-19. John reiterates that if we are walking in God's light – being like Christ in faith and obedience – then we can have confidence on the day of judgment [2.28; 4.17]. The new information is that there is no fear in love, that perfect love drives out fear, that if we fear punishment then we are not yet "perfected in love." If we truly understand how much God loves us, and we avail ourselves of that love through faith in the deliverance described in the gospel of Christ, then we have nothing to fear: God's perfect saving love leaves us sure of our destiny. On the other hand, if we still fear death and judgment, it shows we do not fully grasp God's love cognitively or faithfully.

Reflect: Do you still fear death or the day of judgment before Christ? Do you recall from earlier in this letter [and in the gospel of John] what is the basis on which you will be judged righteous? Can you see that if you are sure you are a Christian, then you should have no fear of death or judgment?

Day 5: Memorize: When you think of a memorized verse, take a moment to reflect on what it means for you.

Learn: Read 1 John 4.20-21. John reiterated that we cannot love God without loving his people too: love for God and love for his people are not separable. Here John gave us a new reason for this: if we cannot love the tangible people of God then we will not be able to really love the un-seeable God. So God's love for us will help transform us to love others, our love for God will lead us to be willing to love others, our love for others is one form of evidence for having received God's loving grace, and now we add that loving others is an integral part of actually loving God.

Reflect: Do you see that if you are not loving the others whom God has saved then you are not reflecting God's love to them nor showing God's type of love even to God himself? Reflect on this.

Day 1: Memorize: This week, practice all the verses you have memorized before. Keep them fresh in your mind.

Learn: Read 1 John 5.1-2. We have already heard that believers are “fathered” by God [2.29; 3.9; 4.7-8]. It is good to be reminded that God the Father initiated our salvation, which was effected by the Holy Spirit, through the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. In the earlier passages, it was our obedience [2.29; 3.9] and love for one another [4.7-8] that were evidence of being fathered by God. Here John brings in another of his diagnostic tests, faith in the true gospel: we are fathered by God if we believe in the true gospel of Christ. In contrast, the false prophets of John’s day were denying that the human Jesus and the divine Christ were one and the same, so they were not fathered by God. We also have seen before that if we truly love God then we inevitably will come to love God’s people [4.7-8, 20-21].

Verse 2 is a little tricky. Most translations have 5.2a pointing forward: “*By this we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and carry out his commands*”; but that states the relationship backwards from how John usually represents it: “*By this we know that we truly love God and are obeying: when we love his children.*” It could be that John is saying that love for God’s people and love for God with obedience are inseparable: we cannot love God and obey his commands without loving people, because loving people is an inevitable result of loving God and of living the way he has prescribed; and we cannot truly love people without loving God and obeying him, because true love comes from God and his commands define how true love functions. John could have phrased it, “*By this we know that we should love the children of God: when we love God and carry out his commands.*” Another possibility, offered by scholar I. Howard Marshall, is that 5.2a points backward: that the logic in 5.1 is how we know we should love the children of God.

Reflect: Throughout this letter, there have been four diagnostic tests: faith in the true gospel, obedience to God through the apostolic teachings, love for one another, and the indwelling Holy Spirit. These are *not* the *requirements* of salvation, but they *are* the *evidence* of our salvation. Ask a few intimate friends and family members to give you feedback on how much of this evidence exists in your daily way of living. Their feedback will not determine your salvation, but it will help you see whether there are ways you could better reflect your position as a citizen of Heaven and child of God.

Day 2: Memorize: Continue to practice the verses you memorized previously.

Learn: Read 1 John 5.1-5. Notice that believing Jesus is the Christ [the Jewish *Messiah*; 5.1] and believing Jesus is the Son of God [5.5] are both part of having saving faith. In John’s day, it is likely that the Gentile [non-Jewish] false prophets saw the Christ and the Son of God as identical, as some sort of divine being that indwelled the human Jesus but was not Jesus himself. Most of the gatherings of church leaders during the first couple of centuries after Christ’s resurrection focused on establishing correct beliefs about the identity of Christ. They concluded the following: that the Son of God always existed as part of the triune God [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit]; he came to Earth born as the human Jesus to fulfill the prophecies about the Christ coming; as Jesus he has his divine nature and a fully human nature, which are separate within him; and despite having two natures and thus both a perfectly divine will and a purely human will, Jesus makes one moral decision for himself.

It is not news to us that if we love God we will keep his commands, but it might be a new concept that keeping all God’s commands is not burdensome [5.3]! John said our faith empowers us to overcome the temptations of the world [5.4]. In fact, he even stated it once as a “done deal”: that faith already overcame. Notice the content of this faith: in Christ [5.5]. It is faith in Christ and his eternal deliverance that is the human means to our salvation. It is through faith that we experience the work of the Holy Spirit to purify [*sanctify*] us to be more like Christ. It is in faith that we trust Christ has already delivered us from the power of sin [Romans 6.5-7]. Because we trust Christ to be powerful enough to save us eternally, we can trust he is powerful enough to save us from temptation now. Because we know Christ has saved us eternally, we desire to follow him and experience his deliverance in real ways now. As we experience Christ’s deliverance and so overcome the temptation to be worldly, to be self-oriented, and to satisfy our sinful cravings, we become free in Christ, free to love one another and free to obey God.

Reflect: Do you find it difficult to live the Christian life in victory? In his blog post entitled “Sancti-fried” [www.retrochristianity.org], theologian Michael Svigel argued that the Christian experience is always one of struggle to resist sin and overcome the lures of the world. This is true. But it also is true that we have been empowered to have victory in this daily struggle, and that the struggle should lessen in at least some areas as we become more like Christ. Do you understand that your victory is already assured if you walk by faith? Is that victory reflected in your daily life, in the words you say, the tone of voice you use, the things you choose to do and to not do?

Day 3: Memorize: Continue to practice the verses you memorized previously. Tell one or two to a friend!

Learn: Read 1 John 5.6-8. No doubt 5.6 was helpful to John's readers, but it can be hard to understand in our word-for-word type translations. The NLT does a good job interpreting: *And Jesus Christ was revealed as God's Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross-- not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with his testimony.* The false prophets might have held a theory that became popular later, that the divine Christ descended into the human Jesus at his baptism [the start of Jesus' ministry] but left Jesus before the crucifixion [at the end of Jesus' ministry]. John says this is *not* so: believing in the real Jesus is to realize that he was always Christ, always the Son of God, even when he hung on the cross as a convicted criminal. This might seem an obscure argument, but it is important to get this right: if Jesus died as only a "good person" then he could do nothing for us on the cross, and we would have no salvation by his blood. That is why the teachings of the Unitarians and other theologically "liberal" denominations are so dangerous and evil.

The Holy Spirit is truth [5.6] like God is love [4.8]: "truth" is qualitative, expressing a supreme quality of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit is absolutely truthful" would be another way to say this, but it would lack the dramatic quality of "the Spirit is truth." This quality of truthfulness is 100% pure and realized in the Holy Spirit, unlike in us. In truth, the Spirit testifies about Christ [5.6; John 15.26]. He does this directly to our spirits, through inspiration of the writers of Old Testament prophecy which Christ fulfilled and of the writers of the New Testament who wrote about Christ, through his descent onto Jesus at Jesus' baptism, and through empowering miracles while Christ walked the Earth. Jesus' baptism was an identifying event, with the Holy Spirit visibly descending to alight on Jesus [Matthew 3.13-17] and John the Baptist recognizing this as evidence that Jesus is the Christ [John 1.32-34]. Jesus' crucifixion also was an identifying event [Matthew 27.50-54], with fulfillment of prophecies including his sacrifice for sin [2.2; 4.10] and his resurrection [Matthew 28.5-10]. John's point with these three witnesses probably was that you cannot claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit if you are rejecting the testimony of any of these three witnesses as to Jesus' identity as the Christ and Son of God.

Reflect: Now that we have spent several weeks in this material, can you articulate why it is important to believe that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human, why our salvation would be impossible otherwise? If not, start reviewing!

Day 4: Memorize: Continue to practice the verses you memorized previously. You can practice many times each day.

Learn: Read 1 John 5.6-10. 5.9 could read, "If we receive the testimony of men, *then we should receive the testimony of God, because the testimony of God is of greater importance...*" The italicized part is not in the letter, but it is assumed; this was a common way of expressing yourself back then. God has testified to the identity of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God through fulfilled prophecies, his declaration at Jesus' baptism, the inspired New Testament writers, and the Holy Spirit's testimony. In fact, a great deal of what is recorded in the New Testament gospels is focused on understanding who Jesus is, and this focus tells us how important this issue is, while the attestations from many sources assures us of how true his identification is. If you believe in God then you will believe in his testimony about the Son; if you believe in the true Jesus as the Son and Christ, then you have accepted God's testimony [you have it "in yourself"; 5.10]. The false prophets of John's day did not believe this, they had rejected the true gospel preached by the apostles and created a false conception of Jesus and false gospel. This is still a common problem today.

Reflect: Many people find it difficult to believe the Son of God would come in human form, because mankind and the world are so corrupted; many people assume that we do not need salvation because mankind and the world are so marvelous in themselves; do you tend toward either of these views? The wonder of the *incarnation* [the Son coming in human form] is that the triune God realized our need for salvation and was willing to condescend to come in human form, live a perfectly pure life to be a worthy sacrifice, and die on the cross for our sakes. Take a few minutes to reflect on the wonder of God coming to earth as a human to die for you! How do you feel about that? What are your thoughts?

Day 5: Memorize: Continue to practice the verses you memorized previously. Thank God for his revelation!

Learn: Read 1 John 5.1-12. The content of God's testimony is that he will offer us eternal life, but only through Christ the Son [see John 14.6]. John has stressed the identity of Christ and the work of Christ, which combine to provide us with the benefit of eternal life.

Reflect: Many people complain that it is unfair of God to offer only one way of salvation. But if we are all in a pit of corruption, deserving eternal death and punishment, and then God offers us a lift out of the pit and into eternal life, should we complain about it or accept the gift? God offers us free deliverance, and asks only that we believe in the facts about that deliverance, that it comes through the identity and work of Christ. Is that unfair? Are you convinced there is no other way to reconcile with God and be saved?

Day 1: Memorize: If you want to remember what 1 John is about, you can memorize 5.13: the connection between faith in the real Jesus and assurance of salvation. 5.19 and 5.21 are short and sweet too! Pick something to work on this week.

Learn: Read 1 John 5.13-15. Throughout this letter, John has tried to show distinctions between true believers of the real gospel of Christ and deceived people who believe in a false gospel. He has provided diagnostic tests that can reassure the true believer of his salvation and be a wake-up call to those who do not have salvation. Now he provides his summary statement in 5.13: he has written to the real believers in the church, to provide them with assurance that they have eternal life. In his gospel, John wanted to *convince* people of the true identity of Jesus, so they could believe and be saved [John 20.31]; in this letter, John wanted to *assure* those who knew the true identity of Jesus that they were saved. After the false teachers left the church, those who remained might have been shaken by events, wondering if they had chosen the right side in the fight, wondering if they had the right gospel and thus salvation for real. John assured those who believed in the true Jesus, the Christ and Son of God – those who passed the diagnostic tests of believing in the true apostolic teachings, obeying God, loving each other in the church, and being indwelt by their Holy Spirit – that they were truly saved.

With that assurance, believers have confidence in God's presence, such as in prayer, because they know God loves them and has forgiven them. Amazingly, God allows us to approach him and ask for things, and even grants some of our requests! When we yield our will to God's, we become tools for his work. When we yield our will to God's, we learn to ask according to his will. Regarding 1 John 3.21-23, we discussed what it meant to pray "in Christ's name" and the relationship between getting prayers answered and doing God's will [you might want to review that]. Here John connects answered prayer with praying according to God's will. If we yield to God, we seek what he desires, and then he is certain to grant our requests! Sometimes the results take a lifetime to come to fruition, but this is another confidence builder for believers: trust that God will grant the prayers that are consistent with his known character and desires.

Reflect: John's audience feared they might be lost, so he assured them of their salvation and welcome from God in prayer; do you approach God with relational confidence? On the other hand, often we have a casual attitude toward God, not showing him proper reverence as the almighty and holy God; do you approach God with the proper amount of respect and courtesy? What prayers do you believe are according to God's will and which you are still trusting him to fulfill?

Day 2: Memorize: Practice your new verse and the ones you already have memorized.

Learn: Read 1 John 5.16-17. These verses seem confusing to the modern day English-speaking church, and there are many different theories about them, none without objections. Perhaps the key to interpreting them is to realize that John must have thought they would make clear sense to his original audience [especially since they come at this culmination of his letter], and therefore the interpretation must be simple and easy to derive from the text. John says we are to pray for the church member [literally, our "brother"] who is "sinning a sin not with a result of death." In the New Testament era, physical death sometimes came to people who sinned in specific ways [Acts 5.1-11; 1 Corinthians 11.30]. It seems that John is saying if someone sins and does not physically die, then we should pray for him. If that person sins and then physically dies, it is too late, and he is not talking about that situation. So what does it mean that if we pray then God will give "life" to the one who sinned? The one who sinned is already physically alive and not about to die for his sin in this situation, so "life" must have a more spiritual meaning. In 1 John 3.14, John said believers had "passed out of death into life" [NASB]; this means we were made alive through our new birth by the Holy Spirit when we were reconciled with God. Perhaps in the context of 5.16-17, John means the believer who sins and does not physically die is still walking in darkness as though he were spiritually dead, but if we pray for that person God will bring him to repentance and walking in the light with God which is true life [see 1 John 1.6-7]. These verses come right after 5.14-15, which promise success if we pray according to God's will, which should tell us something about the success of these types of prayers!

Another view keeps in mind that John's letter deals with the situation of false teachers who were in the church but then left to follow a false gospel based on a false Jesus. These people were extensively exposed to the true gospel, but rejected it, and that rejection led them to leave the true faith for a false one, a decision that led to their permanent spiritual death. So John was saying if we notice that someone in the church [someone who calls himself a "brother" but is not yet a true believer] is sinning, we should pray for that person, and God will grant him true spiritual life. But John pointedly was not saying the church should pray for those who had already left the church, and thus sealed their fate.

Reflect: Do you pray for your fellow church members? Do you ask God to help them repent of their sins and walk with God in his light? Do you think you should? If you are in a small group of some kind, do you confess your struggles with sin to each other and ask for prayer support, encouragement, and accountability? Do you think you should?

Day 3: Memorize: Practice your new verse and the ones you already have memorized. As you get to know each verse better, you can practice it less often – every other day, weekly, etc. – but don't let yourself forget them!

Learn: Read 1 John 5.18-19. John again says believers do not sin [see 1 John 3.6-9 and that devotion]. Note this comes right after he says to pray for the believer who sins [5.16]! What John is expressing here is both a promise and a command: it is possible for us to resist temptation to sin, because we are born again with a new nature and because we have the Holy Spirit empowering us; and because of this we are commanded to avoid sin and walk in the light. The second half of 5.18 is difficult to translate because of complicated Greek, but the meaning is clear: John is saying that either Jesus or God the Father protects the believer from Satan's attempt to lead him/her into sin. That is good news!

Throughout the letter, John has made clear that there are two types of people out there: those walking in the light and those walking in the darkness; those walking with God and those influenced by Satan. Here he states this plainly in 5.19: we, the believers of the true gospel [5.13], are in God's family, but those who do not believe in this gospel – those "in the world" – are still under the influence of Satan. This is his definitive statement about the false teachers who left the church and professed a false gospel: they are under the influence of Satan.

Coming where it does, after the promises in 5.13-18 – that we who believe in Christ are saved, that we can approach God with confidence and get our prayers answered when we yield to God's will, that we can successfully pray for our sinning brothers and sisters in Christ, that we can have victory over sin because God is protecting us from Satan – 5.19 seems to imply assurance that we can trust in these promises because we are in God's family. God loves us and his word is true, so we can trust the promises he has made to us, including particularly the promises in this letter and especially in this passage of the letter.

Reflect: Do you believe that you can have victory over your temptations, even your compulsive/addictive ones? Do you need help? If so, to whom should you turn in the church? What is the impact on your thinking to know that God is protecting you from the harm Satan wants to bring you through temptation? Has this letter changed the way you view your position in the scheme of things or the position of other believers and of non-believers?

Day 4: Memorize: Continue to work on your memory verses.

Learn: Read 1 John 5.20-21. John just told us that we know we are protected and can have victory over sin, we know that we are in God's family [5.18-19]. Now he continues with several other vital things we know: we know the Son of God has come! we know Christ gave us understanding to know God ["the one who is true"]! we know we are in intimate relationship with God the Father and Christ! Many in John's day thought people needed knowledge to be "saved" from the material world. John has explained that ignorance is not our problem, sin is; but the answer to sin is to know the truth about Jesus and believe it, thereby establishing a relationship with Jesus, reconciling with God the Father, and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God's revelation is the basis for our faith. Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God, because he is the Son of God, part of the triune Godhead, and thus perfectly reflective of the character of God. Ultimately, it is not about gaining higher knowledge, as the false teachers said, but about knowing Jesus; not just knowing *about* him, but knowing him *relationally*. We enter this relationship in faith, by believing in the true gospel taught by Jesus' apostles, but it is more than an intellectual understanding, it is acceptance of the promises as applying to you and putting your complete trust in them for your deliverance.

Note the end of 5.20: John repeatedly has used the term "This One" or "That One" to refer to Christ [though this does not always come across in English translations]; here he says, "This One [Jesus] is the true God and eternal life"! There is eternal and true life only in Jesus and only through him; and John says plainly that Jesus is truly divine, part of the triune Godhead, so your faith must include that aspect of his identity.

Reflect: John provides the application step to his letter: "protect yourself from idols," in other words, protect yourself from the false concepts of Jesus that the false teachers are peddling. How can you ensure you do this?

Day 5: Memorize: Continue to work on your memory verses.

Learn: Read all of 1 John. It is about three pages of text; you can do it! As you read, make note of anything about which you still have questions and make note of the most important things you learned or most important steps you took as a result of these studies.

Reflect: What were the most important things you learned studying this epistle [letter]? What valuable steps did you take as a result of your study? Did you value the memory work? If you still have questions, what steps can you take to get them answered? Share praise reports with your pastors!

Day 1: Memorize: This week, memorize vv.7-8, as a reminder to support missionaries and other itinerant ministers.

Learn: Read 3 John, all fifteen verses. Like in 2 John, the author of 3 John identifies himself only as “The Elder.” The early church knew him as the apostle John, one of the closest disciples of Jesus. In John’s later years, he was in what is now western Turkey, providing ministry oversight to churches in many towns. John wrote to Gaius [Γάϊος = “GAH-ee-ahs”], which was a very common name back then. John and Gaius obviously had an intimate friendship, since John called him “beloved” four times in just fifteen verses. John also referred to Gaius as one of his children; Paul used such a term to indicate he had led the person to Christ and mentored him, so Gaius might be a disciple of John’s, but it could also mean simply that Gaius was a member of a church for which John provided oversight. John intended to visit this area soon [v.14], so he kept this letter short [v.13], apparently writing only what had to be said right now.

John ended his letter wishing Gaius “peace.” This is very Jewish: in Hebrew they would say שלום [read right to left: “shah-LOME”]. The Hebrew word can mean more than just peace, it can mean health, success, safety, completeness, which are all good things to wish someone. Notice John’s prayer in v.2; it is possible Gaius was not healthy [or was old and living out in the country], since John felt he had to write to him about what was happening in the church there. The Greek word used in v.15, εἰρήνη [ay-RAY-nay], can mean peace with other people, peace with God in the sense of having salvation, or peace as in general well being or health. Jesus spoke this phrase, “Peace be with you” or “Peace to you” [depending on your translation] after his resurrection [John 20.19, 21, 26]. John’s church [probably in Ephesus] sent out some traveling missionaries [vv.3-8; more on that tomorrow], who stayed with Gaius and reported back in a letter to their home church about the hospitality they received from Gaius [vv.3-6]. This led John to conclude that Gaius’ soul was prospering [v.2], because he was faithful to the gospel and living in the truth through obedience and love [vv.3-4].

Reflect: If someone you didn’t know stayed with you for a few days, how would they testify about your faith, character, and lifestyle? Do you think they would easily see Christ in you? Or would they have to rely on outward signs such as the fish on the car, the cross on the wall, or your habit of praying before meals? Has your character been *transformed* by your relationship with Christ? Has your lifestyle? In what ways yes, and in what ways no?

Day 2: Memorize: Continue to work on memorizing 3 John 7-8.

Learn: Read 3 John 1-8. When John said he had heard that Gaius was living in the truth [v.3], he had in mind what he wrote about Gaius’ hospitality [vv.5-6]. The churches depended in part on traveling ministers, who would help evangelize and would bring new teaching guidance from apostles like John. These missionaries in turn depended on the church they visited: by taking them in, Gaius would have provided them with food and shelter, and also with credibility in the local Christian community there. Whole church communities would repay hospitality to each other’s people, as part of connecting to the greater church outside the city. In this area, all the churches were under John’s authority, so accepting missionaries with his letter of recommendation also was an act of continuing to align the church with the apostolic authority and message. Gaius apparently was very hospitable, serving the missionaries so well that they reported to John that he was doing everything he could, even though he didn’t know them at all personally [v.5]. John commended Gaius for his hospitality and service [vv.3-6] and then encouraged him to complete the task by sending the missionaries onward “in a manner worthy of God.” In other words, John wanted Gaius to reflect God’s love, generosity, and purity of heart, by sending the missionaries off fully prepared. This would have meant Gaius supplying them with food, money, and anything else they needed, and also ensuring their clothes were washed and so on. Gaius already had been generous in both material goods and services, and John encouraged him to give even more.

Reflect: If your pastor called and asked you to put someone up in your house for a while, how would you react? Would you be willing to sacrifice your family’s privacy and harmony to take care of someone doing God’s work? Are you right now willing to sacrifice some money and material goods to promote God’s work of spreading the gospel and strengthening the churches? Are you willing to serve the people who spread the gospel and strengthen the churches? There are many opportunities, both in the US and overseas, to support missionaries, evangelists, itinerant preachers, missions recruiters, missions trainers and coordinators, seminaries and seminary students, and others involved in the work of Christ. *What are you willing to do?* Even if you cannot travel yourself, you still can be involved! Your pastors will have ideas of how you can help. Another idea is to take the “Perspectives” class [www.perspectives.org].

Day 3: Memorize: Continue to work on memorizing 3 John 7-8. Continue your practice of previously learned verses!

Learn: Read 3 John 5-8. John described the missionaries as those who “went out for the sake of the name” of Christ [v.7]. So they have focused their entire lives on serving Christ selflessly. They are sacrificing their lifestyle, their time, their careers, and more, to be Christ’s servants. And they don’t take any pay from non-believers [v.7]: in other words, as they go out to spread the gospel and strengthen the churches, they are not asking for payment; they give away their ministry, and trust that God, through his people, will support them with what they need to get the work done and to care for themselves and their families. John places great emphasis in the Greek on the word “we” in v.8: therefore WE ought to support such people! Why? Because they are doing Christ’s work, because they take no direct payment for their ministry, and because by supporting them we become fellow workers with them in this great work [v.8]! Remember from 2 John 11, if we support false teachers then we partake in their evil; but if we support Christ’s workers, who are spreading the true apostolic gospel and strengthening the true churches that adhere to it, then we partake in their good work! If you support an evangelical seminary in Cuba, which strengthens a house pastor, who leads people in his village to Christ, then you were part of the team that brought those people to Christ!

Reflect: Theologian I. Howard Marshall points out that even local pastors rely on our generous giving to provide for their needs. A local pastor can only receive pay if the giving to the church is sufficient. Financial difficulties and the logistics of daily life can diminish any pastor’s time and energy for ministry. Are there ways you and your church could better support your pastors? Certainly, pray for them and their families and the ministry! But could you also provide them with a meal once in a while or free babysitting or lawn care or something else that might seem small to you but would be a big help to them? Have you thought more about getting involved in supporting local or foreign missions work?

Day 4: Memorize: Continue to work on memorizing 3 John 7-8. Think about the content too.

Learn: Read 3 John 9-12. John apparently had sent his letter of recommendation about the missionaries to the church near Gaius, but the church leader [or at least a prominently influential person in the church], Diotrophes [Διοτρέφης = “dee-ah-TRE-face], would not accept John’s recommendation [v.9], would not welcome the people John sent [v.10], and threatened to cast out of the church anyone who did [v.10]! Maybe that is why John is writing to Gaius, to warn him that he might be in trouble with Diotrophes. The problem with Diotrophes was not just a matter of failing to be hospitable, it was a church leader who was trying to assert his independence from the apostles. John made no reference here to false doctrine, so probably Diotrophes and the church were still adhering to the true gospel, but Diotrophes was not willing to take outside guidance and even disparaged John and his people [v.10], showing he was acting in personal ambition instead of zeal for the cause of Christ, since Jesus had put the apostles in charge of the church.

Reflect: Many local churches are independent of administrative oversight, but they still must come under the authority of the apostles that Christ sent out to start the church and authorized to write the New Testament. There can be no picking and choosing which parts of the Bible to recognize, like some do; there can be no teaching human wisdom [sometimes supported by scriptures taken out of context] instead of teaching the revelation of God given to us through the apostles, like some do. Christ is the head of our church, so we must obey him completely, as revealed in the New Testament. Are you confident that your pastors are teaching God’s Word faithfully? If so, what does that imply for how much to heart you should take the teachings, and how hard you should try to apply them to yourself and your life? Are you in a good church that focuses on teaching you the Bible and not on instilling some other human philosophy? Do you remember from previous devotions how to discern this? [hint: it has something to do with dusting off the Bible you have at home!]

Day 5: Memorize: Continue to work on memorizing 3 John 7-8.

Learn: Read 3 John 1-15 [try a different translation than your usual!]. To not receive these missionaries was the same as not receiving John [v.9]; and not receiving John is the same as not receiving Jesus [John 13.20]! John hints that Diotrophes might not even be a believer, that he “has not perceived God” [v.11]. In contrast stands Demetrious [Δημήτριος = “day-MAY-tree-us”), probably the bearer of this letter. Demetrious has received a recommendation from John and his church, and apparently there is nobody who could accuse him, because even “the truth itself” would testify that he lives by the truth [v.12]. Now there is a man with a good reputation! John said Gaius knew that John’s testimony was true [v.12], not just about Demetrious, but about the gospel of Christ too. He asked Gaius to extend his greetings to the like-minded people in the church [v.15], no doubt assuring them that John would soon visit and deal with Diotrophes [vv.10, 14].

Reflect: What is the most important thing you are taking from studying this letter? Is there a change in your knowledge or understanding of God? Is there a deep theological truth you need to believe or a behavioral change you want to make?