

## 1. Introduction to the Letter of 1 John

**Aim:** To understand the main concerns of the letter of 1 John and its relevance for us today.

**Discuss:** Many people make the claim to know God. What tests does the Bible apply to a person's belief or behaviour to give assurance as to whether we (or anyone else) really is born of God? *[discuss]*

### Background to 1 John

1 John is a letter to Christians, but doesn't contain the usual features of an opening greeting, names or places. It may have been a circular letter to multiple churches experiencing similar problems. The letter was written sometime before 90AD, since portions of it are used in writings after that date.

*The writer does not identify himself, but what do we learn about the writer from 1 John 1:1-3?*

The writer heard, saw and touched the Word of Life - ie Jesus (John 1:1-2). He was an eyewitness to Jesus. Early Christian writings identify the Apostle John as the author. The many similarities in themes between the Gospel of John and 1 John also support this (eg compare John 20:30-31 & 1 John 5:13).

### The problem being addressed

*Read 1 John 2:18-19. What has happened in the churches John is writing to? [discuss]*

A split has occurred and a group of people have left.

*What is the problem facing John's churches? 1 John 2:26, 4:1. [discuss]*

Those who have left are still trying to influence the remaining Christians towards their teaching. The need for John's warnings and assurances suggest some in the church still felt the pull of these false teachers.

*What is the major aim of John's letter? 1 John 3:7, 2:21, 2:28, 5:13 [discuss]*

John warns his readers against being led astray by false teaching, reassures them that they know the truth and therefore have eternal life, and encourages them to abide in the truth and live it out in their daily lives.

*Why is it important to encourage one another in our faith and life? [discuss]*

### What were the false teachers teaching?

*Churches battled with false teaching in the first few centuries. What were some of these? [discuss]*

- Gnosticism (not fully developed until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD). Believed that matter was evil and spirit was good. Salvation was the release of the spirit from the body through special knowledge. This led to two extremes: licentiousness (doesn't matter what you do in the body), or asceticism (treat the body harshly).
- Docetism (a branch of Gnosticism) rejected the incarnation. Believed that a spirit (good) would not take on a body (evil matter). Jesus' humanity therefore could not have been real, but was just an apparition.
- Cerinthus taught that God could not suffer. Therefore, he believed that the Son of God (Christ) came upon the man Jesus at His baptism, but left him before His crucifixion.

*What can we infer about the teaching of the false teachers referred to in 1 John?*

- 2:22-23 - they denied that Jesus was the Christ (probably denying His divine Sonship). cf 4:15, 5:5.
- 4:2-3 - they denied that Jesus has come in the flesh, denying His humanity.
- 5:6 - they seem to deny the importance of Jesus' death (He came not just by water [probably baptism], but also by blood [death]). John keeps reaffirming the importance of Jesus' death. cf 1:7-8, 2:1-2, 4:14.
- 1:8, 1:10 - they claim to be without sin (presumably now they have come to know God).
- 2:3-4 - keeping Jesus' commands is not a high priority.

*What are some of the implications of these teachings and why are they dangerous? [discuss]*

### The tests of a true Christian

*What tests and assurances does John give concerning what a true Christian believes? [discuss]*

- 2:22-23, 4:15: We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (ie truly divine).
- 4:2-3: We believe that Jesus came in the flesh (truly human).
- 5:9-12: We believe the testimony of God that eternal life is found only in His Son Jesus.

*What tests and assurances does John give concerning how a true Christian behaves? [discuss]*

- 2:3-6, 3:10: We keep Christ's commandments (even when they conflict with our agenda!)
- 3:14-16, 4:20-21: We love our fellow Christians. *Would you give your life for a brother/sister?*
- 1:8-10: We confess our sin, not deny it. And we look to Jesus as our Saviour (2:1-2, 4:14).

*Right belief will show itself in right behaviour. Do you pass all of these tests? [discuss]*

**Summary: If we are born of God, it will be evident in what we believe and how we behave.**

## 2. The Introduction: 1 John 1:1-4

**Aim:** To help us to appreciate the basis of our fellowship and joy in the Christian life.

**Discuss:** We often speak of having "fellowship". What does "fellowship" mean? *[discuss]* [It is not just mateship. It is the act of sharing and experiencing a deep common bond together – ie our relationship with the Lord. The act of fellowship should deepen our relationship with the Lord and one other.]

### **The basis of our fellowship (1 John 1:1-4)**

*Who or what is John speaking about in v1? What title is used?*

John is speaking about the "Word of Life". The title can refer to the gospel message (Phil 2:14-16), but here, John is speaking of Jesus, since he refers to seeing and touching this "Word" (John 1:1-3).

*Why is Jesus called the "Word of Life" (v1)? [discuss]*

The "Word" could refer to Jesus being the visible expression of the invisible Father (Col 1:15). But the "Word" also refers to divine power – God created by speaking words ("Let there be..."), and upholds the universe by His word (Heb 1:3). As the Word of Life, Jesus is the source and sustainer of all life – both physical and spiritual. There is no life outside of Him (John 1:3, 14:6).

*What else does John call Jesus in v2?*

Jesus is called the "eternal life" which was with the Father and has now been manifested to us (John 1:4). Eternal life is not just a state we enjoy, but a person we know. To know Jesus is to enjoy spiritual and indestructible life. We have eternal life when we are in Him and He in us (John 17:3, 1 John 5:11-12).

*What does John mean when he says Jesus "was from the beginning" (v1)? In view of the false teachers referred to in 1 John, why might this be important to affirm? [discuss]*

"From the beginning" is John's way of saying Jesus is eternal/uncreated and therefore the divine Son of God – He has no beginning and no end (Micah 5:2, Rev 22:12-13). Some of the false teachers in John's day appear to deny Jesus' divinity by claiming He was not the Son of God (cf 1 John 2:22-23, 4:15).

*Can you know God but still deny that Jesus is divine? [discuss]*

No. Denying Jesus' divinity (as almost all cults do today) shows that you do not have the Father (2:23).

*In view of what other false teachers were claiming, why does John speak of hearing, seeing, beholding and touching Jesus? Read 1 John 4:2-3 & 2 John 1:7. [discuss]*

John is affirming that he and the rest of the apostles ("we") were eyewitnesses of Jesus – they heard this One who spoke with authority, they saw the One who was God, they touched Him and beheld His glory (Like 9:28-36). But against the false teachers who claimed that Jesus did not have a real human body (because matter was thought to be evil), John affirms that Jesus really was human just like us (except without sin). *What other evidences in the Scriptures assure you that Jesus was truly human? [discuss]*

*Why was it essential for Jesus to be human like us? (Heb 2:14-15)*

In order to pay the penalty for our sins and free us from the fear of death (after which comes judgement), Jesus had to become like us in order to die for us. And now He intercedes for us (Heb 4:14-16).

*How does John rebut the false teachers in these opening verses of 1 John? [discuss]*

He simply declares the truth about Jesus. We don't always need to have all the answers to disprove and dismantle the arguments of others who scoff at the truth – often, it is good simply to affirm the truth.

*What reason does John give for affirming these truths to his readers? (v3)*

John was affirming these truths so that we might have fellowship with fellow Christians (ie in this case, the apostles), and with the Father and the Lord Jesus (Rom 5:9-11, 1 Cor 1:9). This requires us to be walking in the truth. If we are born of God, we all have the same Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we are all part of the body of Christ and therefore all intimately connected to Christ and each other (Eph 4:1-6). To be out of fellowship with one another (the body) is to be out of fellowship with the Lord (the Head).

*What should the proclamation of the truth bring? (v4)*

Proclaiming the truth not only promotes fellowship, but brings joy to both the one proclaiming it and the one receiving it (John 15:11). The basis of our fellowship is knowing the Word of Life. And our joy is made complete when we grow in our relationship with Him and each other. Psa 16:11.

**Application:** Do you make time to fellowship with the Lord each day? Does it bring you joy as you grow in your relationship with Him? How highly do you value fellowship with other Christians?

**Summary:** Jesus is the Word of Life and the Eternal Life. He is the basis of our fellowship and joy.

### **3. God is Light: 1 John 1:5-7**

**Aim:** To help us know the true test of genuine fellowship with God (who is Light).

**Discuss:** In last week's study from 1 John 1:1-4, what essential truths were proclaimed about Jesus? [*Jesus is both divine (v.1, He is the "Word of Life"; v.3 "His Son"), as well as human; ie, "we saw Him, looked at Him, and touched Him"*]. Why are these truths so important? [*without true knowledge of Jesus, we cannot be saved, and have fellowship with God and His people*]. In this study, we shall go on to consider the main message that Jesus, the "Word of Life", proclaimed.

#### **God is light**

*What would you consider to be the main message that Jesus declared in the Gospels? [discuss]  
Under the inspiration of the Spirit, how does John summarise the message of Jesus? (vv. 5-7)*

The message is primarily about how God is light, whereas we are in darkness. We can only have fellowship with God if we are in the light. That happens by being washed of our sins through Jesus' blood, and continuing to walk in the light.

*Why is God described as light? [discuss]*

- Firstly, light shines. It is not hidden; it reveals itself. Likewise, God reveals Himself. God has revealed Himself through creation (Psalm 19:1); through His dealings with Israel (Psa 103:6-8); through his Word; and through his Son (Heb 1:1-2).
- Secondly, light refers to truth, in contrast to darkness which refers to lies or ignorance. God is truth. There is no lies or ignorance with Him. Also, His word is truth, and Jesus is truth (John 14:6, 17:17),
- Thirdly, light refers to purity or righteousness, in contrast to darkness which refers to sin or impurity (Isa 5:20, John 3:19-21, Rom 13:11-14). God is perfectly and infinitely pure. In Him "there is no darkness at all"; no secrecy, no shadows, no impurity or fault. He is the only One like this.

*Compare 1 John 1:5 and John 1:4-9. What do you note?*

In 1 John 1:5, God is declared as light, but Jesus also is declared the light in the opening of John's Gospel. This should not surprise us, for Jesus is truly divine. Jesus was described as 'a light' (Isa 42:6-7, 49:6) before He came, and in John 8:12, Jesus made that great declaration "I am the light of the world".

*In contrast to God who is light, how should we describe ourselves in our unsaved state?*

We are in darkness; we are not pure and righteous like God, but sinful and corrupt. This becomes evident when we are in God's presence (Isa 6:1-5; Luke 5:8). We are also in darkness by being ignorant of the truth. We are enslaved to lies and deceptions, and are kept blinded by Satan (2 Cor 4:4).

*What happens when we trust in Jesus? (Act 26:16-18; Eph 5:8; Col 1:13-14; 1 Pet 2:9)*

The Bible tells us that we cross over from darkness to light. Our darkness from ignorance is removed (2 Cor 4:6), and the darkness caused by our sin is washed clean. Not only that, we are given a new nature; God's nature of light. As a result, we can have fellowship with God, as we are now in the light, as He is.

#### **The test of true fellowship (1 John 1:6-7)**

*In John's time many were claiming to be Christians, and in fellowship with God (especially false believers and teachers). What test does John apply to those who make such a claim? (v.6)*

We cannot be in fellowship with God if we walk in the darkness. Since God is light, we can only know Him and be in fellowship with Him, if we walk in the light (2 Cor 6:14).

*What does it mean to walk in the darkness?*

It can mean to walk in ignorance of the truth, but particularly here, it means to continue in sin; ie, habitually practice immoral or sinful deeds (the tense of the verb 'to walk' indicates this).

*In contrast to walking in darkness, what does it mean to "walk in the Light"? (v. 7)*

To walk in the light is to be like God, who is light (pure and righteous). Another way of putting this, is to follow Jesus (Jn 8:12). Only when we walk in the light can we genuinely have fellowship with God.

*If we "walk in the Light", what is the result? (v.7)*

Firstly, we have fellowship with one another. We will love to be with God's people (Heb 10:24-25), and we won't be like others who had left the church (1Jo 2:19). Secondly, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Those who walk in the Light aren't perfect, but are honest with God, confess their sins, and look to Jesus for cleansing. However, those who walk in darkness ignore or deny their sins.

**Summary: God is Light, and if we claim to be a Christian, then we must walk in the Light too.**

## 4. Confessing our Sin: 1 John 1:8-10

**Aim:** To help us acknowledge/confess our sins and to experience God's forgiveness and cleansing.

**Revision:** *In John's day, false teachers claimed that sin did not break fellowship with God. What does 1 John 1:5-6 say? This is a lie. God is light (pure), and if we sin, then we cannot be right with God.*

*Many claim to be in fellowship with God, yet they have no desire to have fellowship with other believers. Is this a possibility according to 1 John 1:7? No! If we are in fellowship with God, then this will show itself by our desire to be in fellowship with other believers (cf. Acts 2:42-47). One of the clear signs that a person is not right with God is that they will avoid having fellowship with Christians [discuss].*

### **Acknowledging Sin**

*Does "walking in the light" (v.7) mean that we will be like God and never sin? (v.8)*

No! If we claim to have no sin, we are a liar. Even after becoming a Christian, and being born of God's Spirit, we still will sin. Note: Some false teachers in John's day claimed to be without sin – this was a lie.

*Why do we continue to sin after we have come to the light and become a Christian?*

The Bible teaches that we have a nature bent on sin (Rom 3:10-12; 7:18-19), which we inherited from the Fall. This nature remains with us, even after we have been born again. When we yield to it, we sin.

*In regard to sin, is there any difference between those who walk in light compared to darkness?*

#### Those who walk in light (Christian)

Sin remains, but has no dominion (Rom 6:14)

There is conflict and struggle with sin (Gal 5:17)

Sin is in us, but we are in Christ (1 Cor 1:30)

Acknowledge sin is against God (Psa 51:4)

#### Those who walk in darkness (Non-Christian)

Sin has dominion

There is cooperation with sin

They are in sin and outside of Christ

They are care-free about sin unless it affects them

*What dangerous state do we enter if we do not acknowledge our sin? (v.8)*

Not only do we lie, but we deceive ourselves. Such deception is very serious, as it negates our need to acknowledge our sins in order to be forgiven (Psalm 32:5). Today, many deny sin [discuss].

*If we do not acknowledge we have sinned, what else are we doing? (v.10)*

We make God out to be a liar, for He has clearly declared in his Word that all of us have sinned (1 Kings 8:46; Rom 3:23). Also, God's word is not in us, for God's word has made clear that we have all sinned.

### **Confessing Sin**

*What should we do when we sin? (v.9)*

We are not to deny our sin but confess it. The Greek word for "confess" means to "speak the same thing or to agree with". Thus, we are to agree with God (as He convicts us) that we have sinned (cf. Isa 1:18-20).

*What two promises does God give us if we would confess our sins? (v.9)*

The first is forgiveness of our sins. This has to do with sin being a debt which God pardons and cancels so that nothing is left owing. The second is cleansing from all unrighteousness. This has to do with how sin pollutes or stains us, which God reverses by cleansing or purifying us (eg, Psalm 51:2 - washing us clean).

*Who are we to confess our sins to, in order to be forgiven? (Psa 32:5, 51:1-4; Matt 6:9-12)*

We are to confess our sins to the Lord, not to a priest, or any other person, in order to find forgiveness.

Note: In v.9, the word for "sin" is plural. This indicates that we are not just to make a general confession of "sin", but to make confession of our "sins". We are to call each one to mind and confess them.

*What is the basis of our forgiveness? (cf. 1 John 1:7)*

The forgiveness of our sins is based solely on the blood of Jesus (Matt 26:27-28; Eph 1:7).

*V.9 says that God is faithful and just to forgive us. Why is this mentioned?*

God is faithful because He has promised to forgive us in Christ (Acts 2:38; Col 1:13-14). God is also just in cancelling our debt of sin because another, even Jesus, bore the penalty of our sins (Rom 3:21-26).

*According to the context around v.9, who can be forgiven if they confess their sins? (vv. 7-9)*

Only those who walk in the light (Christians) can be forgiven of their sins. People in other religions confess their sins too, but to no avail. God's forgiveness is based upon his Son's death and resurrection.

Note: V. 9 is not to do with establishing a relationship with God, but maintaining our fellowship with Him.

*V.9 clearly tells us that we only need to confess our sins to be forgiven. What does this signify?*

Forgiveness is not dependent on how sorry or remorseful we are. Also, it is not conditional on how great or how many our sins are. The only condition is that we confess or acknowledge our sins to God.

**Summary:** We can be forgiven and remain in fellowship with God if we confess our sins to the Lord.

## 5. The Sinner's Advocate: 1 John 2:1-2

**Aim:** To help us have a right attitude toward sin and to appreciate the One who is our Advocate.

**Revision:** *In John's day, false teachers claimed that they were without sin. What does 1 John 1:8,10 say? No one is without sin. We deceive ourselves and make God out to be a liar if we make such a claim.*

*For Christians, what is the only condition for us to be forgiven of our sins and to remain in fellowship with God, according to 1 John 1:9? We are to simply confess our sins to the Lord. Because Jesus' shed His blood and paid the penalty for our sins, God can faithfully and justly forgive us.*

### **John's address**

*What is expressed in the way John calls His readers "my little children"? (1 John 2:1)*

It expresses how John was like a loving parent to them. He loved them dearly. Do we love each other dearly?

*It is worth remarking on the major change that had occurred in John's life. Consider Mark 3:17 and Luke 9:52-56, together with John 3:16 and 1 John 4:7-10. What do we learn about John?*

In Mar 3:17, John and his brother James are called "sons of thunder", possibly because of their previous behaviour seen in Luk 9:52-56. But after Pentecost, John was a changed man. He became known as the apostle of love. Since the rebirth, how have you changed? (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).

### **A Christian's attitude to sin**

*What does John exhort his hearers to do in 1 John 2:1a? Why? [discuss]*

He exhorts them not to sin. The reason for this is in the light of 1 John 1:8-10. Previously John declared that we all sin, but we can be forgiven through confession. Sadly, we can allow these truths to make us think lightly of sin; ie, sin is "no big deal" as we all sin, and if we "slip up" all we have to do is confess it.

*What should the Christian's attitude be toward sin? [discuss] (cf. Rom 6:1-7)*

We should have the same attitude as God. He detests it and takes sin seriously, as seen in the way He punished His Son. The puritans spoke of the "sinfulness of sin". We need to pray that we may see sin rightly, as God sees it. NB: Many Christians have become accommodating of sin. [discuss] God wants us to be children of light, who shine in a dark world (Phil 2:15). Therefore, do not sin.

### **The Christian's Advocate**

*Though we are to hate sin and do all we can to not practice it, what is the reality? (1 John 2:1)*

We will still sin, for we are sinners (1 John 1:8,10); therefore we need a way to be forgiven. NB: When we sin, it ought to be very different to how a non-Christian sins. [discuss] Eg: We find no lasting enjoyment in sin and don't boast about it, but feel guilty and ashamed. Sin is against the true tenor of our life.

*In His grace, what has God done if any of us should sin? (1 John 2:1)*

God has provided us an Advocate (this word is used in more literal translations).

*What does "Advocate" mean (which is the Greek word "paracletos")?*

It literally means "one called alongside to help". It is the same word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). This word expresses the idea of one who helps, comforts and counsels. It also has a legal sense, where it means one who appears on another's behalf; ie, an advocate or intercessor.

*Who is our "Advocate"?*

He is Jesus Christ; our Helper (Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-15), and intercessor or advocate (Heb 7:25).

*Why can Jesus be our "Advocate"? Consider the title given to Jesus in v.1*

Jesus is given the title "Jesus Christ the righteous". This expresses our Advocate's human nature (Jesus), His office (Christ, the Saviour), and His holy character (righteous). It's these essential qualities that enables Jesus to be qualified as our Advocate.

*Although only Jesus is qualified (v.1), what has He done to become our Advocate? (v.2)*

Jesus became the "the propitiation for our sins"; ie, it was He who turned aside God's wrath from us by bearing God's wrath and punishment for our sins on the cross (Isa 53:5-6). It's this essential act that enables Jesus to be our ongoing Advocate for sin (and for the sins of all who would trust in Him).

*What other great truth do we learn about our Advocate in 1 John 2:1? (cf. also Heb 12:2)*

He is right there with the Father; in Heaven's courtroom itself. Since our Father has instigated and brought this about, we are guaranteed that our Lord will be a successful Advocate. Our defence is sure.

Note: As our Advocate, Jesus does not plead our innocence, or point to extenuating circumstances. Instead, He presents before the Father His atoning sacrifice as the only grounds by which we can be forgiven.

**Summary: We are not to sin, but if anyone does, we have Jesus as our ongoing Advocate.**

## 6. Genuine Christianity - the Obedience Test: 1 John 2:3-6

**Aim:** To help us understand the importance of obedience to God as proof that we are saved.

**Revision:** *In 1 John 2:1 there are two contrasting statements: "that you may not sin" and "if anyone sins". Discuss the importance of keeping them both in balance. [eg, we may be either too lenient or too severe towards sin - leniency encourages sin, whereas severity discourages forgiveness and restoration]*

*When we sin we have an Advocate. Who is He? Why is He the perfect Advocate? (vv.1-2)*

[Consider the title "Jesus Christ the righteous", and what is said of Jesus in the first part of v.2]

**Introduction:** Many claim to know God. In John's day, the Gnostics claimed this, based on their special knowledge. In 1 John 2:3ff, John applies three tests for genuine Christianity. They are the test of obedience (vv. 3-6), the test of love (vv. 7-11), and the test of belief (vv. 18-27). These tests are designed to encourage and give assurance to those who are true believers, and to reveal those who are false believers.

### **The Test of Obedience (the moral test) - vv. 3 to 6**

*In v.3a how is the true believer described?*

He is one who knows God. It is not in the sense of knowing about God (having knowledge or facts about God), but knowing Him personally and intimately.

*It is truly amazing that God can be known. [discuss] What is the basis of this?*

The Bible is clear that God can be known (Gen 5:22; Exod 33:11; Jer 31:34). He has revealed Himself, and made Himself known to us, and in spite of our sin, God has also made a way for us to be reconciled back to Himself through Jesus (2 Cor 5:18) so that we may know Him eternally (John 17:3).

*Many people declare that they know God. What test can we apply to verify such a claim? (v.3)*

The test is obeying (keeping) God's commands (cf. Rev 12:17; 14:12). Note: It's not about perfectly obeying His commands, but rather having the inward principle to strive to be obedient, in the midst of a fallen world.

*Why does obedience to God's commandments show whether we know God and are a true Christian?*

If we are a Christian, then we have been born again (John 3:3,5), and because of the Holy Spirit, we will have been changed such that we obey God's commandments (Jer 31:33; Rom 8:12-14). Also, a true believer follows Jesus (Matt 16:24; John 10:27). This is accomplished by obeying His commandments.

*It may appear that our salvation is based on obedience. Is this the case? (Eph 2:8-9)*

No! We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Obedience to God's commandments is simply the evidence that we have been saved and are born of God and know God.

*What does God say about those who say they know Him but don't obey His commands? (v.4)*

They lie: before God, to themselves (deceive themselves), and to those about them. In regard to the latter, they also cause others to mock Christianity, and to ridicule Christ. [discuss] Disobedience is also evident that the truth of God is not in us, for if God's truth really was in us, then we would obey Him (Psa 119:11).

*According to v.5a, what is the result of us obeying God's word (ie, His commandments)? Explain.*

The love of God is "made complete" or is "made perfect" in us. The Greek expression for "love of God" could either mean "God's love for us", or "our love for God". Most conclude that it can't be "God's love for us" as this is already perfect and complete toward us (Rom 5:5-8), but that it is referring to "our love for God". The more we obey Him, the more we complete or perfect our love for Him (cf. 1 John 5:3).

*What did Jesus say in relation to love and obedience?*

Jesus declared that love for Himself (and for God) is not expressed in sentimental language or mystical experience, but in obedience (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10). It is the way we are to express our love for God.

*In v.5b, how is the true believer described? What does this mean?*

He is described as being "in Him". This means being "in Christ". In the NT, this is a common expression to describe the Christian (Eph 1:1-4; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1-2). Those who "know God" (v.3) are "in Him".

*In some translations, the phrase "abide in Him" is used in v.6. What does it mean to "abide"?*

It means to live, remain, or dwell in Christ. We do this by being attached to Jesus (cf. John 15:1-5).

*How do we know that we are in Christ, and therefore are a true Christian? (v.6) Why is this?*

We know that we are in Christ when we live like Jesus did. This is because when we are in Christ, He is in us by His Spirit (Gal 2:20; Rom 8:9), and He will be enabling us to be like Him. As a result, like Jesus, we will be obedient to God, seeking to obey Him and keep His word (John 6:38).

**Summary:** A true believer is one who knows God (v.3), loves God (v.5), and is in Christ (vv.5-6). The proof for each of these is our obedience to God. Obedience doesn't save us, but shows we are a Christian.

## 7. Genuine Christianity - the Love Test: 1 John 2:7-11

**Aim:** To help us understand the importance of love for God's people as proof that we are saved.

**Revision:** *In 1 John 2:3-6 what test is applied for genuine Christianity? Why is this a valid test?* The test is our obedience to God's commandments. If we have truly believed in the Lord Jesus, and been born again, then we will have a heart to follow Jesus and obey His commands (Jer 31:33; John 10:27).

### **The Test of Love - vv. 7 to 11**

*John now introduces a second test for genuine Christianity. What is it? (read 1 John 2:7-11, 4:20)*  
It is love towards believers (v.10). Genuine Christians will not only love God, but also God's children.

*In what way does John give us an example of what it means to love fellow believers? (v.7)*  
He calls fellow believers "beloved" or "dearly loved". From this you can glean that John loved these fellow believers with all his heart (cf. 1 Peter 1:22). Do you truly love other believers? All of them?

*According to v.7, in what way is loving others an "old" commandment?*  
This commandment was "from the beginning"; ie, it was part of the teaching from the OT (cf. Lev 19:18).

*In what way is loving others a "new" commandment? (v.8)*  
According to v.8, it is a new commandment in the way it was seen "in Him". The Lord Jesus taught and lived out a new and more wonderful way to love.

*How did Jesus' teaching and life bring a newness to the old commandment to love? [discuss]*

- A new emphasis – Jesus brought together the love commands of Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18 like never before, declaring that the whole teaching of the Law and the Prophets hung upon them (Matt 22:36-40).
- A new quality - Lev 19:18 taught that we were to love others as ourself. But Jesus commanded that we are to love each other in the same way that He loved us (John 13:34). This was altogether new.
- A new extent - Jesus showed in the parable of the good Samaritan that the "neighbour" we must love is anyone who needs help, irrespective of race and rank, and includes our "enemy" (Matt 5:43-44).

*This new command to love is to be seen in us ("in you"). Is it? What results from this? (John 13:35)*  
By our love for each other people will recognise that we are followers of Jesus.

*How does John describe this change in love that the Lord Jesus has brought about in us? (v.8b)*  
We have had God's light shine in our hearts (2 Cor 4:6) through Jesus, who is the true Light (John 8:12). This is causing the darkness within to pass away; darkness here includes living selfishly and without love.

*In v.9 and 10 John applies this "test of love". What does John boldly declare?*  
If we claim to be in the Light (ie, a Christian who is walking with God), and yet we hate our brother or sister (ie, fellow believers), then our claim is false; we are still in darkness (which means we are not saved). However, if we do love, then it shows that we are in the Light (ie, we are saved, and are a child of God).

*What does it mean to "hate" our brother? (v.9)*  
It means not loving our brother or sister with the love that Jesus commanded and lived out (cf. Matt 5:43-48). This means much of what the world would call "love" is not love at all, in God's eyes.

*Why is the test of love a valid test for genuine Christianity?*  
To love as Jesus did is not natural. We can't produce this kind of love ourselves. It comes as a gift from God (Rom 5:5), and is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). That is why this test of love is a valid test to see if we know God and are in the light. If we have this love, then it shows that we are a true Christian. Note: John specifically speaks of loving our brother in contrast to loving everyone. Even though we are to love all people, we are to especially love our fellow believers. This is the test.

*At the end of v.10 it mentions that the one who loves has no stumbling in him. Explain.*  
Loving people causes us not to sin (Rom 13:10), and keeps us in the Light. In God's Light, we are then enabled to see spiritually, and to live life purposefully, without stumbling (cf. 2 Peter 1:4-10).

*How does v.11 describe the one who does not love?*  
The one who hates is in the darkness. This is because "to hate" is to sin, and if we sin, then we cannot be in the Light and in fellowship with God. In this state, we are spiritually blind, and therefore will stumble. Note: In 1 John 2:7-11. John combines light and love together; and darkness and hatred together. The two pairs are opposites. We are in one or the other. There is no twilight. Which one are you in?

**Summary:** **The first test looked at our relationship to God – do we submit ourselves to Him and obey His commands? The second test looked at our relationship to believers – do we love them as Christ loved us? True Christianity affects both our relationship to God and our relationship to believers.**

## 8. Assurances for genuine Christians: 1 John 2:12-14

**Aim:** To help us be assured and encouraged in the Christian life.

**Revision:** In 1 John 2:7-11 what test is given as evidence for genuine Christianity? Why is this a valid test? The test is that we love one another. We are to love as Jesus loved us. This is not a natural love, but a gift from God (Rom 5:5) and part of the fruit of being born of His Spirit (Gal 5:22).

### **Assurance and encouragement to Christians (vv12-14)**

*After a series of searching tests in verses 3-11 to examine whether a person's claim to know God is genuine, what does John now seek to do in vv12-14? [read & discuss]*

John's aim in vv3-11 was to remove the false assurance of the counterfeit Christians, not unsettle the true Christians. John now balances his tests with assurance to his readers about their own relationship to God.

*Why is encouragement and assurance important in the Christian life? [discuss].*

It is easy to get discouraged. We must keep the balance between challenge and encouragement (Heb 10:24-25), speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15). A doubting Christian is a vulnerable Christian.

*It's not clear who John has in mind in vv12-14 when he speaks of children, fathers and young men. He could be referring to physical age, or spiritual maturity. But John frequently uses the term "children" throughout the letter to address all his readers. In what sense are all Christians "children"?*

All true believers in Jesus are children of God (John 1:12, 1 John 3:1-2). Calling them children also reflects John's affection toward them. Do we have similar affection towards each other?

*What assurance does John give in v12 to true believers? [discuss]*

John assures us that our sins have been forgiven. Not that they will be forgiven, but they have been forgiven and remain forgiven. What a wonderful assurance! (Psa 32:1-5, Eph 1:7).

*What is that basis for our assurance of forgiveness of sins according to v12?*

Forgiveness is assured "for His name's sake" – that is, forgiveness is given on account of Jesus (Acts 10:43). He is the atoning sacrifice (2:2), having paid the debt of our sins in full (Col 2:13-14). Satan might still accuse (Rev 12:10), but we have an Advocate who speaks to the Father in our defence (2:1).

*What assurance does John give to those he calls "fathers" in vv13-14?*

John assures his readers that "you know Him who has been from the beginning". The perfect tense is used (but doesn't come out in the English) – ie you have known and continue to know Him. *Who is "Him"?* This is most likely a reference to Jesus (1 John 1:1, John 1:1-2). Believing in Jesus is not just learning facts about Him, but entering into a personal relationship with Him (John 17:3). How is your relationship with Jesus?

*At the end of v13, what assurance does John give to us as "children"?*

If we believe in Jesus and have received forgiveness, John assures us that we "know the Father" (John 14:6-7). This is what Christianity is all about. We must be on guard against those who suggest that a more complete knowledge of God is available elsewhere. What we receive in Christ is complete (Rom 5:10-11).

*What actions or attitudes in our life should give us assurance that we do know the Father? [discuss]*

See 1 John 1:7, 2:3, 4:7, 4:2, 4:15. Walking in the Light, keeping His commandments, loving one another and believing Jesus came in the flesh and is the Son of God are all signs that we too know the Father

*What assurance does John give to those he calls "young men" in vv13 & 14?*

John affirms that we "have overcome the evil one" (v13, 14). Not we "will" or "might", but have!

*When did this victory take place? (Col 2:15, Heb 2:14-15)*

Satan was defeated when Jesus came into our world and died and rose again.

*How can John be so sure that we have now overcome? [discuss]*

John gives two reasons in v14. (1) We have overcome because we are strong. The One who has defeated Satan abides in us and protects us (1 John 4:4, 5:18-19). (2) The Word of God abides in us, providing strength and nourishment (Psa 1:1-3). Does God's Word abide in you? It takes faithful and disciplined study.

*Why is it important to be assured that we have overcome the evil one? [discuss]*

Even though Satan has been defeated, he still loves to terrorise God's children. Our struggle is primarily a spiritual one and Satan prowls about like a roaring lion (Eph 6:12, 1 Peter 5:8). But we can face life with confidence, knowing that the evil one has been defeated by the Lord Jesus, who is our Protector and Saviour. We have nothing to fear in this life, or the next.

**Summary:** Follow Jesus with confidence – if you are born of His Spirit, be assured that your sins have been forgiven, you know the Father and you have overcome the evil one.



## 9. The danger we face as Christians: 1 John 2:15-17

**Aim:** To warn us of the danger of loving those things which take us away from God.

**Revision:** *What assurances are given to genuine Christians in 1 John 2:12-14? [discuss]* If we believe on the Lord Jesus and follow Him, then we should be assured that our sins have been forgiven (and remain forgiven!), we know the Lord Jesus and the Father, and we have victory over the evil one.

**Introduction:** Even though our salvation is secure in Jesus, the Christian life is not always an easy one. What dangers do we face as Christians that can hinder our walk with the Lord? [discuss]

### **Beware of the danger – do not love the world (vv15-17)**

*Read vv15-17. Although we have forgiveness and know God, what danger does John warn us about?* John warns us not to love the world, nor the things in the world.

*If John 3:16 says that God loved the world, how can 1 John say that we are not to love it? [discuss]* The terms "world" and "love" carry different meanings, depending on the context. In John 3:16, the world refers to people trapped in sin and unable to save themselves - God's love is a concern for their well-being. Here in 1 John 2:15, the world refers to that part of society that is hostile to God and opposed to His purposes. It is an evil system under the power of Satan (1 John 5:19, John 12:31). Moreover, the love 1 John warns of concerns pleasure and gratification a person hopes to receive from the world.

*What warning does John give in v15 about those who love the world or the things in it?* If anyone loves the world, it shows that he/she does not really love the Father. *Why?* To love the world is to love what stands opposed to God. We cannot walk in darkness and truly love God (1 John 1:5-6). We cannot be friends with the world and with God, or give our allegiance to both (James 4:4, Matt 6:21, 6:24). Two choices stand before us – we either love the Father, or we love the world. Which have you chosen?

*What should our attitude to the world be? [discuss]*

We are to have a loving concern for those trapped in darkness and under the power of the evil one (2 Cor 4:4). But we must be on guard against the world and its ways which are hostile to God. It is a dangerous place that can cause serious harm to believers and draw us away from God (2 Tim 4:10). Do you maintain boundaries between your life in Christ and the life promoted by the world? The two are incompatible. Although we are in the world, we are not to be of the world (John 17:14-16, Rom 12:2).

*How does John summarise the things in the world in v16? [discuss]*

- "The lust (or desire) of the flesh" refers to the sinful passions that arise within seeking gratification (Jer 17:9, Mark 7:20-23). The world provides the sphere for these desires to operate freely.
- "The lust (or desire) of the eyes" refers to those sinful cravings that are activated by what we see, leading to coveting and many others sins (eg David's lustful look at Bathsheda – 2 Sam 11:2). The world presents "eye-candy" as pleasing and normal, but much is sinful and shameful before God.
- "The boastful pride of life" refers to arrogance or pride over one's wealth, possessions or even position to others. It is to depend on myself & what I have, rather than on God (Deut 8:11-14).

*Read Gen 3:1-7. Has much changed in the way sin presents itself to us? [discuss]*

Not much has changed at all, has it? Eve experienced the lust of the flesh in desiring to taste of the fruit, the lust of the eyes in coveting what was forbidden and the pride of life in wanting to be like God.

*What reason does John give us in 1 John 2:16 not to love the things in the world?*

All these things (ie v16a) do not come from the Father, but from the world – a world that is opposed to God and under the power of the evil one. They will ultimately harm our relationship with the Father. Lust leads to (and is) sin, not obedience (James 1:14-15); pride leads to love of self, not one another (1 John 3:17-18).

*What second reason does John give in v17 not to love the things of the world? [discuss]*

The world is passing away, and its lusts. This present world is currently decaying and breaking down; everything in it is temporal; and it stands under God's judgement, reserved for destruction (John 12:31, 2 Cor 4:16-18, 2 Pet 3:7, 10-12). There is no future in worldliness, so it is foolish to love the things in it.

*What encouragement does John give to us who follow the Lord? (v17)*

Although there is a time when the world which is passing away will have passed away, whoever does the will of God will live forever. And what is the will of God? In the immediate context, it is to not love the world, but to love the Father, love one another and to believe in Jesus (1 John 3:23-24, John 6:26-29).

**Summary: Do not love the world or the things in it, but continue to love and follow the Lord.**

## 10. Genuine Christianity - the Belief Test (Part One): 1 John 2:18-21

**Aim:** To help us understand the importance of right belief as proof that we are saved.

**Revision:** *In 1 John 2:3-6 and 2:7-11, John applies two tests for genuine Christianity. What are they? [discuss]* The first test is obedience to God's commandments, or put another way, to follow Jesus and obey His commands (Jer 31:33; John 10:27). The second test is to love one another with Christ's love (John 13:34-35). Both tests show whether we are truly born of God or not. Do you pass the test?

**Introduction:** In the next two lessons, we will consider the third critical test that we can apply to ourselves to see if we are a genuine Christian. It involves the area of belief. But first let us look at truth.

### **The need for truth (vv. 18 to 21)**

*What does John call the time he and his readers lived in? (v.18) Why?*

John calls it the "last hour". According to the NT, the period of time between the Lord Jesus' ascension and His triumphant return is to be understood as "the last hour", or "the last days" (Acts 2:17; Heb 1:1-2); ie, it is the last hour, or last days, before Jesus' return. Note: We so often think of the last few years before Jesus' return as the last hour or last days, but let us be aware, that it includes the whole church age.

*What was the evidence to John that he was living in the "last hour"? (v.18)*

The evidence was the rise of antichrists in the world (Note: the word "antichrist" only occurs in 1 and 2 John). John knew from Jesus' teaching (Matt 24:5) that the "last hour" would see the rise of many such ones; ie, ones who are false Christs, who take the place of Christ, and seek to get people to follow them.

*We often use the term "antichrist" to refer to the one who will arise at the very end of the age to oppose God and to lead the world astray (cf. 2 Thess 2:3-4). How does John use this term in v.18?*

John uses the term "antichrist" to refer to the one who will come right near the end of the age (for John's day, and for us, he is still coming), but John also uses the phrase more generally to describe anyone who opposes Christ, and teaches against Him. We need to consider false teachers and false prophets as antichrists. They are forerunners of the one still to come, being led by Satan and his evil spirits.

*Read 1 John 2:19. What is so disturbing about this verse?*

We might have expected that antichrists have come from outside the church; in various cults or human philosophical schools. But John declares that they have come from within the church. In other words, they began amongst us, masquerading as Christians; (cf. 2 Pet 2:1-3; Jude 3-4, 12-13).

*What is implied in v.19a in regard to the mixture of the church?*

The visible church, as seen by humans, consists of true and false believers (with some even being antichrists). But in the midst of the visible church, is the invisible church, which consists of all those who are truly children of God.

*How are we to distinguish between the true believer and the false believer (or antichrist)? (v.19)*

Jesus taught us that we can distinguish between them by their fruit (Matt 7:15-20); those born of the Spirit will be different. Also, here in 1 John 2:19, we are told that the false will eventually go out from us. Their going confirms that they really were not of us (cf. Judas in John 13:21-30).

*In contrast to an antichrist, what will a true and genuine believer do in regard to the church?*

He will not go out, but remain (ie, "if they had been of us, they would have remained"). We can really be tested out at times, but a sign of genuine Christianity is to remain and to love God's people.

*Why does the genuine believer remain? (v.20)*

He has been anointed by God with His Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:21-22). This happened when we were saved.

*In v.20, John also says "and you all know". What do all genuine believers know?*

We know the truth. This is because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us the truth and leads us into all truth (John 14:26, 16:13; 1 John 2:27).

*In verse 21, John encourages his fellow believers. How?*

John affirms that they knew the truth. He doesn't say "I hope you know", or "perhaps you know", but "you know the truth". That's because all true believers have been anointed by the Spirit and have the truth.

*What is so important about the truth? (John 8:31-32; Eph 6:14)*

It is through the truth that we are saved, as well as to stand firm against the lies and deceptions of antichrists (cf. Matt 24:24). In the end, it helps us remain in Christ, when others are trying to draw us away.

**Summary:** **God's truth from the anointing of His Spirit, enables us to be genuine believers in the first place, and it enables us to remain in Christ, instead of fall away.**

## **11. Genuine Christianity - the Belief Test (Part Two): 1 John 2:22-25**

**Aim:** To help us understand the importance of right belief as proof that we are saved.

**Revision:** *According to 1 John 2:19-21 what distinguishes a true believer from a false one? [discuss]*  
He remains in fellowship with God's people, has the Holy Spirit's anointing, and knows the truth.

In this next study, we shall consider one of the essential elements of the "truth". This forms the third test (the belief test) that John uses to distinguish genuine Christians from false ones (or antichrists).

### **The belief test (vv. 22 to 25)**

*There are many great truths in the Christian faith. What are some of them? [discuss]*

*Of all the truths that we have and cherish, which one does John highlight in 1 John 2:22?*

It is this: that Jesus is the Christ (or Messiah: the word Messiah is the Hebrew word for Christ).

*What are we declaring when we proclaim that Jesus is the Christ? (cf. Acts 2:36; Matt 16:16)*

We are declaring that Jesus is the special One God promised to send into our world. From Gen 3:15, right through the Old Testament, God spoke of this One who would come. He would come to save us from our sins (Isa 53:5-6,10-12) and to give us light, life and salvation.

*Did the Old Testament indicate who the Christ would be? (cf. Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23; Isa 9:6)*

The Christ would be "God with us" (Isa 7:14), "mighty God" (Isa 9:6), and the "Son" (Psalm 2:7-12). The word "Christ", therefore, speaks of Jesus' divinity. Note: The word Christ is often considered Jesus' surname, but it really speaks of who Jesus is (Lord) and what He is to us (Saviour).

*Why is the statement "Jesus is the Christ" such a crucial truth? (Rom 10:9-10; John 8:24).*

We can't be a true believer, saved from our sins, made right with God, and possessing the gift of eternal life, unless we believe that Jesus is the Christ. It is absolutely essential for salvation. We must believe that He is our Saviour from sin and that He is the Lord.

*What does John call the person who denies this truth? (v.22)*

He calls him a liar, and puts him in the same camp as an anti-christ, who opposes Christ.

*Why is such a person called a liar?*

He is a liar because God has revealed to us that this person Jesus truly is the Christ. Not only did the Father make this clear at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:17), and when He was transfigured (Matt 17:5), but Jesus' whole life perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, making it certain He was the Christ. Finally, His resurrection proved beyond doubt that this Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Rom 1:4).

*Consider cults and religions, as well as false prophets and teachers. What do they all get wrong?*

They all get wrong that Jesus is the Christ. They "play-down" either His divinity, or His saving work.

*Most have a wrong view of Jesus. [Discuss] How do we get a right view of Him? (Matt 16:15-17)*

This comes from God the Father revealing the truth about Jesus to us. Knowing this truth is not something we come to with our own human reasoning. We need the help of God's Spirit.

*When we deny Jesus is the Christ, what also do we do? (v.22 -23)*

We deny the Father. The first denial (denying Jesus) leads to the second. Not only that, but we cannot have the Father. There are many who boast that they know God, but their boasting is in vain if they deny Jesus, for we can only know and come to the Father through Jesus (John 14:6).

*If we acknowledge and confess that Jesus is the Christ, what does this result in? (v. 23b)*

It results in us having the Father (cf. John 14:23). To believe in Jesus causes us to be reconciled to the Father (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18), and therefore to have both the Father and the Son.

*In v.24, John encourages his readers to abide or remain in something. What is that?*

He encourages them to abide (or remain) in the truth, which they had declared to them from the beginning; ie, when they heard the truths of the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-4).

*What does it mean to abide (or remain) in the truth?*

It means to remain faithful and to hold onto the truths of the Gospel, and especially about who Jesus is and what He has done for us. The best way to maintain this is by reading and studying God's word daily, and coming under the faithful preaching of the Word, as well as being a doer of the Word (Matt 7:24-27).

*Why are we encouraged to continue to abide in the truth? (v.24-25)*

It will enable us to remain in both the Son and the Father, and it will keep us from falling away and denying the Lord. We are also promised by the Lord Himself, the gift of eternal life (John 5:24).

**Summary: The genuine believer remains in the truth and believes that Jesus is the Christ.**

## **12. Warning against Deception: 1 John 2:26-27**

**Aim:** To help us not be deceived when it comes to the truth about who Jesus is.

**Revision:** *According to 1 John 2:22-23 what essential truth does a genuine Christian hold to? [discuss] What does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Christ? [Christ means the anointed One - the One who would come to save us from our sins; we also learn from the OT that He would be the Lord (Isa 9:6)]*

*To those who believe that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, what promises does John give (cf. vv. 24-25)? [We have the Father and the Son, and the gift of eternal life]*

### **The Danger of Deception (v. 26)**

*Why had the apostle John written in vv.18-25 about those who deny that Jesus is the Christ? (v.26)*

John had written to warn fellow believers of those who were trying to deceive them in regard to who the Lord Jesus really is (cf. 1 John 3:7; 2 John 1:7). This included false teachers, or antichrists.

*Today, we have many who continue to try and deceive us about Jesus. What are some of the views that people try to promote so that we may not believe in Jesus? [discuss]*

People say Jesus was just a moral teacher; a prophet of God; a religious leader; an angel; a madman who claimed to be somebody he wasn't; an ordinary Jew that His followers made into someone great.

*Who is actually behind this deception. Why?*

The devil; he is the great deceiver. He deceived Eve in the garden, and has continued to deceive people ever since. As Jesus said, he is "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He especially seeks to deceive us in relation to Jesus, for our salvation hinges on us believing in Jesus as Lord (God) and Christ (Saviour).

*Consider John the Baptist. What happened to this great man of God? (Matt 11:2-6)*

He began to doubt whether Jesus was the Christ. Perhaps it was his imprisonment that caused him to doubt, or his pre-conceived ideas of what the Christ would do, but whatever it was, we can be sure that the devil was using every means to cause John the Baptist not to believe that Jesus was the Christ. Let us be aware that he will try and do the same in our life; especially through false teachers.

*Besides trying to deceive Christians, what does the devil do in respect to unbelievers? (2 Cor 4:4)*

He deceives and blinds the minds of the unbelieving so that they especially do not see who the Lord Jesus really is – thereby, they are unable to believe in Jesus and be saved.

### **The Blessing of God's Anointing (v. 27)**

*In spite of the devil's schemes, what blessing do we have so that we may not be deceived? (v. 27)*

Christians have been anointed with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:21-22). From the moment we were saved, God anointed us with his Spirit. Every Christian, without exception, has this anointing (Rom 8:9).

*What does the Holy Spirit do in relation to the lies and deceptions we face? (v. 27)*

He teaches us the truth (cf. vv. 20-21). He teaches us about all things, and this especially includes who the Lord Jesus is, and what He has done for us.

*John was so convinced about the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in teaching us the truth, that he says in v.27 that we have no need for any [human] to teach us. How are we to understand this?*

This doesn't mean that we are not to have Christian teachers. God has given the spiritual gift of teaching to some, and they are to use that gift (Eph 4:11-12; Rom 12:6-7). But what we need to understand is this:

- (a) False teachers were saying that people needed to hear them, for only they had the truth. This was a lie. With the Scriptures and the help of the Spirit, any Christian can know the truth.
- (b) When it comes to true teachers of the Word, it is the Spirit who teaches us through them. In that sense, the Holy Spirit is the Christian's true and only teacher. Remember what Jesus said to the churches in Revelation: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says" (Rev 2:7).

*In John 14:26 and John 16:13 what did Jesus teach His disciples?*

The Spirit would teach us and lead us into all the truth. Though these words were particularly given to the disciples, who would compose the NT and begin preaching the truth, we are also blessed to have this ministry of the Holy Spirit. The question is: how teachable are we? Sadly, we can stop growing in the truth because we are not teachable. Consider Josiah's heart in 2 Kings 22:18-19. We should be the same.

*Besides confirming who Jesus is, what is the thrust of the Spirit's teaching? (v. 27)*

The Spirit's ministry is for us to remain (or abide) in Jesus. He seeks to keep us believing in Jesus and following Him, rather than being deceived by false teachers, and drifting away.

**Summary: Only by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, can we overcome lies and deceptions.**

### 13. Abiding (Remaining) in the Lord Jesus: 1 John 2:28-29

**Aim:** To encourage us to abide in Christ, and to be like Him, so that we may be sure of salvation.

**Revision:** *According to 1 John 2:24&27, what is needed for us to be kept from being deceived and falling away?* We need to allow "what we have heard from the beginning" (God's Word, the Gospel), to abide (remain) in us, and we need the Holy Spirit, who abides in us, to be our Teacher.

*What is the ultimate aim of the Spirit, as well as God's Word (v. 27)?* That we abide, or remain in, Christ, who is our hope of glory and of salvation (Col 1:27).

#### **Abiding in Christ and Righteousness (vv. 28-29)**

*In this next section (1 John 2:28-3:10), John will expand on the first of the three tests we looked at in regard to genuine Christianity. What was this first test? (1 John 2:3-6)*

All true Christians will seek to obey the Lord's commands, and to live a life of righteousness and holiness.

*What does the Bible tell us in Matthew 5:20 and Hebrews 12:14 in regard to how we are to live?*

Unless there is a genuine and practical righteousness about us (ie, we are not a hypocrite), and unless we live a holy life, then we have no biblical assurance (confidence) for salvation.

*In v.28, John says "and now", and then proceeds to give the essence of his teaching. What is it?*

We are to abide (remain) in Christ. In the previous verses (vv. 24-27), John uses this word four times. It is the key to living as a Christian. No doubt, John was mindful of Jesus' own teaching on it (John 15:1-11).

*What does it mean to abide (or remain) in Christ? (John 15:1-6)*

It means to be so connected to the Lord Jesus that, not only does He live in us, but He lives His life out through us (Gal 2:20); ie, consider the sap of the vine flowing into the branches to give it life.

*If we abide (remain) in Christ, what will it result in? (1 John 2:29; John 15:4-5)*

We will bear much fruit. Fruit, here, refers to the fruit of righteousness (Phil 1:9-11), for when we abide in Christ, His righteous life will flow through us. As a result, just as He was righteous, we will also be righteous (v.29). Practically, we will obey His teaching and submit ourselves to Him (cf. 1 John 2:6).

*What motive is given here in v.28 for abiding (remaining) in Christ? (cf. also 2 Peter 1:10-11)*

The motive given for abiding (remaining) in Christ is so that we may have confidence to meet the Lord and be received by Him on the day of His return (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-17).

*What will happen to all who do not abide (or remain) in Christ, as is implied in v.28?*

They will "shrink away from Him in shame at His coming"; ie, they will feel embarrassed and ashamed.

*Who are those who will "shrink away from Him in shame at His coming"? (cf. 1 Cor 3:12-15)*

V.28 is addressed to believers ("little children"). On the day of Christ's return, there will be some Christians who will be ashamed because they did not fully abide (or remain) in Christ; evident by the way they did not live a righteous life as they should have. Note: John does not state this to indicate that we can lose our salvation, but rather to spur us on to living and abiding in Christ (cf. Heb 10:37-39).

*As an aside, what will be the response of the unbeliever to Christ's return? (cf. Rev 6:12-17)*

They will not be ashamed, so much, as terrified. They will seek to flee in terror from His holy presence.

*Notice that v.28 says "so that when He appears". What's significant about this?*

It's not "if" He appears, but "when" He appears. Jesus will come again (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 2 Pet 3:3-10). Do you long for it? It's a test of whether we really love Him or the world (1 John 2:15). Are you ready for it? The best way to be ready and to have confidence on that day is to abide (remain) in the Son.

*According to v.29, what does a righteous life, brought about by "abiding in Christ", indicate?*

It shows that we have been "born of Him"; or as John 3:3 says "born from above" (born again).

*"Born of Him" is a phrase John often uses to describe a genuine Christian. What does it mean?*

It means that God has "begotten" us and given us re-birth by His Spirit. As a result, we are one of His children, and by His Spirit, we are a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Consider: just as a child exhibits the characteristics of their parents, we now exhibit the characteristics of our Father in heaven. As v.29 makes clear, since God is righteous, true Christians will also be righteous.

*Are you a genuine Christian? Are you born of God? How can we tell? (cf. James 2:26)*

Living a righteous life is evidence of the new birth and that we are a true Christian. Consider Matt 25:31-46. The difference between the sheep and the goats is not belief and unbelief, but what they did and didn't do.

**Summary:** **If we abide in Christ, we will be righteous. Righteousness is evidence of the new birth and that we are saved, but not the cause of salvation. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ.**

## 14. What We Are and What We Will Be: 1 John 3:1-3

**Aim:** To help us appreciate God's love for us, and what we presently are, and what we will be.

**Revision:** *What does abiding (remaining) in Christ result in (1 Jn 2:28)?* It results in us having confidence at the Lord's return of being accepted by Him, rather than being turned away. In contrast, believers who do not fully live for (abide in) Him, will feel ashamed, and shrink away from His presence.

*What does abiding (remaining) in Christ lead to? What does it show (v. 29)?* It leads to a righteous life, and it shows that we have truly been born of God (without which, we cannot be saved - John 3:3).

### **What we are and what we will be (vv. 1-3)**

*In the light of how a genuine Christian is born of God (v.29) how does John start chapter three?*

He is full of praise for one thing: God's great and amazing love for us. John starts with a word that means "behold", or "see", or "stop and consider this". God's love for us should capture the heart and arrest the attention of every Christian - (cf. how it touched Paul's heart in Rom 8:35-39).

*Why is God's love so great and amazing?*

He has loved us unworthy sinners, who were His enemies (Rom 5:5-8; Eph 2:1-5), and He has even given up His one and only Son, Jesus, so that we might be forgiven and saved (John 3:16; Rom 8:31-32).

*In v.1 the Bible says that God's love has been bestowed or given to us. What does this infer?*

God's love is not earned or deserved. We should have received God's wrath, but we have received God's love and grace through Jesus. We have also received it so liberally; it has been lavished on us (NIV).

*What one thing causes John to glory in God's love? (v.1)*

It is this wonderful truth that though we were once His enemies, we have become God's children through Jesus and the re-birth. There is no greater blessing than this, for we are a dearly loved child. There is also no greater position, for we have been made higher than God's angels (cf. Heb 1:14). We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, and the whole creation is presently longing for our final "revealing" (Rom 8:16-19).

*Although we are God's children, what does John say about how the world views us? (v.1)*

The world doesn't know us, honour us, or even recognise us, just as it did not know or recognise Jesus (John 1:10-11). As a result, we are persecuted, hated and mocked (John 15:18-21; Heb 11:37-40).

*At the start of v.2, what truth about Christians does John mention again? What is emphasised?*

He emphasises that "now we are children of God". It's not "we will be", but "now we are", for God has already accepted us through His Son Jesus. The world may not recognise us as God's children, or we may not feel like we are, especially when we let the Lord down, but we are and will forever be God's children.

*Though we are God's children, what is still "not yet"? (v.2)*

What we will be is still "not yet"; that is, our final perfect state. One day we will be completely free of our sin nature and be perfect like our Lord, and we will have a new body that will never age or perish.

*When will this "perfection" take place? (1 John 3:2; 1 Cor 15:50-52)*

This will occur when the Lord Jesus returns. John simply says that when we see Him, we will be like Him; ie, at that very moment we will have a new imperishable body (like His glorious body) and we will be perfectly righteous (like He is righteous).

*How are we to understand what we will be, and what the Lord is doing in our life presently?*

The moment we were born again, God began His great work to conform us to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). In this life we shall never attain to the perfect standard and image of Christ, but one day, at the Lord's return, that work will be brought instantly to completion.

*If we would fix our mind on this hope of being like Christ, what will it result in? (v.3)*

It will help purify us; ie, to become more holy and righteous - like Jesus. This is because it helps us be focussed on our ultimate goal and destiny of being like Christ. Practically, it helps us not get caught up with the ways of the world, but instead, helps our life's direction and purpose be firmly pointed heavenward.

*How should we understand this word "hope" as in v.3?*

"Hope" doesn't mean "maybe" or "I hope so" (wishful thinking) but something that is sure and certain, for our hope is based upon God's ever reliable promises (Heb 10:23). We will certainly be like Christ one day.

*John ends v.3 by reflecting on a wonderful truth about Jesus. What is it?*

He reflects on how Jesus is pure; without sin or stain. May we dwell on Him, for it will help us become more like Jesus, here on earth. Looking at Jesus is the best way for us to grow in holiness and purity.

**Summary: We are dearly beloved children of God, and will one day be pure just like our Lord.**

## 15. Jesus – the One who Came to Take Away our Sins: 1 John 3:4-6

**Aim:** To help us see what sin is, what Christ has done for us, and how we ought to live.

**Revision:** *Although we were once God's enemies, through faith in Jesus Christ, what are we now? (1 Jn 3:1-2)?* We are now children of God (now and forevermore).

*What is still to come, and will not happen until Christ's return? (v.2)* Our perfect and complete change into Christ's likeness. On that great day we will have a sinless nature and a glorious body like His.

*What was behind us becoming God's children and having a glorious hope? (v.1)* It was God's great and amazing love for us (cf. Titus 3:4-5).

### **Sin and what Christ has done for us (vv. 4-6)**

*In vv. 4-6, John looks at the indispensable necessity of holy living in the light of Jesus' death on the cross. He begins by firstly considering what sin is. What is sin? What does John say sin is? (v.4)*

Sin is lawlessness; this is the very essence of sin. It is having no regard for God's commandments; it is a defiant violation of His moral law. It is essentially an active rebellion against God's rule.

*We don't often have the right biblical view of sin. Why is this?*

This is because we may not be aware that we sin, as we are unaware of God's standard and law (Rom 7:7). Also, we often do not appreciate God's attitude to sin. As a result, we can end up minimising it, or dismissing it. We need to recognise the very nature of sin, and see the utter "sinfulness of sin" (Rom 7:13).

*Why is it important to see sin as it really is?*

Unless we come to see sin as it is, we will not comprehend why God's anger is upon us and why we so desperately need Christ to save us. Also, as a Christian, if we do not see sin as it is, then we will end up living sinful lives, rather than holy lives. We need to pray that we have God's attitude towards it.

*After considering what sin is, John mentions why Jesus came. What reason does he give? (v.5)*

Many reasons may be given as to why Jesus came. For example, He came to reveal to us the Father, to teach us the truth, etc. However, the main reason why He came was to remove, or take away, our sins (John 1:29; Heb 9:26-28).

*What do we mean when we say that Jesus came to "take away sins"?*

We mean that Jesus obediently went to the cross and bore the penalty (the punishment) for our sins (Isa 53:5-6). As a result, through faith in Him, we have been forgiven; ie, the guilt and penalty for our sins has been removed from us (Psa 103:12; Micah 7:19; 1 John 1:9). But also, Jesus came to deliver us from the power of sin; He came to break the chains of sin so that we might be righteous (1 Peter 2:24).

*Although Jesus came to take away the sins of the world, what does John say at the end of v.5?*

This One who took our sin away, has no sin of His own; that is, there is no lawlessness in Him. He perfectly obeyed His Father, even being "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). He is the only one who the Father could say, "with Him I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17; 17:5). Even though He was like us in every way (Heb 2:14), He was without sin (Heb 4:14-16; 2 Co 5:21). Indeed, John says, "in Him there is no sin; ie, He has and always will be sinless, for His eternal nature is sinless.

*What does John say about Jesus in 1 John 2:29, 3:3 & 3:5? Why? (consider the false teachers)*

John highlights that Jesus is righteous, pure and without sin. This is because the false teachers of John's day believed that Jesus was not sinless. They believed that all matter was evil, including human flesh, and therefore, because Jesus inhabited a human body, He must have been sinful also. But they were badly mistaken. Matter is not evil. It is sin that has marred creation; the creation itself is inherently good (Gen 1:31). As a result, the holy God was able to dwell in human flesh.

*In v.6, what conclusion does John draw?*

If the eternal nature of the Son of God is sinless, and if the purpose of His appearing was to remove sin, then all true Christians who abide in Christ and who are born of Him (1 John 2:29) will not (or do not) sin.

*Does this mean a genuine Christian never sins? And if we sin, does it mean we are not saved?*

In 1 John 1:8, 1:10, 2:1, we read of how we lie if we say we do not sin. Thus, a genuine Christian still sins. But what v.6 means, is that all those who "habitually practice" sin, or who continue in sin (without repentance), are not genuine believers. To see (by faith), and to know, the sinless saviour of sinners, is to outlaw sin. To truly abide in Christ will result in God's Spirit causing us to see sin as our enemy and to do what we have to, to eradicate it out of our lives. We shall sin less and less. Is this true in your life?

**Summary: Jesus came to take away our sins; may we be true followers by living this out.**

## 16. Children of God and Children of the Devil: 1 John 3:7-10

**Aim:** To help us distinguish between the children of God and the children of the devil.

**Revision:** *What is sin?* (1 Jn 3:4) Sin is lawlessness (rebellion toward God).

*Why did Jesus come?* (v.5) He came to take away our sins; ie, to remove the penalty of our sins.

*If we live (abide) in Him, what shall we not do?* (v.6) We shall not sin. [discuss] As 1 John 2:8,10 makes clear, a Christian still sins, but he/she will not continue to habitually sin (ie, being lawless).

In this next section, John makes a major distinction between the true believer and the unbeliever.

### **Righteousness and sin (vv. 7-10)**

*What does the apostle John again warn us about? Why the warning?* (v.7)

He again warns us of not being deceived, just as he did in 2:26. The reason for John's repeated warning is because we live in a world where people try to deceive us and get us off the narrow path of Christ. Behind this is the devil, who is the great deceiver (Rev 12:9). We even have the battle of our own heart seeking to deceive us (Jer 17:9). Even Jesus warned us that the deception in the last days will be very powerful and strong (Matt 24:24); therefore, how we need to be warned of the danger of deception.

*What particular deception does John warn us about in v.7?*

He warns us of the deception of a person who claims to be righteous yet lives in an unrighteous and unholy manner. There are many who claim to be righteous; ie, right with God. They may boast about their spiritual experiences, and call themselves a Christian. But if we do not practice righteousness, then we are not right with God; we are not a Christian. (cf. Matt 7:21-23).

*What type of righteousness should we be exhibiting?* (v.7)

If we are truly righteous before God (a genuine Christian) then we will be practicing the righteousness found in Jesus. We will not be doing our own thing, but we will be following Jesus and living like Him.

*In contrast to v.7, how does John describe those who don't practice righteousness?* (v.8)

He describes those who practice sin (ie, who continue in sin) as being of the devil. This may sound harsh, but if we are not a child of God, then we are of the devil. Jesus taught this (cf. John 8:44). Indeed, we are all under Satan's control (Eph 2:1-3), and in Satan's kingdom, unless we turn to Jesus (Col 1:13-14).

*Why does John say that the person who practices sin is of the devil?* (v.8)

He declares that a person who practices sin is of the devil, because that's precisely what the devil has been doing from the beginning (ie, from the beginning of the creation of mankind). His character is sinful, and therefore those who practice sin show that they still belong to him. This verse also shows the seriousness of practicing sin. Sin is equated with the devil. Therefore, we ought to hate sin.

*In v.8 John tells us another reason why Jesus came into our world. What is it? Explain?*

In v.5, we learn how Jesus came to take away our sins. But in v.8, John tells us that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. Satan's work may be classified into two areas: he entices us to sin, and he seduces us to accept error. But Christ came to destroy Satan's work. Through Christ we now have His power by His Spirit to resist the devil and overcome sin, and through Christ's Word and His Spirit, we are able to know the truth and avoid the errors and lies of the devil.

*Why does the genuine Christian not practice (or continue habitually) in sin?* (vv.4-9)

The Christian does not practice sin because it is lawlessness and Jesus came to take away sins (vv. 4-5), and because sin is of the devil (vv.7-8). But the main reason why the Christian does not practice sin is because we have been born of God (John 3:3); that is, by the Holy Spirit, God's seed or nature, is in us. As a result, we now desire to be like our Father, holy and righteous, and we detest sin like He does.

*Is John saying in v.9 that the Christian never sins?* (ie, "he cannot sin")

No! As we have seen previously, the Christian still sins (1 John 1:8,10, 2:1) – but he cannot and does not continue in sin. Even when he sins, he is convicted and troubled, and repents of his sin.

*1 John 2:28 to 3:10 is a mini-section in John's letter. What does he conclude with in v.10?*

There are only two types of people in our world; children of God and children of the devil (Note: we are not all children of God, as some teach who hold to the universal fatherhood of God). The two are distinguished by their response to Jesus, and that in turn is evident by the way they live. Children of God not only trust in Jesus, but they practice righteousness (ie, they follow Jesus and love others) because of the re-birth, but the children of the devil practice sin (which includes living for self). Which one are you?

**Summary:** We are either a child of God who practices righteousness, or a child of the devil.



## 17. Loving the Brethren: 1 John 3:11-14

**Aim:** To help us see that the genuine Christian is evident by the way they love fellow believers.

**Revision:** *What are we not to be deceived in?* (1 Jn 3:7) Those who are right with God (ie, a true and genuine Christian) are those who practice righteousness (cf. Matt 7:15-20)

*How does John describe those who continue in sin?* (v.8, 10) They are of the devil. Note: We are either a child of God (seen by the way we live righteously like Christ), or we are of the devil.

*Why does the Christian not continue in sin?* (v.9) He has been born of God, and has God's nature. In this next section (vv. 11-18), John elaborates on the second test for genuine Christianity – the love test.

### **Example of Cain and Abel (vv. 11-13)**

*In the last part of the previous verse (v.10), who is not of God (ie, who is not a child of God)?* Anyone who does not practice righteousness, and anyone who does not love his brother (fellow believer).

*What does John mean when he says that the message to love was from the beginning?* (v.11) The message to love was an essential part of the Gospel. From the beginning, Jesus taught it (Matt 5:43-48; Matt 22:37-40; John 13:34, 15:12-17), and so did His Apostles (Rom 13:8; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22).

*How would you describe the love we are to show toward one another?* (John 13:34-35; 1 Cor 13:4-8) We are to love with Christ's love. It is self-sacrificial, unconditional, and centred on others; not on self.

*In v.12 what example does John give in regard to how we are not to be?* John gives the example of Cain who killed his brother Abel (Gen 4:3-8). Instead of loving his brother, Cain fell into a dangerous progression: jealousy, anger, hatred, and then even murder. Although God lovingly warned him of the temptation he was facing, he ignored God and killed Abel.

*Who does John say Cain belonged to? Why?* John tells us that Cain was of the evil one, for Satan was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44), and those who do evil (sin) are of the devil (v. 8). Cain serves as an example of those who are of the devil, evident by the way they do evil and do not love, in contrast to Abel who serves as an example of those who are of Christ and of God, as evident by the way they practice righteousness and love (cf. 1 John 3:7-9).

*After mentioning the example of Cain and Abel, what does John remind us of?* (v. 13; John 15:18-20) John reminds us of how Jesus taught us that the world (unbelievers) will hate us, just as it hated Him. Cain and Abel are an example of this. Cain represents the world which hates all those who are righteous in God's sight. Abel represents the Christian who lives righteously and is hated by the world.

*Why does the world hate the genuine Christian?* (cf. John 3:19-20; Matt 5:10-12) We are hated because we are not of the world (ie, we do not live worldly lives), because our righteous life exposes their sin and unbelief, and because of Jesus in us (the world is against Him). Indeed, how much we are hated will be dependent on how much we live for and shine Christ [discuss].

### **Love for the brethren (v.14)**

*In v.14, how can we know with certainty that we are a genuine Christian?* (v.14) We can know we are a Christian if we love the brethren (fellow believers). Those of the world, and who are under Satan (ie, all non-believers) will hate the genuine Christian. They are even "bugged" by their presence, especially the more we speak of Jesus and live for Him. But a Christian loves fellow believers.

*Why is "love for the brethren" such a sure sign that we are a Christian?* (Romans 5:5) When we are born again through faith in Christ, God pours His love into our hearts, thereby enabling us to love like we have never loved before. Love is the first part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), the pre-eminent Christian virtue (1 Cor 13:13), and the distinguishing mark of the Christian (John 13:34-35).

*How does John describe what has happened to the genuine Christian?* (v. 14; also John 5:24) We have "passed out of death into life". We were once spiritually dead and under God's wrath (Eph 2:1-3), under the power of death (Heb 2:14-15), and facing hell (eternal death). But we now have eternal and abundant life (John 3:16, 10:10) through faith in Christ. John says "we **have** passed". This is because it is a present reality; not just a futuristic thing.

*What does John state about the person who does not love?* (v.14) John concludes that if we do not love then we are still dead; ie, spiritually dead and outside of Christ. If we are spiritually alive in Christ, then by God's Spirit we will love, and not with any kind of love, but with Christ's love. We will not only love the brethren, but our enemies as well (Matt 5:43-45).

**Summary:** **The genuine Christian will love the brethren, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22). Do you?**

## 18. The Model of Genuine Love: 1 John 3:15-18

**Aim:** To help us see that genuine love towards fellow believers is evident by actions; not just words.

**Revision:** The Apostle John is writing the letter of 1 John to encourage believers in the face of false teachers that are seeking to undermine their faith. In the letter, John gives us some tests and assurances to help distinguish a true Christian by (a) what they believe and (b) how they behave.

*What tests does John give us about what a true Christian believes?* A true Christian believes that (1) Jesus is the Christ, the divine Son of God (2:22); (2) Jesus has come in the flesh (truly human - 4:2, 1:1); and (3) eternal life is found only in Him (1:2, 5:11-12).

*What tests does John give about how a true Christian behaves?* A true Christian (1) keeps Christ's commandments and practices righteousness (2:3, 3:7); (2) has a genuine love for fellow believers; and (3) admits their need for Jesus and confesses their sin (1:8-9).

**Read 1 John 3:10-18.** Here, John is elaborating on the love test for genuine Christianity.

### **The warning if we do not love our brother (v.15)**

*How does John describe the person who "hates" or does not love his brother or sister? (v.15)*

John pulls no punches – the one who hates is a murderer in God's eyes! Is John exaggerating? No – He simply echoes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-22.

*What implication does John draw about the spiritual state of a person who hates a believer? (v.15)*

No unrepentant murderer has eternal life in him. Whoever "hates" or "does not love" a brother or sister still abides in death (3:14) and is a child of the devil (3:10), who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44).

*Examine your own heart. Is there a brother or sister that you detest, abhor, hate or are unable to love?* If there is, you need to question whether you have eternal life, because love is the evidence of life.

### **The model of genuine love (v.16)**

*What is the supreme model of love that John refers to in v.16?*

The supreme model of love is seen in one particular action of Jesus – that He laid down His life for us. The highest display of love is to give one's life in the place of another (John 15:13, 10:11). What is even more remarkable is that the Lord Jesus gave His life for us not when we were friends of God, but while we were still enemies (Rom 5:6-8, 5:10). Would you give your life for a friend, let alone an enemy?

*What do we learn about genuine love from this act of Jesus?*

Genuine love consists not just of feelings or words, but in action. It is given willingly (ie He laid down his life), unconditionally, it is self-sacrificing and always seeks the good of another. Consider Mark 10:45, John 3:16, Phil 2:3-8. How does this differ from what the world generally considers love?

*According to v.16, what should our response be to Christ's love as Christians?*

The love of Christ is not just to be admired – it is an example to be copied in our lives. It is a direct command from Jesus - John 15:12-14. Would you be willing to trade your life for another Christian? Is there someone you wouldn't die for? This is the ultimate test of our love – for each other (are others really more important than ourselves?) and for the Lord Jesus (will we obey Him no matter what the cost?).

### **The practical nature of genuine love (vv.17-18)**

*Genuine love shows itself not only in extreme circumstances, but also in everyday life. According to v.17, how are we to practically display our love for brothers and sisters?*

Not many of us are called to lay down our life – but we all have the opportunity to show our love by sharing our possessions with those in need. If we are to be willing to give up our life, how much more should we be willing to give lesser things such as money, time or possessions? Discuss James 2:15-17.

*What warning does John give if we have the ability to help a believer in need, but choose not to?*

In effect, John says that a person who closes their heart towards a believer in need shows that God's love does not really abide in them. Genuine love surrenders what we value in order to enrich the life of another, whether in a small or a big way. Discuss Acts 2:44-45 & Rom 12:10-13. *Are you aware of the needs of fellow believers? Do you share what you have to help those in need, or just turn a blind eye?*

*What plea does John make to his readers, and to us, in v.18?*

True love is much more than words – it must display itself in action. In the light of God's great love for us (1 John 4:10-11), our love for one another must be genuine (in truth) and show itself in our deeds.

**Summary:** To follow Jesus is to love like He loved - in deed and truth, not just with words.

## 19. Christian Assurance: 1 John 3:19-20

**Aim:** To help us have true assurance when our heart condemns us.

**Revision:** In 3:10-18, John expands on the second of his three tests for genuine Christianity; namely, the test of love. *Summarise what this test is?* We are to love fellow believers with Christ's sacrificial love; we are to love practically, helping those in need; if we do not love like this, then we are not saved.

**Read 1 John 3:14-20.** Before he expands on his third test, the doctrinal test, John deals with the matter of assurance in a genuine Christian's life.

### A condemning heart

*What does John mean by "our heart condemns us"? (v.20a)*

John is not meaning the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting the believer of his sin, but where our own heart tries to condemn us, and causes us to have serious doubts whether we are a genuine Christian.

*Do you ever have doubts about whether you are a Christian? [discuss]*

*What is the basis for our heart condemning us (for us having doubts)? [discuss]*

There are many things we could list, but here are a few (can you relate to any?):

- (i) We do not live the righteous (holy) life we ought to, and we battle with sinful traits.
- (ii) We do not have the same spiritual experiences as others, or we do not have certain spiritual gifts.
- (iii) We question whether we prayed the "sinner's prayer" sincerely, or whether we repented fully, or whether we came to Christ the right way.
- (iv) We don't have a specific date and time of being saved, as others do.
- (v) When we compare ourselves with other Christians who shine the character of Christ and serve him well, we feel that we mustn't be a Christian.
- (vi) When we recall our sins, or when Satan (the accuser of the brethren - Rev 12:10) reminds us of our sins, we feel that they are too bad for God to forgive us.

Note: We may not like to own up to doubts, but such a thing is not an unusual or infrequent experience of Christians. Even the most sanctified believer can sometimes doubt that he is saved.

### Christian assurance

*How is a genuine believer to assure his heart that he is saved when it is condemning him? (v.19)*

It's not a matter of clinging to our past confession, or some religious experience, but we are to assure our heart by examining our life and seeing the evidence of genuine Christianity. As John has highlighted in 1 John 3:4-18, the evidence is this: we will be seeking to obey the Lord and not continue in sin, and we will be loving fellow believers with Christ's sacrificial love.

*Why is this the basis for Christian assurance?*

Such behaviour shows that we have been born of God. Only when we are born of God's Spirit can we truly obey the Lord (and not continue in sin), and love others with Christ's love. We may say then that the fruit of obedience and love is confidence, or Christian assurance. It is the mind's knowledge by which the heart's doubts may be silenced.

*But there are genuine believers who can still feel condemned and who question whether they are saved, although they seek to obey the Lord and love others. Why is this?*

They feel they do not obey the Lord sufficiently, and they do not love others as fully as Christ loves us. Let us be aware that though the tests for genuine Christianity in 1 John are to distinguish between the genuine and false believer, even the genuine believer can still wonder whether he or she is saved.

*What are we to do in such a case? (v.20b)*

We are to appeal to God, who knows all things. Although our heart may falsely condemn us, God knows that we are His child (cf. John 21:15-17). He knows that we have called out to His Son for salvation. Also, God is greater than our heart. Although we don't want a condemning heart, our salvation is not based on whether or not our heart condemns us, but on God who saves.

*Consider the word "condemnation". The devil condemns us, we may condemn others, and we may even condemn ourselves as not being a Christian. But what does God say (that's what counts)? (Rom 8:1)* If we are in Christ, we are not condemned. God may discipline us (Heb 12:4-13), and He will convict us of sin, but He will never condemn us. But may we have assurance by obeying the Lord and loving others.

**Summary:** Christian assurance is based on obeying the Lord and loving others, and even beyond that, it's in the confidence that God knows and confirms (cf. Rom 8:15-16) that we are His child.

## 20. The Blessings of Christian Assurance: 1 John 3:21-24

**Aim:** To help us appreciate the blessings of Christian assurance.

**Revision:** *Sometimes our heart may cause us to doubt whether we are a true Christian. In the context of 1 John, where should we draw assurance from? Discuss.* Assurance is not drawn from feelings or experiences, but (1) from right evidence in our life (eg obedience to Christ and loving one another), and (2) appealing to God because He knows whether we have called upon Jesus to save us.

**Read 1 John 3:14-24.**

### **Confidence before God (vv21-22)**

*When we are not troubled by doubts about our standing with God, what do we experience (v21)?*

Assurance of our standing before God results in us experiencing confidence in our relationship with God.

*What does it look like in practice to experience confidence before God?*

Confidence before God results in several things. Firstly, our heart is at rest and we enjoy God's peace in our life knowing that we are right with Him (Rom 5:1, Phil 4:5-7). Secondly, we have confidence to approach God with openness and boldness, and enjoy fellowship with Him, like a child approaching a loving father (Eph 3:11-12, Heb 4:14-16). Our confidence before God should result in our relationship with Him growing deeper and stronger. *Does your confidence lead to this? Discuss.*

*According to v22, what else can we be confident about when we approach God?*

We can be confident that when we ask something of God, He not only hears us, but will also answer us! "Whatever we ask, we receive from Him." Prayer is not just wishful thinking – God hears and answers.

*What is the confidence of answered prayer based on, according to v22?*

We can be confident of answered prayer when we keep His commandments and do the things pleasing in His sight. This doesn't mean that what we receive from God depends on how much we obey Him - He is far more gracious than that! (Matt 5:44-45, James 1:17). But answered prayer springs from a fruitful and intimate relationship with God, where we walk with Him and seek His glory, not our own.

*Does this mean that God will always give us exactly what we ask for? Why / why not?*

No. This is because of God's will. We can be assured that God hears us, but as 1 John 5:14-15 says, God's answer is subject to His will. Jesus is our supreme example – He pleased His Father in everything, and when He asked that He might be spared the cross, He also said "not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:41-42). Note: If we are doing the things that are pleasing in His sight, this will mean living according to His will, and this will result in us being so in tune with the Spirit that our prayers are lined up with His will – as a result, "whatever we ask we receive from Him".

*Under what circumstances can we be confident that God will **not** give us whatever we ask?*

We can have confidence of receiving nothing from God when (1) we hold sin in our heart and don't keep His commandments (Psa 66:18), and (2) when we ask according to our will, and not His (1 John 5:14).

*In order to please the Father, what is the most fundamental command to all human beings? (v23)*

The first and foremost command to every person is to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 6:28-29). No matter how much we obey the commandments of God, we cannot please God unless we believe in Jesus. Without Jesus, everything else will be in vain (John 3:36).

*What is the other fundamental commandment we must keep in order to please God? (v23)*

We must love one another, as Jesus commanded us (John 13:34-35). To not love is to not obey Christ.

### **Abiding in Him**

*What is the outcome of keeping the Lord's commandments? (v24)*

Those who keep His commandments (ie in v23) are those who abide (remain) in the Lord and He in them. This intimate and mutual relationship with God exists only when we believe in Jesus and are obedient to Him (John 14:23, 15:10). Read John 15:5 - discuss what it means to abide in the Lord.

*How has God confirmed that He abides in us? (v24)*

We know God abides in us because He has given His Spirit to live within us (1 Cor 3:16, Eph 1:13-14). The evidence of the Spirit living in us (ie, believing in Jesus, loving one another, obeying Christ's commands, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit – Gal 5:22-23) should therefore set our heart at rest when our heart tries to condemn us.

**Summary: When we abide in God and He in us, we can be confident of our standing before Him.**

## 21. Testing The Spirits: 1 John 4:1-3

**Aim:** To help Christians distinguish between true and false prophets/teachers.

**Revision:** *What blessing do we enjoy when we have true assurance? (1 John 3:21-24)* We have confidence to approach God in prayer, knowing that He hears us and answers us according to His will.

*What is our confidence based on in regard to God answering our prayers? (v22)* It's based on us keeping God's commands and living a life that pleases Him; for when we live like that, we are in tune with His Spirit, and therefore what we request in prayer will be in line with His will.

*What are the two greatest commands according to verse 23 of 1 John?* They are to believe in Jesus and love each other. Such a person who does this abides (remains) in Him, and He in them.

**Read 1 John 4:1-6** In the next studies we will look at the third test for genuine Christianity – the belief test.

### **Test the spirits (4:1-3)**

*Who does John warn us about? (1 John 4:1b)*

He warns us of false prophets who have gone out into the world. Jesus warned us of them (eg, Matt 7:15). Peter warned us of them (eg, 2 Peter 2:1). The warning needs to be heeded today; even in Christ's church.

*What makes a person a false prophet? (1 John 4:1; 1 Tim 4:1-2)*

They are led by deceitful spirits or demons. Consider 2 Chron 18:4-7, 14-22. Micaiah was the only true prophet, and the other prophets were false ones being led by an evil spirit. They may appear to speak for God, but they do not speak through God's Spirit. They speak through evil spirits, under Satan's control.

*Because there are evil spirits, as well as God's Spirit, what are we instructed to do? (v1)*

We are instructed to test the spirits; that is, we are to test which spirit a prophet or teacher has. Either he is a true prophet speaking under the leadership of God's Spirit, or he is under the leadership of evil spirits. John simply warns us not to believe every spirit (ie, every prophet or teacher), but to test them.

*How easy is it to be fooled by false prophets? Discuss.*

It's easier than we think. Jesus speaks of powerful deceptions in Mark 13:21-22. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:13-14). We can often be gullible and too quick to accept everyone and everything, and end up believing something that is not of God. Therefore, test the spirits.

*How are we to test the spirits; ie, how do we distinguish between God's Spirit and evil spirits? (v2)*

We can test which spirit is controlling a prophet (or person) by finding out what they believe about Jesus. This is the essential test, as well as looking at the spiritual fruit they bear (Matt 7:15-20). First and foremost, God's Spirit causes a person to confess or declare that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh".

*What does it mean when we declare that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh"?*

1. It means the man Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ; ie, the One whom God promised to send to deliver us from our sins and to bring us back to God. Jesus is not just a prophet or teacher. He is the Saviour.
2. It means that the man Jesus existed before He was born, for He **came** into the world; unlike us. John's Gospel repeatedly tells us that Jesus came from above (John 8:23); He was sent from the Father (John 5:36-37). This is because Jesus already existed. He had no beginning. He is eternal (Micah 5:2).
3. It means that the Christ, who is the Son of God and God Himself (John 1:1), took on human flesh. One of the greatest of all events was when God became a man (cf. Phil 2:5-7).

*Who is able to confess these glorious truths about Jesus? (cf. Luke 2:25-32) Why?*

Only those who have God's Spirit dwelling in them can declare these truths about Jesus, for it is the Holy Spirit who reveals the Christ. Jesus taught that the Spirit's ministry would be to testify and glorify Him (John 15:26; 16:13-14). Without the Holy Spirit, our minds are blinded to Christ's glory (2 Cor 4:4).

*What conclusion are we to draw about the spirit in a person who does not confess Jesus? (v3)*

Their spirit is not God's Spirit, and therefore they are not a genuine believer. It doesn't matter what claims such a person makes, what signs and wonders they perform, or how charming and influential they are. If they do not correctly testify about Jesus, then they are not of God.

*What does John say about prophets or teachers who have a false spirit within them? (v3)*

They have the same spirit who will be in the anti-Christ; the one who will arise at the end of the age to oppose God and to lead the world astray (2 Thess 2:3-4). He is still coming, but his spirit is already at work (2 Thess 2:7), through false prophets and teachers. John calls them anti-Christ (see 1 John 2:18). They all have the same spirit, which is of Satan, and they seek to oppose Christ.

**Summary: Test the spirit in a prophet/teacher, by finding out what they believe about Jesus.**

## 22. The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error: 1 John 4:4-6

**Aim:** To help us to distinguish between the spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit) and the spirit of error.

**Revision:** *There are true and false prophets/teachers. What are we encouraged to do? (1 John 4:1)*

We are to test the spirits to see if it is God's Spirit or another spirit that is directing a prophet/teacher?

*How can we tell whether a person is speaking according to God's Spirit, or another spirit? (v2)*

We are to examine what they believe about Jesus. Those who have God's Spirit confess that Jesus is the Christ and that He came in the flesh. *[discuss what this means]*

### **Encouragement for genuine Christians (4:4)**

*Addressing genuine Christians, what encouraging truths does John give in v4?*

True believers are from God (or "are of God"), and have overcome "them" (ie, false teachers/prophets).

*What does John mean when he says that Christians "are from God"? (v4)*

This phrase is probably best translated "are of God", or "belong to God". By His Spirit, God has put His seal of ownership on us (2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14); we belong to Him (1 Cor 3:23; 1 Cor 6:19-20).

Note: It's also true that we "are from God", in the sense that our spiritual life comes from Him. There is nothing we have that does not come from Him (1 Cor 4:7; 1 Cor 6:19-20); except our sinful nature.

*What does John mean by the phrase "and have overcome them"? (v4; cf. also Matt 24:24)*

Christians have (and are able to) overcome false prophets/teachers who are led by wrong spirits (vv1-3). Though they seek to overcome us with their false teaching, and their deceptions, we have overcome them.

*Why have we been able to overcome them? (v4)*

The reason for our victory is not because of our intellect or ability, but because of who is in us. The one in the world, Satan, is powerful, and through his servants, he seeks to turn us away from the truth. But the One in us is far greater. By His Spirit He leads us into truth (John 16:13), and exposes lies so that we are not deceived. Left to ourselves, we are no match for Satan; but Satan is no match for God.

*What part can we play in overcoming the lies of Satan and his helpers? (Eph 6:10-18)*

We are to trust in the Lord, and put on the armour He has provided. This includes using the sword of the Spirit, or the Bible. However, we can't use it effectively if we don't read it. Do you? Daily? Consider how Jesus used the Scriptures to counter Satan's lies and distortions (Matt 4:3-10).

### **Who do we listen to? (4:5-6)**

*In contrast to us being from (of) God, what does John say about false prophets/teachers? (v5),*

False prophets/teachers are from the world (or "of the world"). They are not from (or of) God.

*What does it mean to be from (or of) the world?*

The "world", here, does not stand for God's wonderful creation, but fallen humanity. The "world" is opposed to God, and is ruled by the prince of this world, Satan (Eph 2:2). So when it says that false prophets/teachers are from (or of) this world, it means that they are of Satan, and under his power.

*What does it mean that they "speak as from the world"? (v5)*

They deny and suppress the truth God has revealed to us, and declare the philosophies of men (Col 2:8), and the doctrine of demons (1 Tim 4:1); things of the world. Even in the way they speak, they are worldly.

*How do people of the world respond to false prophets/teachers? (v5)*

They listen to and accept their teaching; it is what they want to hear (2 Tim 4:3). Consider teaching on evolution, good works, humanism, etc. The world heartily accepts this, and believes the lies.

*In contrast, who listens to those true prophets/teachers of God? (v6; cf. also John 18:37) Why?*

Those who listen to (and receive) them are those who know God (ie, they know God personally through faith in Jesus). This is because the Holy Spirit within them confirms that their teaching is of God. Those who are not of God (ie, those in the world) do not listen. Indeed, they consider it all folly (1 Cor 1:18).

*At the end of verse 6, how is the Holy Spirit distinguished from other spirits?*

The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth" (cf. John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), for He always teaches us the truth. The other spirits are called "the spirit of error", for they teach us lies and errors.

*What is another test that we can use to distinguish between true and false prophets/teachers? (v6)*

God's people will listen to and receive the teaching of a true prophet/teacher, whereas the world won't.

**Summary:** **There are two ways to distinguish between those with the spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit) and the spirit of error (evil spirits). Those of God's Spirit will declare that Jesus is the Christ who has come in flesh, and God's people will listen to them and receive their message.**

## 23. Love One Another: 1 John 4:7-11

**Aim:** To help us to love another with the same kind of love that God loves us with.

**Revision:** *If we are a genuine Christian, what can we be encouraged with? (1 John 4:4)* We can be encouraged to know that we are of God, and because of who lives in us, we can overcome the world.

NB: 1 John 4:1-6 is about having a right belief in Christ. It is an expansion of the first command (belief in Jesus) in 1 John 3:23. The second command in v23 (loving one another) is expanded on in this next section: 1 John 4:7-12. This is the third mention of this test for genuine Christianity (cf. 1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18). It is the greatest and most searching test of all to verify if we are a Christian or not.

### **We should love because God is love (4:7-8)**

*How does John begin this next section in his letter? What is he doing? (v7)*

John calls fellow Christians "beloved" or "dear children". He is about to exhort them to love one another, and so he sets the example by expressing his love for them. Do we practice what we preach?

*Besides it being a command, why should we love one another? (v7-8)*

The main reason why we ought to love one another is because God is love (v8), and since God lives in us (v4), then we should love. Also, love is from God, and since God's love has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), we should love. NB: God's love is very different to the love in this world. *[discuss]*

*In v7 what two things are evident when we love one another?*

It is evident that we have been born of God (by His Spirit) and that we know God (personally as our Father). These two phrases are synonymous, as all those born of God, truly know God.

*For those who do not love, what does John declare in v8?*

The person who does not love does not know God (personally). It doesn't matter how correct our doctrine is, or how regular our church attendance is. If we don't love, we're not a true Christian (born of God).

*At the end of v8, we have a great declaration about God. What is it, and how should we take it?*

God is love; in his very essence and nature. But He's isn't just love (cf. Exod 34:6-7). He is also truthful, faithful, righteous, just, and sovereign. Indeed, He is holy (there is none like Him). But one of His crowning characteristics is love; and especially love that is characterised by grace and compassion.

### **We should love because God loved us (4:9-11)**

*How has God especially manifested (revealed) His love for us? (vv9-10)*

God has revealed His love for us by sending His Son into the world, and by sending Him to the cross to atone for our sins. This has eclipsed all other acts of His love.

*Consider God's love in sending His Son to us. What makes His love so great?*

1. He sent His only begotten Son (ie, His one and only Son) - not an angel, not a prophet, nor just an adopted son (as we are in Christ - Eph 1:5). He gave His precious Son (John 3:16). What love!
2. He sent Jesus to us, though we did not love God (v10). We had become His enemies through sin (Rom 5:10). He sent Jesus, though we would reject Him (John 1:10-11; Isa 53:3). What love!
3. He sent Jesus to the cross to bear our sins (Isa 53:5-6). God punished His own Son for our sins, so that He could provide a means of rescuing us from eternal punishment. What love!

*In some of the older or more literal translations, v10 has a very special word to describe what Jesus did for us on the cross. It's the word "propitiation". What does it mean?*

It means that Jesus' death on the cross appeased or averted God's wrath from us. We need to appreciate that our sins had angered God. According to His justice, we should have suffered God's wrath. But in His love for us, God sent Jesus to bear our sins so that His wrath may be turned away from us. NB: Jesus didn't just die to give us an example of sacrifice, or to teach us the seriousness of sin, or to express to us how much He loves us. He died to atone for our sins and to turn aside God's wrath from us.

*Because of His love for us, what has God achieved for us in Christ? (vv9-10)*

Though we were once spiritually dead (Eph 2:1-3), God has given us life (v9b); abundant and eternal life (John 10:10). Our sins have also been atoned for so that we are no longer under God's wrath (Rom 8:1).

*In the light of God's great love for us, what application does John bring out in v11?*

If God so loved us, we ought to love one another. Consider: How can we receive God's love for us, and then choose not to give or show love to another? It is not right!

**Summary:** **We ought to love one another because God is love and we are born of God (vv7-8). We also ought to love one another in the light of how much God has loved us (v11).**

## 24. The Evidence of God Abiding In Us : 1 John 4:12-15

**Aim:** To help us know if we abide in God, and if God abides in us.

**Revision:** *Why should we love one another? (1 John 4:7-8, 11)* We should love one another because God is love and we are born of God, and also because of how much God loves us.

*How has God manifested (revealed) His love to us?* God sent His one and only Son into our world, and sent Him to the cross to be the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins. What love!

### **The evidence - loving one another (v12-13)**

*John begins v12 by declaring that no-one has ever seen God. [Discuss]*

No-one has ever seen God the Father at any time (1 Tim 1:17, 6:13-16; John 1:18). Some have seen Him in a vision (Isa 6:1-3), and others have seen Him in part (Exod 33:18-23). But we cannot see Him fully, lest we die, because of how He is holy and how we are presently imperfect (sinners). But one day we will see the Father in heaven, if we are in Christ, because we will be made perfect (1 Cor 15:51-52).

*Although we cannot see God, what is clearly implied in v12?*

When we (Christians) love one another with God's love, it shows that God abides (dwells) in us, and that, in effect, results in the invisible God being seen in us. Just as Jesus could say "he who has seen Me, has seen the Father" (John 14:7-9), so when we love one another with God's love, the Father is seen in us.

*Does God abide in us when we love, or is it that we love, when God abides in us? Which way is it?* It's the latter; love is the evidence that God truly abides (dwells) in us. We can only love when God lives in us. Love is the fruit we bear when God dwells within (Gal 5:22).

*When we love one another, "His love is perfected in us" (v12). What does this mean?*

It means "God's love as an attribute" is perfected in us. God has poured his love into our hearts (Rom 5:5), and this love we have from God is perfected (made complete) when we use it by loving others.

*After John mentions in v12 "God abides in us", what does John also say about "abiding" in v13?*

Not only does God abide in us, but we abide in Him. This is highlighted in John's Gospel. If we love Jesus, then the Father and the Son abide in us (John 14:23), but we also abide in Him (John 15:1-6).

*The word "abide" occurs more than 25 times in 1 John, and climaxes in 4:16. Why is it such an important theme?*

Only those who abide in God, and God in them, are genuine believers who will be saved and have eternal life. We must make sure that we abide (dwell) in God, and He is us.

*How can we know if God is abiding in us, and we in God? (v13b)*

John tells us that it is by the Holy Spirit being in us. When we become a Christian we receive the Holy Spirit (John 16:5-7; 14:16-18; Acts 2:38-39); we are baptised in the Spirit by Jesus himself (Luke 3:16).

*How do we know that we have the Spirit? (Romans 8:12-16)*

In the context of 1 John 4, we will love one another, for God is love, and love is the fruit of the Spirit. Also, according to Romans 8:12-16, the Spirit will bear witness with our spirit that we are God's children (Rom 8:16), and this will be seen in the way we cry out to our Father, for we have an intimate and personal relationship with Him in Christ (Rom 8:15). We will also be workers of righteousness, due to the Spirit's leading (Rom 8:13-14).

### **The evidence – right doctrine (v14-15)**

*How else can we tell that God dwells in us? (vv14-15)*

We will have a right understanding concerning what God has done for us, and who the Lord Jesus is. These truths are what Jesus and the apostles taught us, and all those who abide in God, and He in them, confess (agree and acknowledge) these truths; all because of the Spirit of truth (4:6) living in them.

*In a nutshell, what has God done for us, and who is the Lord Jesus?*

1) God sent His Son into the world. Though Jesus was fully human, He came from God. Jesus constantly taught this to His disciples and the crowds about Him (John 8:42; 10:36).

2) God sent Him to be our Saviour. This is why He came into the world (John 3:16-17). He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

3) Jesus is God's Son; He is God's one and only Son, who is exactly like the Father (John 14:9; Heb 1:3)

*Does God abide in you, and do you abide in God? How are we to tell?*

The Spirit will enable us to love one another, and to believe the truth concerning what God has done for us.

**Summary: Only those who abide in God, and He in them, are genuine Christians.**



## **25. God's Love For Us & Perfecting Love In Us: 1 John 4:16-18**

**Aim:** To help us grasp God's love for us, and to consider the blessing of perfecting our love for others.

**Revision:** *A genuine Christian is one who abides in God, and God abides in him. How is this possible? (v13)* It is made possible by the Holy Spirit living in us.

*How do we know if we have the Spirit? (v12, 14-15)* We will love one another and have a right belief about what God has done for us, and who the Lord Jesus is.

### **Knowing love and living out love (v16)**

*What have genuine Christians come to know and believe? (v16a)*

We have come to know (personally and experientially) and believe (accept) God's love for us. In spite of how we were God's enemies, and in spite of how people may not love us, we know that God loves us.

*What is the primary basis for us knowing and believing God's love for us?*

This is primarily because of what the Bible declares in regard to what God has done for us through His Son (John 3:16; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5; 2 Thess 2:16; Tit 3:4-5; 1 John 4:10).

*What should be happening in regard to our understanding of God's (Christ's) love? (Eph 3:14-19)*

We should be seeking to comprehend it more and more (though we will never plumb the depths of it).

*Because of how God has loved us, what declaration does John make about who God is? (v16)*

God is love! In His very nature, He is love, as well as just and righteous, powerful and holy. (cf. also v8)

*On the basis that God has loved us, and is love, what does John reiterate in 16b?*

If we are a genuine Christian in whom God lives, and we live in God, then we will abide (live) in love; ie, loving God and loving others will naturally happen because of how the One living in us is love.

*What conclusion can we draw from v16?*

We can tell if God abides in us by seeing if we know and believe God's love for us, and if we live out love. Being a Christian is both about knowing love and living out love. It's about a head and heart change.

### **Perfecting love (vv17-18)**

*How is love perfected (made complete) with us? (v17)*

Love is perfected when we abide (live) in love (v16), and when we live like God (in love) in this world (v17b). NB: God's gift of love (Rom 5:5) is perfect, but what needs to be perfected is the way we live it out.

*What is the result of perfecting God's gift of love in us? (v17)*

It will give us confidence to know that we will not be condemned on the Day of Judgment for our sins, and be cast into the lake of fire; the place of eternal punishment (Rev 20:11-15).

*Why is this?*

This is because living in love is the evidence that we are in God (in Christ), and such ones will be spared judgment (Rom 8:1). In Jesus' parable in Matt 25:31-46, note how the sheep (Christians) perfected their love by doing deeds of love. But the goats didn't. As Jesus makes clear, only the sheep will enter heaven.

*What fear is John referring to in v18?*

He is specifically referring to the fear of punishment due to the sins we have done against God.

*Do you sometimes fear that God might judge and condemn you for your sins? [Discuss]*

Christians can suffer with such a fear. Great men and women of God have testified to the fear of punishment gripping them at different times. Even in Pilgrim's Progress, Bunyan expresses this reality.

*What are we to do when the fear of punishment grips us? (v18)*

We are to cast out (drive out) such fear by "perfect love". Such love banishes fear.

*What does it practically mean to drive out fear with "perfect love"? (vv16-18)*

There are two elements to this, when we consider the context of this verse.

1. When we perfect love by living it out, it shows that God abides in us and that we are born of God, since He is love. This then assures us that we are a true Christian, and will be saved on the day of judgment.
2. Also, if we are a Christian, then we know that God so loved us that He punished our sins in Jesus so that we stand forgiven. His strong and perfect love for us assures us that we will not be condemned (Rom 8:31-39), even though we still fail Him from time to time (cf. John 10:27-30).

*According to v18b, what does the fear of punishment in a Christian indicate?*

It shows that they are not "perfected in love"; ie, they are not confident that God's love for them will ensure that they are saved, and/or they are not sure that their life shows that they have been born of God.

**Summary:** **God wants His children to be sure that they will not be punished, by perfecting love.**

## **26. Loving God Means We Will Love Fellow Believers: 1 John 4:19-21**

**Aim:** To help us know that if we say we love God, then we will also love one another.

**Revision:** *What should every Christian know and believe in? (v16a) We should know and trust in how much God loves us; especially when we consider what God has done for us through Jesus (vv9-10).*

*When we live in love (make perfect our love for others) what does it result in? (vv17-18) It results in us being sure that we are a Christian, and that we will not be condemned on the day of judgment.*

### **We love because God first loved us (v.19)**

*John instructed us to love one another in vv.7-12. According to v.19, why can we love?*

We can love (that is, with God's kind of love), because God first loved us.

*Some may argue that we can love others regardless of God. How would we respond to this?*

We can love to some degree (as we were originally made in God's image – Gen 1:26). However, due to the "Fall" (Gen 3), God's image was seriously damaged, and we are no longer able to love like God – sacrificially/unconditionally. But because God loved us, it is now possible for us to love like God again.

*How has God's love for us enabled us to love like Him? Explain!*

God so loved us that He gave us His only Son, and in His love, He offered up His Son on the cross for our sins, so that we could be reconciled to God. As a result, when we believe in Jesus and are reconciled to God, we are born again by God's Spirit, and we are enabled to love like God through His Spirit (see Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22). Thus, we are enabled to love again (with God's love) because He first loved us.

*V.19 stresses that God "first" loved us. What should this remind us of?*

We did not love God first, but He loved us first. Nor did God love us in response to our love for Him. Indeed, the Bible says that we did not love Him (v.10). We were His enemies (Rom 5:10), and in rebellion to Him. But God first loved us, and sent His Son to save us. Discuss Rom 5:8-10; Eph 2:1-5.

*Consider your own coming to faith in the Lord Jesus. Who loved who first?*

God has loved us and saved us, not because He saw in our hearts that we had love for Him. It was the opposite; while we were still in our sin and rebellion, God chose in His love and grace, to help us hear the Gospel, and to respond to His grace. It was He who drew us to Christ (John 6:44). What love!

### **An impossibility – loving God and hating a fellow believer (vv. 20-21)**

*Many claim that they love God. What test can we apply to verify this? (v.20)*

The test is this: if we hate another believer, then we do not love God. We may sing songs of praise to God and tell others how much we love Him, but if we hate another believer, then we do not love God.

*In what ways can we be guilty of "hating" a fellow believer? [discuss]*

We can "hate" another by being bitter toward them, or resentful, or even unforgiving. Note that in v20, "hate" is synonymous to "not loving". Therefore, to simply not love a fellow believer is to hate them.

*Why will a person who loves God also love fellow believers?*

If we truly love God (and therefore know God), then we will have been born again, and we will love (not hate). Consider also: How can we hate a fellow believer whom God so loves, and whom Christ died for? NB: Believers will hurt us. But even so, through the Spirit we are able to love and forgive. [discuss]

*At the end of v.20 what argument does John give in relation to loving God and loving others?*

John argues that it does not make sense if we claim we love the invisible God and yet we do not love fellow believers whom we can see. This is because our heart should go out to those we see. We should have compassion for each other as we struggle in this world of sin and seek to follow Jesus.

*Three times John uses the expression "is a liar". Look up the following verses. What do we learn?*

1 John 2:4 One is a liar if they claim to know God and do not keep His commandments.

1 John 2:22 One is a liar if they claim to be a Christian but deny that Jesus is the Christ (Saviour).

1 John 4:20 One is a liar if they claim to love God and do not love other believers.

Each time, John applies one of his three tests for genuine Christianity; a Christian is one who shows that they are born of God by the way they keep God's commands, have a right belief in Jesus, and love fellow believers. Do you pass the test for genuine Christianity? Is there the evidence of the re-birth?

*In v21, John declares a command that should constantly ring in our ears. Why? What is it?*

We should love fellow believers as He loved us, for Jesus commanded us to (John 13:34-35). Do we?

**Summary:** All those who truly love God will love fellow believers, just as Jesus commanded us.

## 27. The Evidence That We Are Born of God: 1 John 5:1-5

**Aim:** To help affirm if we are truly born of God.

**Revision:** *Why do we, and why can we, love one another?* Because God first loved us (v19). God took the initiative to love us by sending Jesus to save us, and now enables us to love others in His way.

*How serious is it not to love a fellow believer? What does it reveal about our relationship with God?* If we do not love a brother in whom God abides, it shows that we do not truly love God.

### **The evidence of being born of God (vv1-3a)**

*What is the evidence that we are born of God and are a true child of God? (v1)*

We believe that Jesus is the Christ – that is, we believe in who Jesus is and what He has done for us (1 Jn 4:10, 4:14). This is something that those who had left the church denied (1 John 2:22-23).

*What does this imply about followers of religions who do not trust in Jesus?*

Those who follow other religions are not true children of God and do not know God (1 John 5:11-12).

*What does it mean to believe that Jesus is the "Christ"? (v1)*

Christ is not a surname. It's a title. Christ means Messiah or Anointed One. The Christ is the King whom God promised to send to rule over His people and to save them from their enemies (our biggest enemy being sin!). God also revealed that this promised one would be divine (Isa 9:6, Micah 5:2).

*If we are born of God, what should be a natural outworking of our love for God? (v1)*

We should automatically love others who are born of God, because we are all part of the same family. John draws an analogy from life. If we love our parents, we should love the children who bear their image and whom our parents love. It is the same with God - we should love those who bear His image and who He loves and abides in. *How should this affect the way you view fellow Christians? [discuss]*

*According to v2, how do we know that we truly love the children of God?*

By loving God and obeying His commandments! It sounds like John is going around in a circle, but it is impossible to love everyone the way God calls us to, unless God stands first in our life. The surest way to fail in our love for others is to come up short in our love for God (Eph 4:32-5:2). Also, as we obey God's commands we will automatically love others, for His commands direct us to (Matt 22:35-40).

*How do we practically express our love for God according to v3?*

One way we show our love for God is by keeping His commandments (John 14:15), and one of His chief commandments is to love one another (John 13:34-35). *How seriously does God view our lack of love towards a fellow believer? [discuss] How serious should it be to us? [discuss]*

### **Keeping God's commands (vv3b-5)**

*Should God's commandments feel like a heavy burden weighing us down? (v3)*

While no-one can keep God's commandments perfectly, His commands should not be burdensome or oppressive for the person who is born of God. Remember, He is a loving God whose commands are designed to help us to enjoy Him and His world; not to make life miserable (Rom 12:2). The rules of the Pharisees were a burden to keep, but Jesus says His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt 11:28-30).

*God's commands are good, but why else are they not burdensome for Christians to keep (v4)?*

Firstly, if we love God, then we will love to please Him by obeying Him; not begrudgingly, but willingly. Secondly, if we have been born of God, His commandments are not burdensome to keep because we have overcome the world and have the power to resist its ungodly lusts. In our natural state, we are slaves to our sinful desires, and it is impossible for us to please God (Rom 8:6-8), making His commands burdensome. But when we are born of God, we are released from our bondage to sin and God's Spirit works in and through us to live a life pleasing to God (Phil 2:13, Heb 13:20-21).

*Do you find God's commandments an onerous burden? Do you find them impossible to keep (eg to love a brother or sister)? Does this concern you in the light of v4? [discuss]*

*Where does our victory over the (fallen) world with its desires and lusts stem from? (vv4-5)*

We overcome the world not by our own efforts of self-control or right thinking or psychology – but through our faith. And not "faith" in just anything – but in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Through faith in Jesus, we are released from slavery to sin. It can still be a battle at times (Rom 7:22-25), but we can overcome the lusts of the world, because we now have access to Christ's victory (Col 2:13-15, 1 Jn 4:14).

**Summary: Obeying God and loving one another is not burdensome if we are truly born of God.**

## **28. The Object of our Faith & God's Testimony to Him: 1 John 5:5-9**

**Aim:** To affirm the truth about Jesus and to give us confidence in believing the truth.

**Revision:** *According to 5:1-2, what is the evidence that we are truly born of God?* We believe that Jesus is the Christ, we love other believers and we love God and keep His commandments.

*Why are God's commands not a burden to the believer?* We not only want to please God, but are now able to obey Him because we have the power to overcome sin through faith in Jesus Christ.

This study covers one of the most difficult sections to interpret in 1 John (5:6-9), because of the uncertainty of some of the phrases. But the overall meaning is reasonably clear. **Read 1 John 5:1-12.**

### **The truth about Jesus (v5-6)**

*According to v5, what essential truth must we believe about Jesus? What does this mean?*

We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God. "Son of God" is primarily a title expressing the divinity and authority of Jesus (Heb 1:1-4). Some Roman Emperors claimed to be a son of god in Jesus' day, but God affirms that Jesus is His true and only Son (Rom 1:3-4).

*What other truth does John affirm about Jesus in v6?*

Jesus is the One who came with water and with blood.

*What does John mean when he says that Jesus "came with water"?*

Although it is difficult to know precisely, "water" probably refers to the baptism of Jesus. This was an important event marking the beginning of His earthly ministry - the Father declared Jesus to be His Son, the Spirit was given, and then Jesus began calling people to repentance (Matt 3:13-17, 4:17). Although Jesus never sinned, He identified Himself with those He came to save by receiving the baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4-5). The term "water" may also refer to Jesus' own ministry of baptism (John 3:26).

*The problem in John's church doesn't seem to be Jesus coming with water, but coming with blood, because this is what John has to stress. What do you think Jesus came with blood means? (v6)*

This must refer to Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins (1 John 1:7, Rom 5:9, Eph 1:7). Jesus' death is, in one sense, the completion and culmination of His earthy ministry (John 19:30). The false teachers in John's day appear to be downplaying the importance of Jesus' death, but it is essential to Jesus' work and a non-negotiable of our faith – we cannot know God apart from Jesus' death for our sins.

*According to v6, who is it that testifies to these truths about Jesus (Son of God, water & blood)?*

John affirms that the Holy Spirit testifies that Jesus is the One, and we can trust the Spirit because He is the Spirit of truth. How has the Spirit testified? *Discuss:* John 1:32-34; 15:26; 1 John 2:27.

### **Our confidence in the truth about Jesus (v7-9)**

**Read vv7-8. Note:** A longer version of vv7-8 crept into copies of the Bible over time: *"For there are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."* But all Greek manuscripts before 1000AD only have the shorter version of vv7-8 now adopted by most modern translations.

*According to vv7-8, how confident can we be that Jesus is the Son of God? (vv7-8)*

We can be absolutely confident that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins. John assures us that there is no guesswork involved, and points to three witnesses, who all bear testimony to Jesus: (1) God's Spirit, (2) the "water" (Jesus' baptism and the events surrounding it); and (3) the blood (His death), which was prophesied in the OT and declared by Jesus – cf Isa 53:5, Mark 8:31, Luke 24:44-47.

*What is the significance of the three testimonies being in agreement?*

Under the OT law, two or three witnesses were required to affirm a matter (Deut 19:15). John quotes three witnesses, affirming that we can trust the reliability of their testimony about Jesus.

*According to v9, why are the three testimonies in agreement?*

The three agree because God is behind them all. God has testified concerning His Son Jesus, and has left us witnesses to the truth so that we can be confident in our faith. *Do you share this confidence? [discuss]*

*What is John's point about the testimony of men and of God in v9?*

If we accept the testimony of men in everyday matters, how much more should we accept the testimony of God, who is far greater and absolutely trustworthy. God has not only testified that Jesus is the One we are to believe in and follow through the prophets and the apostles and the Spirit, but He has also testified directly from heaven itself! (Mark 1:10-11, 9:7, John 12:28). *The question is, are we listening?*

**Summary:** **Have confidence - Jesus is God's Son who died for us & God has testified to Him.**

## **29. Christian Assurance – He who Has the Son Has Life: 1 John 5:10-13**

**Aim:** To help the genuine Christian have assurance that they have eternal life.

**Revision:** *In 1 John 5:6, what does it mean that Jesus "came with (by) water and blood"? It probably refers to how Jesus began His earthly ministry by being baptised in water, and He concluded it by shedding His blood on the cross in order to atone for our sins.*

*In v9, what does the phrase "the testimony of God" refer to?*

The "testimony of God" refers specifically to what God has declared about Jesus. Jesus is God's one and only Son (v9), and He is the Saviour of the world (vv10,14)

**Read 1 John 5:1-13.**

### **The testimony of God (v10)**

*In v10a, what does it say about all those who believe in Jesus?*

All those who believe in Jesus have the testimony of God within themselves. They agree and accept God's testimony concerning Jesus – that He is God's Son and that He is our Saviour from sin.

Discuss: Since we have the testimony of Jesus within us, do we testify about Jesus to others?

*What does John say about those who do not believe in Jesus? Why does he say this? (v10)*

A person who does not believe in Jesus makes God out to be a liar. This is because God has declared to us who Jesus is, and if we don't accept this, then we are basically saying to God "I don't believe You".

Discuss: A non-Christian will be judged for breaking God's law, but he will also be judged for making God out to be a liar, for he did not accept God's testimony concerning His Son – what a serious thing.

### **Eternal life in the Son (vv11-13)**

*Read vv11-12. In this section, John gives us an excellent summary of God's testimony concerning Jesus. What does this summary particularly emphasise?*

It does not so much emphasise who Jesus is, but what Jesus is able to give to us, if we believe in Him.

*V11 tells us that God has given us eternal life. What is your view of eternal life? (cf John 17:3)*

Eternal life is not so much about living forever and ever, but it's about knowing God intimately. In actual fact, all will live forever; but some will be in heaven and the new creation, while others in hell. Eternal life is knowing God in this life, and then spending eternity in fellowship with God in the next.

*Consider the phrase "God has given us eternal life". What do we learn from this? (cf Rom 6:23)*

God has given us eternal life as a gift. It is not something we have earned or deserved. Indeed, by our sinful actions against God, we don't deserve it. We have done everything to forfeit it. We deserve hell. But by His great grace toward us, God has granted eternal life to us as a gift (Eph 2:8-9).

*What essential truth must we understand concerning the gift of eternal life? (v11)*

This greatest gift of all is only to be found in Jesus, God's Son (John 10:10; 11:25; 14:6). He alone is the giver of eternal life (cf John 4:10, 13-14 – living water is synonymous with eternal life).

*Why is eternal life only to be found in Jesus?*

This is all because of who He is and what He did for us. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was raised to life so that we could be forgiven and be made right with God. As a result, we can know God through Jesus, and live with Him both now and forever – by definition, that is eternal life (see John 17:3).

*Eternal life is only found in Jesus, but how do we obtain it? (v12)*

We obtain it by "having the Son". Normally, the emphasis in the Bible is to believe in Jesus (John 3:16). But the verb "to have" shows what it means to believe. To believe in Jesus is not just about acknowledging a few facts about Jesus. No! It's where we call out to Jesus to save us (Rom 10:13); ie, we take hold of Him. Unless we do, then we do not have the Son, and we do not have eternal life.

*According to v13, why has John written this letter?*

His letter was written to those who believe in Jesus so that they may know that they have eternal life; ie, to give them assurance. This is because in John's day the false teachers had caused a lot of trouble, and it had caused genuine Christians to doubt whether they were saved. We can have the same today [discuss]

*From what we have considered in 1 John thus far, how can we be sure that we have eternal life?*

If we "have the Son" then we have life (v12); and if we have the Son, then we will seek to obey the Lord, love others, and have a right belief about Jesus (ie, we'll agree with God's testimony concerning His Son).

Note: John's Gospel was written for evangelism (John 20:30-31); 1 John was written for assurance (v13).

**Summary:** **God wants us to have assurance about eternal life. It's in this: we must "have" Jesus.**

### 30. Christian Assurance - Confidence in Prayer: 1 John 5:14-17

**Aim:** To help us have confidence that God hears and answers our prayers.

**Revision:** *When we refuse to believe that Jesus is God's Son and our Saviour from sin, what are we accusing God to be? (v10)* When we refuse to believe in Jesus, we are calling God a liar, since He has testified that Jesus is His Son and our only Saviour.

*According to vv11-12, what has God testified about how we obtain eternal life?*

Firstly, eternal life is found only in His Son Jesus. If we "have" or "take hold" of Jesus, then we have life. Secondly, eternal life is something God gives – ie, it's a gift we receive; not something we earn.

**Read 1 John 5:13-17.**

#### **Our confidence in prayer (vv14-15)**

*What assurance does John speak of in v14 if we truly believe in Jesus?*

If we believe in Jesus, then not only do we have assurance that we have eternal life (v13), but we have assurance that God hears us when we pray to Him. We don't have to struggle for His attention – He inclines His ear to us and never misses a thing (Matt 6:7-8, 1 Pet 3:12). God wants us to confidently, not hesitantly, approach Him in prayer (Heb 4:14-16).

*What condition does John place on God "hearing" or "giving ear" to our prayers? (v14)*

We can be confident in prayer when what we ask is according to God's will. Prayer is not a device for imposing our will on God, or bending His will to ours. In prayer, we should be seeking God's will, embracing it and aligning ourselves to it. This is the way Jesus taught us to pray (Matt 6:9-10; 26:39).

*Does this mean there are some things we shouldn't ask God for? [discuss]*

God wants us to bring all of our needs and cares to Him (Matt 6:11; 1 Peter 5:7). However, we should not ask God for things we know are contrary to His will. And whatever we ask, we should always be content with whatever answers He gives, since His will is always good, pleasing and perfect (Rom 12:1-2).

*What does John mean by v15?*

If we know God hears us when we ask according to His will, we should be confident we will receive what we have asked for. God is certainly capable of supplying our requests (Psa 24:1, Phil 4:19, James 1:5-6).

*Given this assurance, why is prayer the last thing we often do when in need, rather than the first?*

#### **Our confidence in praying for one another (v16)**

*John now turns to a specific prayer request – praying for one another. If we see a Christian brother committing a sin that does not lead to death, what does John command us to do? (v16)*

John commands us to pray for such a brother, as it is God's will to answer our prayer and restore them.

*When you see a brother sinning, do you condemn & gossip, or pray out of concern for them? [discuss]*

*What does John mean by a 'sin that leads to death'? [discuss]*

In 1 John, "death" is in the context of "spiritual death" (eg, 1 John 3:14). The sin that leads to such a death is denying that Jesus is God's Son come in the flesh, and our Saviour from sin (2:2, 2:23, 4:2-3). To believe in Jesus is to have life (not death). The sin that leads to spiritual (eternal) death is unbelief.

*Some think John is suggesting that particular sins can cause us to lose our salvation? [discuss]*

John can't be referring to a sin which results in a true believer losing their salvation, because he knows the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, not just most sin (1 John 1:7, 1:9). A brother or true child of God will never commit the sin that leads to death – ie denying who Jesus is and what He has done.

*What assurance does John then give when we pray for a "brother" who sins? (v16)*

John assures us that God will give Him life. Since the "brother" already has eternal life, this probably means that God will not take away the benefits of it - forgiveness, fellowship and resurrection life.

*Is John discouraging us from praying for unbelievers; ie, those who commit sin unto death? (v16)*

John is not saying that we shouldn't pray for the lost – the Lord loves to reach the lost (Luke 19:10). The point is that when we pray for an unbeliever in sin there is no promise that they will repent and find life in Jesus. But for a believer, there is the promise that God will answer us and restore our brother in sin.

*In v17, John gives us another definition of sin. What is it, and why does he highlight this?*

Not only is sin lawlessness (1 John 3:4), but all unrighteousness is sin; that is, not living a righteous life in Christ for God's glory is sin. He declares this so that Christians don't ever think lightly of sin. We may not commit sin leading to spiritual death as others do through unbelief, but unrighteousness is still sin.

**Summary:** **When we believe in Jesus, we can be confident God hears and answers our prayers.**

### 31. Three Great Affirmations for a Christian: 1 John 5:18-20

**Aim:** To affirm three great truths that all true Christians should know.

**Summary:** In 1 John we have seen for the genuine Christian that assurance is based on three things - right belief in Christ, love for one another, and obedience to the Lord. We also are assured of three things (5:13-15): we have eternal life, God hears us, and God answers our prayers according to His will.

As we come near to the end of 1 John (5:18-20), John gives three final affirmations ("we know").

#### **We know that Christians do not continue in sin (v18)**

*What truth does John declare in v18 about those born of God?*

Those born of God (ie, genuine Christians) do not sin. As we have seen (3:4-10), this doesn't mean they never sin (1:8,10); rather, they do not make it their practice to sin (as the Greek verb for "sins" indicates).

*What is the reason why a genuine Christian doesn't continue in sin? (v18; 1 John 3:6,9)*

We do not continue in sin because God's seed (the Holy Spirit) enables us to overcome sin (Rom 8:13). Also, Jesus, the one born of God, keeps us from sin (1 John 5:18; John 17:12, 15; Jude 24 and 1 Pet 1:5).

Note: The KJV indicates that we keep ourselves, but this is not supported in most Greek manuscripts.

*A Christian "is born of God", whereas Jesus "was born of God". What's significant about this?*

The Lord Jesus and a Christian are brothers (Heb 2:11-12); we are both born of God. However, we are different. Jesus "was born of God" in the sense that He came forth from the Father and was revealed to us as the eternal Son of God. However, a Christian is one who "is born of God" through faith in Jesus.

*How does our Lord Jesus specifically help us from "continuing in sin"?*

Even though we have a new nature through being born of God, we still have our old sinful nature, and the two are at war with each other (Gal 5:17). But Jesus helps keep us from continuing in sin by protecting us from temptations we can't handle (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). Also, Jesus keeps us from the evil one touching us (ie, harming us). Consider Matt 6:13. Jesus taught us to depend on God's help to resist sin and the devil.

#### **We know that Christians are of God (v19)**

*In verse 19, what truth does John declare about a Christian?*

We know that a true Christian is of God, through faith in Christ, and the re-birth. We have been rescued from this fallen world (Gal 1:3-5), and from Satan's kingdom (Col 1:13), and now belong to God, forever.

*What state is the non-Christian in? (v19)*

Those who aren't Christians are part of this (fallen) world, which is "in" the evil one; ie, they are under the power and influence of the devil (Eph 2:1-3). Though they were made by God, they do not belong to God, but the devil. Indeed, whether a Satanist or not, they lie helplessly in his power, and are heading for hell.

*What conclusion can we draw from v19?*

There are only two types of people; those who are Christians and those who aren't. Christians are of God, and the rest are in the devil. Thus, we are either of God or the devil. We are either under the power and influence of the devil, or kept by Christ such that the devil can't touch (or harm) us (v18).

#### **We know that Christ came so that we might know God (v20)**

*At the start of v20, what great truth does John declare that all genuine Christians know?*

We know that the Son of God "has come"; that is, He left heaven and took on human flesh, and came into our world (Phil 2:6-7; John 1:14). This one is none other than the Lord Jesus; He is the Son of God.

*Why did Jesus come, according to v20?*

He came to give us understanding. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is often referred to as the light (John 1:9, 8:12). Our minds were darkened to spiritual truth, but Jesus came to enlighten our minds. In particular, He came to give us understanding in regard to how we may know God - intimately and personally.

*What understanding has Jesus given in regard to knowing God? How would you summarise it?*

He gave us understanding that because of our sins, we are not right with God and do not know God; but through faith in Jesus, we can be forgiven of our sins and be reconciled to God, and know God personally.

**Note:** Through Christ's redemptive work (ie, His sacrifice on the cross for our sins), and also by His revelatory work (ie, His work in bringing revelation and understanding to us all), we can know God. Jesus has brought both redemption and revelation, without which we would never have been able to know God.

**Summary:** All true Christians ought to affirm three great truths: we know that we do not continue in sin; we are of God; and Jesus came so that we might know God personally & intimately.

## 32. John's Final Words - Christ and Idols: 1 John 5:20-21

**Aim:** To help us know who Jesus truly is, and to be warned about idols.

**Revision:** *In 1 John 5:18-20, what three great truths should all true Christians know? We know that we do not continue in sin, that we are of God, and that Christ came so that we might know God.*

*What difference exists between a Christian and a non-Christian, based on vv18-20? Christ keeps us from continuing in sin, protects us from the devil, and we are of God. However, the non-Christian continues in sin, and is in the world, and under the power and influence of the devil.*

### **Christ is God (v20)**

*Jesus came so that we might know God the Father. How does John describe God? (v20)*

John describes God as being One "who is true". Although there were lots of false teachers and religions in John's day, in contrast, God is true (John 17:3). He is not a figment of our imagination, or a lie. God is real and genuine. He is the ultimate reality and from Him comes all things.

*The term "true" is also associated with Jesus (v20). Consider John 1:9, 6:32, & 15:1. Why is this?* Just as the Father is true and genuine, so is Jesus. He is not false; He is the true light (John 1:9), the true bread (John 6:32), and the true vine (John 15:1). Indeed, He is the truth (John 14:6).

*Not only does John say that we know the Father, but what is our position with the Son? (v20)*

We are "**in** Him" (cf John 14:20). One of Paul's favourite phrases was "in Christ". Constantly he describes how those who are in Christ are saved and truly blessed (cf. Rom 3:24, 6:11, 8:1, 39). Indeed, we are in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as emphasised when we are baptised (Matt 28:19).

*What profound truth does John declare at the end of v20?*

John declares "this is the true God and eternal life", with the "this" referring to our Lord Jesus. In spite of the many false teachers who categorically deny this, John affirms that not only is Jesus the Saviour, and the One who came and took on human flesh, but He is God (Isa 9:6; John 1:1; Col 2:9; Heb 1:3). He is not "a god", but the true God. Rightly did Thomas call Jesus "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Can you?

*Not only is Jesus called the "true God", but what else does John say about Him? Why? (v20)*

Jesus is "eternal life" (cf. 1 John 1:2). This is because He is life (John 11:25-26, 14:6), and the giver of eternal life (John 10:27-28; Rom 6:23). As we saw in 1 John 5:11-12, when we have the Son, we have life (eternal life). Indeed, eternal life is a person (Jesus), and a relationship with God through Jesus (John 17:3)

### **Beware of idols (v21)**

We come to the last verse of first John. There is no formal farewell (as Paul often does in his letters). Instead, this aged apostle ends with some familiar words, and one final command.

*What familiar words does John use to address his readers? What does this imply? (v21)*

John addresses them with the term: "little children". This phrase occurs seven times in John's letter. As the last of the apostles, he writes and speaks to them tenderly and lovingly, as a father does to his small children. May we express our love for each other by speaking tenderly and lovingly to one another.

*What final instruction does John give?*

John commands them to guard themselves from idols. We ought not to think of idols as some statue that is worshipped, but it includes anyone or anything we put ahead of God. We need to always be on guard for this, and to make sure Christ is the pre-eminent one in our life (Col 1:15-18). How thorough we must be, lest some idol subtly take its place in our heart, and we begin to worship it. [discuss]

*Why do you think John concludes this letter with this final command?*

John's letter, in many ways, is about distinguishing between that which is true and that which is false. Christ is true (v20), but every idol is false (1 Cor 8:4; 1 Thess 1:9). Therefore, John seeks to warn us about idols, as they will lead us to embrace falsehood, rather than for us to embrace the truth in Christ.

*How would you summarise the letter of 1 John?*

In the midst of falsehood and deception, John wrote this letter to reassure genuine believers that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). In the process, we have seen that a genuine Christian is one who:

**L** Loves fellow believers                      **O** Obeys God's commands                      **B** Believes rightly about Jesus

*What things have you learnt from 1 John? [discuss]*

**Summary:** **As part of having a right belief about Jesus, a genuine Christian believes that Jesus is the true God. In the light of this, we are to guard ourselves from idols, and only follow Jesus.**