

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 JOHN 1-2

The three great Christian virtues are “faith, hope, and love.” And if Paul was the apostle of faith, and Peter was the apostle of hope; then *John was the apostle of love*. John loved Jesus, and John loved people.

John was the only one of the twelve apostles who was spared a martyrs’ death, but it was not because the Roman Emperor *didn’t try*. Domitian ordered John to be turned into a *french fry*. He had him boiled in oil.

Miraculously though, the Lord delivered John... And since Emperor Domitian couldn’t kill him... he was banished to “Patmos” - a rocky island off the coast of Turkey from where John received the Revelation.

After Domitian’s death John was freed, and ended his years pastoring the church at Ephesus. *As it turned out, God had preserved John for a very important job...*

A dangerous heresy was spreading, and God knew a man of John’s stature would be needed to squelch it. The evil doctrine of Gnosticism had raised its ugly head, and John writes this letter to stop it in its tracks.

Chapter 1 begins, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...”

John refers to Jesus as the “Word” or “logos of life.” The Greeks observed the order and symmetry within nature, and deduced there had to be a *cause* behind the *cosmos*. Greek philosophers coined a term for this unknown force. They called it the “Word” or “Logos.”

And here John shocks his readers by reporting he has seen the Logos! The disciples *handled it, heard it, even hugged it!* What the Greeks thought of as an *impersonal force*, John knew as a *personal friend*.

Farmers Insurance has had a commercial with the punchline, “We know a thing or two because we’ve seen a thing of two.” Well, John would say the same, “We know a thing or two because we’ve seen a thing of two.” John had discovered that the *reason behind all reality* is not an “it,” but a “He” - and his name is Jesus.

John writes this letter so we too can know Him, and experience the joy and love that’s found in Jesus.

Verse 2, “the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us...”

The meaning of life, and the purpose of all eternity, is not a secret. The “Logos” was revealed. The Apostle John met Him and spent 3 1/2 years by His side.

And his intent in writing this letter is so we too can experience a relationship with Jesus... “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Let me ask you a multiple-choice question, “**What is most important in life?** 1) To get to heaven. 2) To serve God. 3) To do God’s will. Or 4) To know God more. *Think about these four choices for a moment...*

First, it’s vital to get to heaven, but what about until then, and after you’re there, what will you do?...

Second, we all want to serve God, but all work and no rest sets a person on the path to burnout...

Third, certainly life goes better when we live in God’s will, but once we’re in His will, what then?...

That’s why the correct answer to *the meaning of life* is # 4, **To know God more**. This is why John writes, that we might have “**fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.**” *I’m glad I’m going to heaven - I love serving the Lord - I desire with all my heart to walk in God’s will.* But my ultimate purpose is **to know God**.

Real fulfillment comes from knowing the God who created us! As John puts it in verse 4, “**These things we write to you that your joy may be full.**” That’s why if your life is full of frustration or despair today chances are you’ve ignored, or forgotten, or been blind to this truth... *You’re looking for love in all the wrong places.*

God’s chief purpose for us isn’t a **location** (heaven), or a **vocation** (a means of service), or a **situation** (God’s will). Rather Jesus died so we could have an **association** with Him - consistent and loving **fellowship with Him**, and it’s byproduct, **fullness of joy!**

Verse 5, “**This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.**” God is a person, but He has characteristics similar to the properties of light... *Light invigorates and illuminates. Light warms. Light drives out the darkness. Light produces color and beauty.*

God is not like the light of the moon - **a reflected light**. God is like the light of the sun - **a radiant light**. He’s the source for all love, and purity, and truth, and beauty. He

doesn't just abide by the standard. God is the standard. He sets the standard. **God is light!**

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." Here's how we grow spiritually as Christians - **we walk in His light.**

Plants grow by a process called "**photosynthesis.**" A plant has cells that absorb the light; then transform it into the energy it needs to process food and grow.

And Christians grow by "**a spiritual photosynthesis.**" Our spirits absorb God's light. The presence of Jesus in my life causes me to become more godly, and good, and loving, and kind, and pure - more Christlike.

2 Corinthians 3:17 explains this process, "**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**"

Living in God's presence has a mirror effect. The more I hang out with God the more He rubs off on me.

Remember, it's not up to the plant to grow. **The light causes its growth.** And it's not up to the Christian to grow himself. Our job is to stay in the light - and the light of Christ will fuel a steady and perpetual growth.

Christians need to be a sort of a *spiritual bug*. Look at the back porch light in the summertime, and watch the moths and bugs hover around that light. We need to be like spiritual bugs and live in the light of God.

Growing in Christ is like sporting a nice tan in the summer. *Tanning requires very little effort.* Find a nice spot on the beach, stretch out a towel, do the rotisserie turn every few minutes - before long you're *baked and beautiful.* All it took was time and exposure. **And this is how we grow in Christ! It's like spiritual tanning.** Just spend daily time in the light of God's presence.

And the God-beams, His glory, rubs off. His light is absorbed into your makeup and disposition. Live in the presence of Jesus and His blood continually cleanses.

But verse 8, "**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**"

Here's what hinders the light of God from having its effect on us - **dishonesty.** Hide your sin, cover it up, act self-righteous, think you've arrived... and such self-deception acts like a 45 sunblock. It shuts out the light.

Hey, there's no such thing as sinless perfection. No matter how mature we become in our faith - as long as we inhabit sin-stained bodies, and live in a sin-infested world, at times we'll sin. **A Christian is a person who sins less and less, but none of us become sinless.**

Verse 9, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."**

Once a Catholic priest heard the confessional of an older lady who was hard-of-hearing. She shouted her sins so loud everyone heard. The priest suggested the next time she just make a list and hand it to him. Well, the next week the lady entered the confessional booth and gave the priest her list. He took one look at it, and said, **"Mam, I'm sorry, but this is your grocery list."** The woman shouted, **"Oh dear, I left my sins at Publix."**

Well, we really can leave our sins with Jesus! If we confess them, **"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** It's been said, **"The only sin God won't forgive is an unconfessed sin."** Whenever we sin we need to immediately ask for God to forgive us and cleanse us.

Which prompts the question... **If the moment we're saved God forgives all our sins - past, present, and future - why do we still need to confess them?** And here's the answer: **our confession helps maintain a repentant attitude.** As far as God is concerned our forgiveness is assured by the blood of Jesus, but our repentance is nurtured by an honest, humble attitude. **Confession keeps our heart in the right posture.**

Chapter 2, **"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin."** Don't ever think, **"O, since God has promised to forgive me I can go out and sin."** John is assuring us of God's forgiveness **so we won't sin.** His forgiveness should make us thankful.

Always remember, sin is not so much breaking *the laws of God*, as it is breaking *the heart of God*. If you and I really love God we'll want to please Him!

But, **"if anyone (does commit) sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."** 1 John was written so we won't sin, but if we do we have an **"Advocate."** The word means **"attorney,"** one who pleads our case. **Meet Jesus Christ, esquire!** Jesus is our attorney in the courtroom of God!

On the other side of the court sits Satan. Revelation 12:10 refers to Satan as “**the accuser of the brethren.**” The Greek term “**devil**” actually means “**slanderer.**” Satan is the prosecutor who wants to condemn you.

And understand, Satan has mounds of incriminating evidence - *video tapes of your private sins, recordings of hateful statements, surveillance of evil thoughts.*

But just when Satan approaches the bench to present his evidence, our attorney, Jesus, jumps up and objects! He declares the evidence “**inadmissible.**” He’s already paid its penalty. Because Jesus died on the cross in our place our sin is forgiven and forgotten.

Verse 2, “**And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**” The word translated “**propitiation**” means “**place of mercy.**” Its Hebrew equivalent was the word “*kipporeth,*” which in the OT is translated “**mercy seat.**”

The mercy seat was the solid gold lid on the Ark of the Covenant. On this lid the Priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice, and staved off God’s judgment.

God loves us, yet He can’t let our sin slide. *So how can He be a loving, yet just God?* Here’s the answer...

Over the mercy seat hovered the glory of our loving God. **Under the mercy seat** sat the tablets of God’s Law. But between His love and His Law, sat the blood-stained mercy seat. And it was there, at the mercy seat, that *God’s justice and God’s kindness* were reconciled. At the mercy seat God satisfied the Law’s demands; yet saved us through His sacrifice.

In the OT the mercy seat was the one place on Earth you could go and be assured that your sins would be forgiven. But here John declares a new and radical truth - that God’s mercy seat is no longer *a lid*, it’s *the Lord*. Jesus is now our blood-stained mercy seat!

He’s our “**propitiation,**” or **place of mercy.** In Christ the Law and love of God made peace. Jesus is the one place on earth where all peoples - as John puts it, “**the whole world**” - can obtain mercy and pardon from God.

If you’ve sinned, *come to Jesus and find mercy!*

Verse 3, “**Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.**” In 1789 Benjamin Franklin penned the immortal words, “**Nothing is certain, but death and taxes.**” But John would disagree.

A relationship with Jesus is also a certainty we can count on. The word “*k-n-o-w*” appears 39 times in 1 John. He writes so we’ll know that we know God.

When the Christian scientist and statesman, Michael Faraday, was dying, a journalist came to his death bed, and questioned him, “Mr. Faraday, would you care to comment on your speculations on the afterlife?” Faraday replied, “Speculations! I know nothing of speculations. I am resting on certainties. I know my Redeemer lives, and because He lives I will live also.”

Well, in the next 9 verses John wants us to know that we know, so He provides **A Christian’s self-test kit.**

When a woman wants to know for certain whether she’s pregnant she purchases a **self-test kit.** And likewise, if you’re wondering if you’re really a Christian, John provides a test that will let you know for certain!

And the Christian’s self-test kit is two-fold... First, verse 3-6. **do you keep God’s commandments?** And second, verses 7-11, **do you love your brother?**

John says in verse 4, “**He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.**” Understand, it’s impossible to know God and not be profoundly influenced by Him.

There are charismatic people in life who have an effect on us, but that’s nothing like the impact God has on a life. If you’re *not enchanted by God’s love, and intrigued by His wisdom, and desirous of His kindness, and longing for God’s character* - if you don’t want to follow God and be more like Him - John says there’s only one explanation - ***you’ve never really met Him!***

Verse 5, “**But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.**” The person who loves God will keep His word, and walk as Jesus walked.

Verse 7, “**Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.**” The Law of Moses in Leviticus 19:18 taught the Hebrews to love. It declared, “**you shall love your neighbor as yourself...**”

But Jesus put a new spin on this command. *He even loved His enemies.* He loved unconditionally, with no-strings-attached. Jesus loved lavishly, in a way that gripped the sinner’s heart, and pulled him back to God.

Jesus-style love turns “***love one another***” into a new command. John writes, “**Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in**

the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.” *If the God of love lives in you, how can you harbor hatred?*

“He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” The light of God will shine the rays of His love into a man’s heart.

I’m a son of the South - born and bred in the heart of Dixie. As I was growing up in the 1960s and early 70s much of the white community I was part of justified racial prejudice and white privilege. Even our church manufactured erroneous theology to justify racial bias.

Sadly, I grew up with an *ugly hatred in my heart* toward folks with *different pigment in their skin*. *But when Jesus became my Lord, He filled my life with His love! Filled it so full, there was no longer any room for the prejudice I once harbored.* Instantly, my attitude changed. I had a love for all people regardless of race.

Some Christians have dramatic testimonies. They speak of instant deliverance from alcohol, or drugs, or a vile temper - *I was instantly delivered from bigotry!*

Yet the nation we live in still suffers from the plague of prejudice. Though racial equality is now the law of the land, disparities still exist in how we see and treat each other. Rather than teach and discipline ourselves to view each person we meet for who they are, we yield to bias and fall into the nasty habit of stereotyping or profiling. Racism is an evil we’ve tried long and hard to eradicate from society, yet it stubbornly hangs on.

It seems to me *the problem isn’t as much a skin problem as it is a sin problem*. People don’t know the God who created us in His image - or they say they do, but don’t. **And until they do**, and learn to see people as Jesus sees them, they’ll live in darkness rather than light. Only the power of our Lord Jesus can change a bigoted heart, *and that alone will put an end to racism!*

Let me challenge you to take John’s self-test! If you don’t keep God’s commandments, **or** if you don’t love your brother, *you don’t know God despite what you say!* Verse 11, “**He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**”

And just knowing I’m a Christian, doesn’t mean I’m growing as a Christian... This is the theme of 2:12-14. Here’s a passage that helps us measure our growth. Three verses depict **three stages** of spiritual maturity.

If you go to any family reunion you would expect to see some **older folks**, some **adolescents**, some **kids**. A healthy family would have representatives at all three stages, *and the same is true of the family of God.*

When we gather as a church for our weekly family reunion we should be able to find people here at all three levels - some *little children*, some *young men* (or women), some *fathers* (or *spiritual parents*). Here John identifies the various characteristics of each stage...

And as we go through the next few verses try to pick out *where you are* and *where you need to be headed* in your own spiritual growth and development...

John's song has two stanzas, and he reveals tidbits in each. Let's read it all; then we'll break it down. Verse 12, "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one"

First, John mentions "*little children*" or *new believers*. He says two things about them: they relish the thrill of God's forgiveness, and they know God as their Father. They're free from the guilt that weighed them down - and they worry less, for now they take their needs to a Heavenly Father! Little children are full of enthusiasm.

But little children age-wise and spiritually are naive and vulnerable. They need to grow up, and mature.

Like the "*young men*" or *spiritual adolescents*. John says two things about them: they have a hunger for God's Word. They feed on Scripture daily. And with it they do battle with the devil, and overcome. His Word makes them strong and they win victories for God.

Yet they're *adolescents*. The hubris and naivety of youth can make them divisive. They assume they know more than those in authority. They can do it better.

Mark Twain once said, "When I was 16 I thought my dad was the biggest fool on Earth. When I turned 21 I was amazed at what the old man had learned in five years." Here's hope for the adolescent. Given time and patience he'll grow. He'll learn to appreciate his elders.

That's who John mentions next - the "*fathers*" - or spiritual parents. And he writes only one statement about fathers, yet says it twice for emphasis: "*because (they) have known Him who is from the beginning.*"

Spiritual kids are enthralled with *God's immanence*. We call God "*Father*" - he's *nigh* to us. But parents are captivated by *God's transcendence*. He's *high* over us. Unlike kids and teenagers, spiritual adults seek God not just for *what He can do*, but for *who He is!*

Hey, a father is a man who's stopped living for himself, and lives for his family. Likewise, spiritual dads go to church *not just to get, but give*. His priority isn't *how he can be blessed*, but *how he can bless others*.

Each of us is at one of these stages of growth. Are you *a little child, a young man, or a spiritual father?* Wherever you're at, I hope you're moving forward!

Verse 15, "*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" Sadly the world system - it's attitudes, values, and motives are diametrically opposed to God.

And here's what makes the world go round, John sums up "*the world*" in verse 16, "*For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh (or the desire to **feel great**), the lust of the eyes (the desire to **look great**), and the pride of life (the desire to **be great**) - is not of the Father but is of the world.*" Here's worldliness in a nutshell: *feeling great, looking great, and being great!*

Here's another way to think of this worldwide web. "*The lust of the flesh*" is to live for physical pleasure rather than spiritual fulfillment... "*The lust of the eyes*" fixates on external appearance rather than internal beauty... And "*the pride of life*" seeks to make a mark on the here and now - the temporal not the eternal...

"The lusts of the flesh" is a vicious trap. Folks live for *the high, the buzz, the escape*. But they become its slave. Addiction is the steep price lust will cost you.

"The lust of the eyes" is just as tragic. *Image ain't everything*. Celebrities today get by on smoke and mirrors, rather than grooming their inner character.

And "*the pride of life*" lives as if the here and now is all there is! It denies the other world waiting where we'll be held accountable for how we lived in this one. One day the real living will begin. **The biggest need for some people is to see an eternity in their future.**

John is wanting Christians to come out of the world. *Real satisfaction* doesn't come by gratifying physical desires, but in a spiritual relationship with God... *Real beauty* isn't about attractive exteriors, but about reflecting God's glory... And *real meaning* isn't found in temporal pursuits, but in a life that counts for eternity...

John writes in verse 17, "*And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*" One of my favorite actors is Charles Dutton.

Dutton won two Emmy awards and co-starred in movies like *Rudy* and *A Time To Kill*. But before becoming an actor, Dutton, spent seven years in a Maryland penitentiary. He was convicted on manslaughter charges. He got into a knife fight and killed a man. Dutton claimed it was self-defense.

Charles Dutton has come a long way: *from prisoner to actor - from jailhouse to stardom*. But when asked how he did it, he had a thought-provoking answer. He said, “Unlike other inmates, I never decorated my cell.”

Dutton believed his prison cell was a temporary situation. He refused to let himself get too comfortable.

And this needs to be our attitude. This world is *passing away*, and I’m just *passing through*. Rather than get caught up in *worldliness*, let’s seek *godliness*.

Verse 18, “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” The Antichrist is the ominous, future rebel John warns us about in the book of Revelation.

He pares his claws after the Church is raptured, and leads a global revolt against God - *but he has many predecessors*. In Matthew 24 Jesus predicted one of the signs of the last days is a proliferation of teachers who are *anti-God* and *anti-Christ*. John saw a rise of this deception in his day, and it’s only escalated since.

John speaks of these false teachers, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” Some false teachers start out on sound, biblical ground, *yet they want to be novel*. They wander from truth to entertain folks or inflate their ego.

Teaching the Bible is like shooting a bow and arrow. Say your target is 100 yards away. If your aim is off a fraction of an inch you can miss by 10 yards. The same is true spiritually. Just a little error in a foundational doctrine can produce enormous deviation later on.

Verse 20, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” Here’s the believer’s safeguard against spiritual deception - *the Holy Spirit*.

Throughout the OT the anointing of olive oil was a symbol of the outpouring of the Spirit - and to each of us God’s Spirit has been given to teach and instruct us.

Jesus promised in John 16:13, “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.” The Spirit is our spiritual watchdog. He sniffs out deception and lies. Like GPS, get off course and He’ll recalibrate.

“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.” Earlier I mentioned God preserved John to combat a dangerous heresy known as Gnosticism. And its central feature was its denial of Jesus as Savior.

We’ll learn more about the Gnostics, but know they concocted fanciful tales and theories to support their ideas. They were wrong, but they *sounded* good.

And here, John tells his readers not to get suckered. They know the truth - *God’s Word* and *God’s Spirit* agree Jesus is God, so don’t cave in to a lie. If a man denies the *Son of God* he’s denied *God the Father!*

Verse 23, “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.” Don’t be swayed by new, avant-garde religions. Don’t look for new truth, hold on to the truths you’ve heard and learned from Jesus.

“And this is the promise that He has promised us - eternal life.” The words of Jesus **alone** give eternal life.

And remember “*eternal life*” is not just *longevity of life* - it speaks of a *quality of life*. Jesus puts His Spirit in you. He lives out His love, and joy, and power in you. *Jesus’ smile shows up on your face - His laugh is heard in your voice - His compassion flows through your hands*. Eternal life doesn’t begin when you die, it begins the moment you give your whole heart to Jesus!

Verse 26, “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” John had confidence in the ability of the Holy Spirit to help us discern truth from error - and grow in the knowledge of God’s Word.

God could’ve set up *one church, or a headquarters* as the official arbitrator of divine truth. But that’s not what God did. Rather than entrust the interpretation of His Word to an *Institution, or a Priest, or a Pastor, God gave each of us His Spirit!* God’s truth is conveyed through a personal anointing available to all believers.

Look at the Church down through the centuries, it’s been saved from heresy time and time again, and the truth has been safeguarded - not by the faithfulness of one

sect, or a single religious order, or denomination. Whenever orthodoxy is threatened the Holy Spirit stirs up a revival that corrects the problem, and brings truth back into focus. When the message gets distorted the author Himself restores the true interpretation.

If you every hear someone say, you can't understand the Bible without reading *their* literature - **beware!** He or she is a cultist. **John says that all a Christian needs to grasp the Word of God is the Spirit of God.**

Good Bible teachers *can be helpful*, but they *can also be wrong*. God doesn't want Christians to put their trust in any human teacher, but in the Holy Spirit. This is why the Father puts His anointing in our heart.

Pick up your Bible, and allow God's Spirit to speak to you personally. Don't just read through the grid of what you've been taught by someone else. Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart afresh. ***He is our teacher!***

Verse 28, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." Jesus is coming back soon, and we need to be ready to meet Him!

"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him."

Sons look like dads, and dads look like granddads. And those born of God practice His righteous ways.

How do you know you know God? Do you keep His commands, and do you love your brother? Jesus is coming and He'll test us all, let's self-test while we can.