

**The book of 1 John** focuses on the themes of love, fellowship, and living in the light of God, emphasizing the beneficial power of abiding in Christ to overcome sin and walk in truth. As preacher Charles Spurgeon beautifully summarized, "Christ Himself is the sum and substance of 1 John; in Him, the love of God is revealed, and through Him, fellowship with God is made possible."

Session 1: "**Walking in the Light**"- 1 John 1:1-2:2

**Focus:** The reality of Jesus, fellowship with God, and dealing with sin

**Purpose Statement:** To understand the foundation of our faith in the incarnate Christ and how confession leads to cleansing and fellowship

**READ:** [1 John 1:1-2:2](#)

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[The Word of Life- 1 John 1:1-4](#)

[Why Study 1 John?- 1 John 1:1-4](#)

[Three Spurious Claims- 1 John 1:5-2:2](#)

**LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:**

John emphasizes that he has "seen," "heard," and "touched" the Word of life (v.1:1). How does the physical reality of Jesus' incarnation strengthen your faith compared to if Christianity were based merely on abstract ideas?

In 1:8-10, John addresses self-deception about sin. How have you experienced the freedom that comes through honestly confessing sin rather than denying it?

**OVERVIEW:**

John, one of Jesus' closest friends, wrote this letter to help early Christians understand the truth about Jesus and how to live in relationship with God. In these verses, John emphasizes that Jesus was real—someone he personally saw, heard, and touched. He explains that when we're honest about our sins and confess them, God faithfully forgives us and restores our relationship with Him.

As C.S. Lewis once said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen:

not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Just as light helps us see clearly, walking in God's light helps us see truth in our lives.

**THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:**

Many people think that being a "good Christian" means hiding your struggles and appearing perfect. But John actually teaches the opposite! In 1 John 1:8-10, he makes it clear that claiming to be without sin makes us liars and shows we don't have God's truth in us. What's surprising is that God doesn't expect perfection—He expects honesty. The pathway to deeper relationship with God isn't pretending we're perfect, but rather being truthful about our imperfections and bringing them to Him. God already knows everything about us, so confession isn't telling Him something new; it's agreeing with what He already knows is true.

**CULTURE CONNECTION:**

In today's social media world, we often show only our highlight reels—the best version of ourselves. We filter photos, carefully choose what to share, and create an image of a perfect life. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and isolation when we compare our behind-the-scenes reality to others' public perfection. John's message is refreshingly counter-cultural: there's freedom in being honest about our struggles. When we "walk in the light" by acknowledging our sins rather than hiding them, we experience true community with others and genuine fellowship with God. Just as meaningful friendships require honesty, our relationship with God thrives on authenticity, not performance.

**SEEDS FOR THOUGHT:**

Why is it important that John emphasizes the physical reality of Jesus in 1 John 1:1-2? —*John stresses that Jesus was heard, seen, and touched. This affirms that our faith is not based on abstract ideas but on a real, historical person—God made flesh. The*

*incarnation grounds our belief in a tangible truth and offers deep assurance.*

What does it mean to have fellowship with God and with one another (v.3)? —Fellowship is more than friendly connection—it's shared life with God through Christ. When we walk in the light together, we experience a spiritual unity that reflects God's nature and nurtures mutual love, honesty, and grace.

How does walking in the light (v.7) relate to how we handle sin in our lives? —*Walking in the light means living openly before God, without hiding our sins. It invites confession, not denial. Rather than pretending perfection, we allow the blood of Jesus to continually cleanse us and restore our fellowship.*

What role does confession play in the Christian life, according to 1 John 1:9? —*Confession is not just admission—it's an act of trust in God's character. When we confess, we rely on His faithfulness and justice to forgive and purify us. This keeps our relationship with God honest, vibrant, and grace-filled.*

How does 1 John 2:1–2 offer both encouragement and assurance when we struggle with sin? —*John reminds us that we have an Advocate—Jesus Christ the righteous. When we fall, we are not condemned but represented. His atoning sacrifice secures our forgiveness and restores our hope, reminding us that grace, not guilt, defines our standing with God.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: The Power of Light in Darkness**

Imagine you're in a deep cave. The tour guide tells you to turn off all flashlights. Suddenly, you are surrounded by complete darkness—so dark that you can't even see your own hand in front of your face. It's unsettling. The longer you sit in the darkness, the more disoriented you feel. Then, the guide lights a single candle, and instantly, the darkness isn't so overwhelming. That one small flame changes everything—you can

see, you feel a sense of direction, and you're no longer alone in the unknown.

This is how Jesus works in our lives. Without Him, we are stumbling in spiritual darkness, unsure of where we're going. But when we walk in the light of Christ, we see clearly. Our relationship with God grows stronger, and we experience true fellowship with Him and with others.

John reminds us that Jesus is real—He came in the flesh, walked among us, and showed us what it means to live in the light. He also gives us a way to deal with the sin that creeps into our lives. Just as darkness disappears when light enters, sin loses its grip when we confess it. God doesn't leave us in our mistakes—He is faithful to forgive and cleanse us.

Think about the last time the power went out in your house at night. Did you immediately reach for a flashlight or your phone? In the same way, when life gets dark, we should instinctively reach for Jesus. He is the light that never goes out.

### **Reflection Questions:**

When have you experienced a moment of darkness, either physically or spiritually?

What does it mean for you to “walk in the light” in your daily life?

Is there any sin you need to confess so that you can experience the cleansing and fellowship John talks about?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Walking in the Light" (1 John 1:1–2:2)

Obedience →Living an active, generally obedient life, not harboring known sin or resisting conviction. →1 John 1:6–7

Fellowship →Enjoying genuine fellowship with God and other believers. →1 John 1:3, 1:

Honesty about Sin →Openly acknowledging and confessing sin, not claiming to be without sin. →1 John 1:8–9

Humility → Recognizing personal imperfection and need for continual cleansing. → 1 John 1:8-10

Growth in Holiness → Maturing in faith and growing in Christlike character as one follows Jesus. → 1 John 1:7

Integrity → Doing what is true and living transparently, not hiding in darkness. → 1 John 1:6

Assurance of Forgiveness → Trusting in God's faithfulness to forgive and cleanse from all unrighteousness. → 1 John 1:9-2:2

Joy → Experiencing fullness of joy through relationship with God. → 1 John 1:4

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

John begins his letter by establishing that Jesus was not just a spiritual idea or a good teacher—He was God in human form who could be seen, heard, and touched. This reality is the foundation of our faith. If Jesus truly lived among us, died for us, and rose again, then everything changes. His physical presence on earth means God understands our human experience firsthand.

The incredible news is that this same Jesus offers us ongoing forgiveness. When we stumble and sin—which we all do—we don't need to hide in shame or work our way back into God's favor. Instead, we simply need to confess our sins and trust that Jesus' sacrifice covers them completely. Like a continuous shower that keeps us clean, confession keeps our relationship with God fresh and our fellowship with other believers authentic. God's forgiveness isn't a one-time event but a constant flow of grace that allows us to walk confidently in His light.

### **QUICK QUIZ:**

John writes about "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched." Why do you think he emphasizes these physical senses? How might this impact how you think about Jesus?

According to this passage, what happens when we confess our sins versus what happens when we deny them? How might being honest about your struggles actually strengthen your relationship with God and others rather than weaken it?

## Session 2: "Loving God, Keeping Commands" - 1 John 2:3-17

**Focus:** Obedience as evidence of knowing God and warnings against worldliness

**Purpose Statement:** To explore how authentic love for God manifests in obedience and rejection of worldly values

**READ:** 1 John 2:3-17

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[The Word of Life](#)- 1 John 1:1-4

[Why Study 1 John?](#)- 1 John 1:1-4

[Three Spurious Claims](#)- 1 John 1:5-2:2

### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

John writes that "whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (v.6). In what specific areas of your life do you find it most challenging to "walk as Jesus walked"?

Verses 15-17 contrast loving the world versus loving the Father. What "things of the world" (desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, pride in possessions) do you find most tempting even in your senior years?

### OVERVIEW:

How do we truly know if we love God? In a world where faith is often reduced to words or feelings, the apostle John gives us a clear test: "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands" (1 John 2:3, NIV). Love for God isn't just spoken—it's lived out through obedience, even when the world pulls us in the opposite direction.

This session challenges us to examine whether our daily choices reflect God's truth or the shifting values of the culture around us. To love God authentically is to desire His ways above all else—and to walk as Jesus walked.

"The Bible knows nothing of a love for God that does not result in obedience." — A.W. Tozer

Reflect on how your love for God is expressed in action—and how resisting worldly influences strengthens your witness in a culture desperate for something real.

### THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:

Despite what some may think, John isn't teaching a works-based salvation ("do enough good and you're in"). Instead, obedience is the evidence of a transformed heart that truly knows God. In

verses 3-5, he says: "Whoever claims to know Him but doesn't keep His commands is a liar... but whoever obeys His word, in them the love of God is truly made complete". That's not salvation by deeds—it's the fruit of grace. As one commentary explains about verse 17: "Even if you read it as a causal statement, only those who have been born of the Spirit... can actually do the will of God. And because He has shed His love abroad in their hearts, they obey".

In short: obedience doesn't earn salvation—it demonstrates it. It confirms that God's love lives and works within us. If we say we love God but repeatedly walk in world-driven patterns—lust, pride, selfish ambition—we expose the reality of our hearts. Those attracted to the world show they've not been drawn by the Father. On the flip side, those who're drawn by Him live in conformity to Christ. That's the beautiful tension John captures: salvation by grace, yet lived out in obedience.

### CULTURE CONNECTION:

In a culture that often equates love with feelings and freedom with doing whatever we please, John's words challenge us to see love for God as obedience shaped by relationship, not obligation. While society encourages us to chase status, pleasure, and self-fulfillment, Scripture reminds us that these desires are fleeting. In contrast, those who align their lives with God's will walk in light, not only resisting the pull of worldly values but also becoming a countercultural witness. In a noisy world of competing loyalties, John's message is clear: true love for God shows up in how we live—not just what we say.

### SEEDS FOR THOUGHT: 1 John 2:3-17

Why does John call his readers "little children" throughout this passage (vv. 1, 12, 18)? What does this reveal about his relationship with them? —*John's tender address as "little children" reflects his pastoral care and spiritual authority. As an elder apostle, he assumes a fatherly role, guiding with love rather than harshness. This relationship demonstrates how spiritual maturity should lead to nurturing others with both truth and compassion.*

In 1 John 2:1-2, John writes about Jesus as our "advocate" and "propitiation." How do these roles comfort believers who struggle with sin? —*When*

*we fail, Jesus serves as our advocate (legal defender) before the Father. As our propitiation, He has already satisfied God's righteous judgment against sin. This dual role reminds us that while God takes sin seriously, genuine believers need not live in paralyzing guilt or fear of condemnation. Christ's work provides both forgiveness and restoration.*

→How does John describe the relationship between knowing God and keeping His commandments in verses 3-6? What challenge does this present to contemporary Christianity? —*John establishes a direct connection: those who truly know God obey His commands. This challenges the modern tendency to separate faith from obedience, or to claim spiritual enlightenment without moral transformation. Authentic relationship with God inevitably produces a lifestyle that increasingly reflects Christ's example.*

What does it mean that the command to love is both "old" and "new" (vv. 7-8)? Why is this significant? —*The command to love is "old" because it existed from the beginning of God's revelation, yet "new" because Jesus demonstrated its fullest expression and empowers believers to love through His Spirit. This reminds us that God's truth is both timeless and freshly relevant to each generation, finding its clearest manifestation in Christ.*

In verses 9-11, John contrasts walking in light versus darkness. How might this metaphor help believers evaluate whether they truly love their brothers and sisters? —*The light/darkness imagery provides a stark diagnostic tool. Those in light demonstrate love; those claiming to be in light while harboring hatred remain in darkness. This challenges us to examine not just our public religious activities but our actual treatment of fellow believers. Genuine spiritual enlightenment always manifests in practical love.*

What might John mean by "the world" in verses 15-17, and why does he warn so strongly against loving it? —*"The world" here refers not to creation itself but to the system of values, priorities, and desires that oppose God's kingdom. John warns that attachment to these temporal things (sensual pleasure, materialism, and pride) diverts our affection from God and leads to spiritual death. Only lives aligned with God's will have eternal significance.*

How do verses 12-14 address different spiritual maturity levels? What encouragement do these words offer to believers at various stages of faith? —*John recognizes and affirms distinct groups: "children" who know forgiveness, "young men" who have victory over evil, and "fathers" with deep knowledge of God. This passage acknowledges that spiritual growth follows a natural progression, encouraging believers to appreciate their current stage while continuing to mature. Each level has its own strengths and assurances from God.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: The Love Test and a Fake \$20 Bill**

Imagine you're at the grocery store, and you hand the cashier a \$20 bill. She holds it up to the light, runs a special marker over it, and checks it carefully. Why? Because counterfeit money looks real, but under close inspection, the truth comes out.

Our love for God works the same way. It's easy to say, "I love God," but John tells us there's a test to see if that love is real—obedience. "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands" (1 John 2:3). Loving God isn't just about feelings or words; it's about actions. When we obey God, we prove that our faith is the real deal.

John also warns us about loving the things of the world—money, status, pleasure—because they are like counterfeit bills. They might seem valuable, but they don't last. True worth comes from loving and obeying God.

Think about a time when you had to choose between doing what was easy and what was right. Maybe it was speaking the truth when lying would have been simpler, or choosing kindness when anger felt justified. Those moments reveal what we love most—God or the world.

### **Reflection Questions:**

Have you ever struggled with wanting something worldly more than wanting to obey God?

What is one command of God that you find challenging to obey?

How can you make sure your love for God is authentic and not just words?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Loving God, Keeping Commands" (1 John 2:3-17)

Trait →Description →Scripture Reference  
Obedience to God's Commands →Demonstrates genuine knowledge of God by keeping His commandments and walking as Jesus did. →1 John 2:3-6

Love for Others →Practices selfless, sacrificial love for fellow believers, avoiding hatred and walking in the light. →1 John 2:7-11

Spiritual Maturity →Progresses from spiritual childhood to maturity, marked by deepening relationship, victory, and knowledge. →1 John 2:12-14

Victory Over Sin and Evil →Overcomes the evil one and resists temptations that would hinder spiritual growth. →1 John 2:13-14

Nonattachment to the World →Forsakes love for the world and its desires, valuing God and His will above worldly pleasures and pride. →1 John 2:15-17

Humility and Dependence →Recognizes dependence on the Father and avoids pride, boasting only in God's love and grace. →1 John 2:12-14

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

Loving God isn't just about warm feelings or saying the right words—it's about living in a way that reflects who He is. 1 John 2 reminds us that our obedience is the fruit of truly knowing Him. When we walk as Jesus walked, choosing kindness, honesty, patience, and forgiveness, we show the world that we really belong to God. It's not about being perfect, but about growing closer to Him day by day, choosing His ways over our own.

The world offers a lot of distractions—things that look shiny and exciting, but fade quickly and leave us empty. God calls us to something deeper and lasting. His commands aren't heavy rules to hold us down, but loving directions meant to lead us into real life, peace, and purpose. When we love God and follow His ways, we begin to see the bigger picture: God is shaping us to look more like Jesus, to shine His light in a world that needs it. That's the kind of life that lasts—not just now, but forever.

### **QUICK QUIZ:**

If someone claims to know God but doesn't live by His commands, what does that reveal about their relationship with Him—according to 1 John

2:3-6? → Follow-up discussion: Why is obedience such a key sign of truly knowing God?

What are some "worldly" desires or values in our culture today that might pull us away from loving God fully (1 John 2:15-17)? → Follow-up discussion: How can we guard our hearts against these temptations while still living in the world?

### Session 3: "Truth and Lies"- 1 John 2:18-27

**Focus:** Discerning truth from falsehood and remaining faithful to sound teaching

**Purpose Statement:** To develop spiritual discernment regarding false teaching and to hold fast to the truth of Christ

**READ:** [1 John 2:18-27](#)

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[A Word of Warning- 1 John 2:18-27](#)

#### **LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:**

John warns about "antichrists" who deny Jesus is the Christ (v.22). What false teachings about Jesus have you encountered in your lifetime, and how have you maintained your commitment to biblical truth?

In verse 27, John speaks of the "anointing" that teaches believers. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit guiding you into truth and helping you recognize error?

#### **OVERVIEW:**

In this passage, John addresses a serious challenge facing the early church—false teachers who were distorting the truth about Jesus. These "antichrists" were once part of the Christian community but had left, spreading confusion and threatening the faith of believers. John reminds his readers that they have God's Spirit within them to help discern truth from falsehood, and encourages them to hold firmly to the teaching they received from the beginning.

As G.K. Chesterton wisely observed, "Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions." John's warning about discerning truth from error remains as relevant today as it was in the first century.

#### **THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:**

Many people assume that "antichrist" refers only to one specific evil figure who will appear at the end of time. What might surprise you is that in 1 John 2:18, John speaks of "many antichrists" who were already present in his day. The term "antichrist" in this context refers to anyone who denies that Jesus is the Messiah or rejects His true nature as both fully God and fully human. John clarifies that false teaching doesn't always come from obvious outsiders—these antichrists "went out from us, but they did not really belong to us" (v.19). Some of the most dangerous spiritual deception comes from those who once

appeared to be part of the faith community. This reminds us that spiritual discernment isn't about being suspicious of everyone, but about carefully evaluating teachings against the truth of Scripture, regardless of who delivers the message.

#### **CULTURE CONNECTION:**

We live in what many call a "post-truth" society, where personal feelings and opinions often carry more weight than objective facts. Social media algorithms create echo chambers that reinforce what we already believe, while "fake news" and misinformation spread rapidly. In this environment, John's guidance on discernment is incredibly timely. Just as early Christians needed to evaluate teachings according to the truth they had received from reliable sources, we need to carefully evaluate the flood of information we receive daily. John reminds us in verse 27 that we have God's Spirit as our internal "truth detector." This doesn't mean we simply trust whatever feels right, but rather that we prayerfully evaluate messages through the lens of Scripture and in community with other believers. In a world that celebrates "your truth" and "my truth," John reminds us that ultimate truth is found in Jesus Christ and His teachings.

#### **SEEDS FOR THOUGHT:** Discerning Truth from Falsehood

What does John mean by "antichrist," and how can we recognize such influences today? — *John warns of the presence of "many antichrists" (v. 18), not just a singular apocalyptic figure. In context, these are individuals who deny that Jesus is the Christ (v. 22) and who once belonged to the community of faith but have departed (v. 19). Today, the "spirit of the antichrist" may manifest not only in overt denials of Christ but also in subtle distortions of His person and work. Recognizing these influences requires more than doctrinal awareness; it demands an intimate relationship with the truth, cultivated by the Spirit.*

How does the "anointing" (v. 20, 27) guide believers into truth, and how should we interpret this in relation to Scripture and church teaching? — *John speaks of an "anointing from the Holy One," which teaches believers all things. This anointing is often understood as the Holy Spirit, who illuminates the truth of Christ and guards against deception. However, this spiritual*

*guidance is not independent of Scripture or communal discernment. The Spirit leads believers through the Word and often within the community of faith. The danger lies in privatized interpretations that ignore the guardrails of apostolic teaching.*

In what ways might we unintentionally drift from the truth we “heard from the beginning” (v. 24), and how can we guard against this? —*John urges believers to let the original message “abide” in them, implying a conscious effort to retain and remain in the apostolic teaching. The drift may occur subtly—through cultural accommodation, intellectual pride, or spiritual apathy. Guarding against this means cultivating disciplines of remembrance: regularly engaging Scripture, participating in sound teaching, and submitting to godly accountability. The battle between truth and lies is often won or lost in the mundane faithfulness of daily abiding.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: Spotting a Fake Jersey**

Imagine you’re a huge fan of your favorite sports team, and you want to buy their official jersey. You find one online for half the price of the real thing—same colors, same logo—but when it arrives, something feels off. The stitching is messy, the fabric is thin, and the logo looks slightly wrong. You realize it’s a fake.

In 1 John 2:18-27, John warns us about “fakes” in our faith—false teachers who claim to know Christ but twist the truth. He calls them “antichrists,” not in the sense of a single end-times figure, but as anyone who denies Jesus as the true Savior. Just like a fake jersey might fool people at first, false teaching can look good on the surface. It might sound wise or spiritual, but when you look closer, it doesn’t match up with God’s Word.

The good news? We have a built-in authenticity checker—God’s Spirit. John reminds us that “the anointing you received from him remains in you” (v. 27). The Holy Spirit helps us recognize what’s true and what’s not, guiding us back to Jesus.

Think about a time when you heard something that sounded spiritual but didn’t quite sit right with you. Maybe someone said, “God just wants you to be happy, no matter what,” but deep down, you knew that obedience matters more than

personal happiness. That’s the Holy Spirit helping you discern truth from lies.

### **Reflection Questions:**

How can you tell if something is spiritually true or false?

Have you ever believed something about God that later turned out to be incorrect?

How can you stay grounded in God’s truth so you won’t be deceived?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously “Truth and Lies” (1 John 2:18–27)

Discernment → Ability to distinguish truth from error and resist deception by false teachers. → 1 John 2:18, 2:26

Abiding in Christ → Continually remaining in relationship with Christ and holding fast to the original gospel message. → 1 John 2:24, 2:27

Reliance on the Holy Spirit → Trusting the Holy Spirit’s anointing for guidance and understanding of truth. → 1 John 2:20, 2:27

Spiritual Maturity → Growing in faith and stability through the Word and Spirit, not swayed by new or false teachings. → 1 John 2:21, 2:24

Confidence in Eternal Life → Assurance of eternal life as a result of abiding in the truth and in the Son and the Father. → 1 John 2:25

Faithfulness to Apostolic Teaching → Holding to what was heard from the beginning, not seeking novelty or secret knowledge. → 1 John 2:24

Fruitfulness → Bearing spiritual fruit by living in fellowship with Christ and growing in Him. → 1 John 2:27-28

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

At the heart of this passage is the importance of spiritual discernment. John isn’t telling believers to become suspicious or paranoid, but to be mindful that not everything claiming to be Christian teaching actually aligns with the truth about Jesus. The key test John provides is whether a teaching acknowledges Jesus as the Christ—God’s Son who came in human flesh. Any teaching that diminishes either Christ’s divinity or His humanity fails this test.

What’s encouraging is that John doesn’t leave believers to figure everything out on their own. He reminds them that they have “an anointing from the Holy One” (v.20), which enables them to

recognize truth. This anointing—the Holy Spirit—guides believers as they engage with Scripture and helps them evaluate teachings they encounter. Rather than chasing after new and exciting spiritual ideas, John encourages believers to hold firmly to the foundational truths they received "from the beginning" (v.24). When we remain grounded in the essentials of the faith—that Jesus is God's Son who died for our sins and rose again—we build our spiritual lives on a foundation that will not shift, regardless of what new teachings may come along.

**QUICK QUIZ:**

John writes about people who "went out from us, but they did not really belong to us" (v.19). Have you ever experienced a situation where someone you thought shared your faith revealed very different beliefs? How did you respond, and what helped you maintain your own spiritual grounding during that time?

According to verses 20-21, believers have "an anointing from the Holy One" that helps them know the truth. What practical steps can you take to better recognize truth and detect falsehood in the messages you encounter daily? How might prayer, Scripture study, and Christian community help sharpen your discernment?

Session 4: "**Children of God**"- 1 John 2:28-3:10

**Focus:** The privileges and responsibilities of being God's children

**Purpose Statement:** To grasp our identity as God's children and the moral transformation this identity requires

**READ:** [1 John 2:28-3:10](#)

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[The Children of God- 1 John 2:28-3:3](#)

[Sinlessness: Fact or Fiction? – Part One- 1 John 3:4-10](#)

### **LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:**

John writes that "when he appears we shall be like him" (3:2). How does this future hope of complete transformation into Christ's likeness impact how you view your current struggles with sin?

The passage draws a sharp contrast between children of God and children of the devil (3:10). In what ways has your experience of living righteously brought clarity to your identity as God's child?

### **OVERVIEW:**

In this passage, John shifts his focus to one of the most profound truths of Christianity—believers are literally children of God. This isn't just a nice metaphor; it's a spiritual reality that shapes who we are and how we live. John explains how this identity impacts our present conduct and future hope, while drawing a clear distinction between those who belong to God's family and those who don't.

As Max Lucado beautifully expressed, "God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus." This captures John's message that our identity as God's children involves both unconditional acceptance and ongoing transformation.

### **THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:**

Many people think that being "born again" or becoming a "child of God" is primarily about going to heaven when we die. What might surprise you is that in 1 John 3:2-3, John emphasizes how this identity affects us right now. He writes, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The surprising part is that our future transformation begins in

the present—"All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." Our identity as God's children isn't just about a future inheritance; it's meant to have an immediate purifying effect on how we live today. John suggests that truly understanding who we are in Christ naturally leads to a process of becoming more like Him now, not just in eternity.

### **CULTURE CONNECTION:**

In our achievement-oriented society, identity is often tied to what we do, how much we earn, or what others think of us. Social media amplifies this by turning our lives into performances where likes and comments validate our worth. Against this backdrop, John's message is revolutionary—our most fundamental identity isn't something we earn, create, or project, but something we receive as a gift from God. Being called "children of God" means our core identity is based on relationship, not performance.

At the same time, John challenges the modern mindset that says personal identity should have no moral implications for behavior. Today's culture often separates who we are from how we live, suggesting that authentic self-expression means doing whatever feels right. John presents a different view: our identity as God's children naturally expresses itself in righteous living. Just as a child might naturally reflect their parent's mannerisms and values, God's children reflect His character through lives marked by love and righteousness. This isn't about rigid rule-following but about living authentically from our true identity.

### **SEEDS FOR THOUGHT:** 1 John 2:3-17

Why does John call his readers "little children" throughout this passage (vv. 1, 12, 18)? What does this reveal about his relationship with them? —*John's tender address as "little children" reflects his pastoral care and spiritual authority. As an elder apostle, he assumes a fatherly role, guiding with love rather than harshness. This relationship demonstrates how spiritual maturity should lead to nurturing others with both truth and compassion.*

In 1 John 2:1-2, John writes about Jesus as our "advocate" and "propitiation." How do these roles comfort believers who struggle with sin? —*When we fail, Jesus serves as our advocate (legal defender) before the Father. As our propitiation,*

*He has already satisfied God's righteous judgment against sin. This dual role reminds us that while God takes sin seriously, genuine believers need not live in paralyzing guilt or fear of condemnation. Christ's work provides both forgiveness and restoration.*

How does John describe the relationship between knowing God and keeping His commandments in verses 3-6? What challenge does this present to contemporary Christianity? —*John establishes a direct connection: those who truly know God obey His commands. This challenges the modern tendency to separate faith from obedience, or to claim spiritual enlightenment without moral transformation. Authentic relationship with God inevitably produces a lifestyle that increasingly reflects Christ's example.*

What does it mean that the command to love is both "old" and "new" (vv. 7-8)? Why is this significant? —*The command to love is "old" because it existed from the beginning of God's revelation, yet "new" because Jesus demonstrated its fullest expression and empowers believers to love through His Spirit. This reminds us that God's truth is both timeless and freshly relevant to each generation, finding its clearest manifestation in Christ.*

In verses 9-11, John contrasts walking in light versus darkness. How might this metaphor help believers evaluate whether they truly love their brothers and sisters? —*The light/darkness imagery provides a stark diagnostic tool. Those in light demonstrate love; those claiming to be in light while harboring hatred remain in darkness. This challenges us to examine not just our public religious activities but our actual treatment of fellow believers. Genuine spiritual enlightenment always manifests in practical love.*

What might John mean by "the world" in verses 15-17, and why does he warn so strongly against loving it? —*"The world" here refers not to creation itself but to the system of values, priorities, and desires that oppose God's kingdom. John warns that attachment to these temporal things (sensual pleasure, materialism, and pride) diverts our affection from God and leads to spiritual death. Only lives aligned with God's will have eternal significance.*

How do verses 12-14 address different spiritual maturity levels? What encouragement do these

words offer to believers at various stages of faith? —*John recognizes and affirms distinct groups: "children" who know forgiveness, "young men" who have victory over evil, and "fathers" with deep knowledge of God. This passage acknowledges that spiritual growth follows a natural progression, encouraging believers to appreciate their current stage while continuing to mature. Each level has its own strengths and assurances from God.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: The Love Test and a Fake \$20 Bill**

Imagine you're at the grocery store, and you hand the cashier a \$20 bill. She holds it up to the light, runs a special marker over it, and checks it carefully. Why? Because counterfeit money looks real, but under close inspection, the truth comes out.

Our love for God works the same way. It's easy to say, "I love God," but John tells us there's a test to see if that love is real—obedience. "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands" (1 John 2:3). Loving God isn't just about feelings or words; it's about actions. When we obey God, we prove that our faith is the real deal.

John also warns us about loving the things of the world—money, status, pleasure—because they are like counterfeit bills. They might seem valuable, but they don't last. True worth comes from loving and obeying God.

Think about a time when you had to choose between doing what was easy and what was right. Maybe it was speaking the truth when lying would have been simpler, or choosing kindness when anger felt justified. Those moments reveal what we love most—God or the world.

### **Reflection Questions:**

Have you ever struggled with wanting something worldly more than wanting to obey God?

What is one command of God that you find challenging to obey?

How can you make sure your love for God is authentic and not just words?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Children of God" (1 John 2:28-3:10)

Confidence at Christ's Coming → Lives with assurance and does not shrink from Jesus in shame when He returns. →1 John 2:28

Practice of Righteousness → Habitually does what is right, reflecting God's righteous character. →1 John 2:29; 3:7

Awareness of God's Love → Recognizes and is shaped by the great love the Father has bestowed in calling us His children. →1 John 3:1

Hope and Purity → Has hope in Christ's return, leading to a life of self-purification and striving for Christlikeness. →1 John 3:2-3

Rejection of Sin → Does not make a practice of sinning, since Christ came to take away sins and there is no sin in Him. →1 John 3:4-6

Distinction from the World → Understands that the world does not recognize God's children, just as it did not recognize Christ. →1 John 3:1

Love for Fellow Believers → Demonstrates genuine love for other Christians, a mark of being born of God. →1 John 3:10

Obedience → Shows evidence of being "born of God" by living in obedience and not following sinful patterns. →1 John 3:9

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

John begins his letter by establishing that Jesus was not just a spiritual idea or a good teacher—He was God in human form who could be seen, heard, and touched. This reality is the foundation of our faith. If Jesus truly lived among us, died for us, and rose again, then everything changes. His physical presence on earth means God understands our human experience firsthand.

The incredible news is that this same Jesus offers us ongoing forgiveness. When we stumble and sin—which we all do—we don't need to hide in shame or work our way back into God's favor. Instead, we simply need to confess our sins and trust that Jesus' sacrifice covers them completely. Like a continuous shower that keeps us clean, confession keeps our relationship with God fresh and our fellowship with other believers authentic. God's forgiveness isn't a one-time event but a constant flow of grace that allows us to walk confidently in His light.

### **QUICK QUIZ:**

John writes about "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and

our hands have touched." Why do you think he emphasizes these physical senses? How might this impact how you think about Jesus?

According to this passage, what happens when we confess our sins versus what happens when we deny them? How might being honest about your struggles actually strengthen your relationship with God and others rather than weaken it?

## Session 5: "Love in Action"- 1 John 3:11-24

**Focus:** The command to love one another demonstrated through concrete actions

**Purpose Statement:** To understand what genuine Christian love looks like in practice and how it assures our hearts before God

**READ:** [1 John 3:11-24](#)

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[Loving One Another- 1 John 3:11-18](#)

[Salvation: Can We Know for Sure?- 1 John 3:19-24](#)

### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

John calls us to love "in deed and in truth" rather than just "in word" (v.18). Share a time when someone showed you Christ's love through actions rather than just words. How did this impact you?

In verses 19-22, John addresses how our hearts may condemn us but God is greater than our hearts. How have you experienced God's reassurance when you've felt unworthy or condemned by your own conscience?

### OVERVIEW:

In this passage, John moves from talking about our identity as God's children to how that identity should affect the way we treat others. He emphasizes that genuine love isn't just about feelings or words—it requires action and sacrifice. John contrasts the hateful example of Cain with the selfless love of Jesus and calls believers to follow Christ's model of practical, tangible love toward others.

As Mother Teresa wisely said, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." John's message reminds us that Christianity isn't just about what we believe, but about how our beliefs transform the way we love others in everyday life.

### THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:

People often assume that the main point of religion is to feel close to God through spiritual experiences or personal devotion. What might surprise you is that in 1 John 3:17-18, John suggests that the authenticity of our relationship with God is demonstrated primarily through how we treat others: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" John doesn't separate loving God from loving others—they're completely connected.

The challenging truth here is that our spiritual life isn't measured by how many Bible verses we know or how often we attend church, but by whether we're willing to meet the practical needs

of others, even when it costs us something. John cuts through religious pretense by stating, "Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." In God's economy, giving your coat to someone who's cold might be more spiritually significant than spending an hour in prayer—if that prayer doesn't lead to compassionate action.

### CULTURE CONNECTION:

We live in a digital age where expressing support or concern is often reduced to clicking "like" on a social media post or sending a quick "thoughts and prayers" message. Our culture has made it easier than ever to express sentiment without taking meaningful action. John's message directly challenges this trend by insisting that real love requires more than words—it demands concrete action and sometimes personal sacrifice.

John's emphasis on loving "with actions and in truth" also speaks to our image-conscious culture where appearances often matter more than reality. In a world of carefully curated social media profiles and public personas, John calls for authenticity—love that's verified through tangible deeds, not just passionate declarations. This might mean volunteering at a shelter, sharing resources with someone facing financial hardship, or simply being physically present with someone who's suffering instead of just sending a text. True Christian love moves beyond the virtual to the actual, beyond convenient expressions to committed involvement in others' lives.

### SEEDS FOR THOUGHT: 1 John 3:11-24

John begins this section by reminding readers this message about love has been taught "from the beginning" (v.11). Why does he emphasize the consistency of this teaching, and what might this reveal about challenges in the early church? —*By stressing this teaching's longevity, John counters false teachers who might claim superior "new" insights. The emphasis on consistency suggests some were introducing innovative theologies that minimized love's centrality. This reminds us that genuine spiritual advancement deepens our commitment to foundational truths rather than abandoning them. The early church, like believers today, needed reminding that love remains non-negotiable, regardless of theological sophistication.*

How does the example of Cain in verses 12-13 illustrate the natural hostility between the world and believers? What comfort can this provide when Christians face opposition? —*Cain's murder of Abel demonstrated the pattern of hostility righteous living provokes from those committed to evil. John uses this to explain why the world hates believers—their righteous lives implicitly condemn worldly values. This historical perspective comforts persecuted Christians by showing opposition isn't evidence of failure but confirmation they're following Christ's path. Hostility*

often indicates effectiveness, not ineffectiveness, in spiritual witness.

In verse 14, John presents love for fellow believers as evidence of passing from death to life. How does this challenge individualistic approaches to faith? —*John establishes community love as essential evidence of spiritual transformation—not optional but fundamental. This directly contradicts individualistic spirituality that claims personal relationship with God while avoiding meaningful connection with His people. Genuine salvation necessarily creates capacity for love that previously didn't exist. This teaches that spiritual vitality must be measured partly through relationships, not just personal piety or experiences.*

How does John define hatred in verse 15, and why does he connect it with murder? What implications does this have for how we view internal attitudes? —*John equates hatred with murder in its spiritual essence, echoing Jesus' teaching that internal disposition, not just external action, constitutes sin. This radical perspective eliminates the distinction between "acceptable" and "extreme" forms of personal animosity. It challenges believers to address seemingly "minor" issues like resentment, contempt, or indifference as serious spiritual problems requiring repentance, not rationalization.*

What concrete example of love does John provide in verse 16, and how does verse 17 apply this principle to everyday life? —*Christ's self-sacrifice establishes the definition of love—willingness to give oneself completely for others' benefit. John immediately applies this to material possessions, showing that withholding resources from brothers in need contradicts claims of divine love dwelling within. This moves love from abstract concept to practical choice: authentic Christian love consistently sacrifices personal comfort and security for others' well-being.*

What does John mean by "let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (v.18)? How might this apply to contemporary church culture? —*John confronts the gap between verbal professions and tangible actions. While not dismissing the importance of affirming love verbally, he emphasizes that words must be authenticated by concrete demonstrations. This challenges church cultures that emphasize emotional worship or theological precision while neglecting practical care. It reminds us that compassionate action, not just spiritual language, validates our claims of transformation.*

According to verses 19-22, how does practical love provide assurance to believers whose hearts condemn them? What is the relationship between obedience and confidence in prayer? —*Acting in concrete love reassures believers of their authentic relationship with God, even when feelings suggest otherwise. Practicing love creates confidence before God that transcends emotional fluctuations. This establishes the counterintuitive truth that external obedience can heal internal doubts. John connects this confidence directly to effective prayer, suggesting that alignment with God's will through obedience creates spiritual receptivity to receiving what we ask.*

How do the twin commands in verse 23 (believe and love) summarize the Christian life? Why does John connect belief in Christ with love for others? —*John distills Christian discipleship to faith in Christ and love for others—theological commitment and ethical expression inseparably linked. This teaches that orthodox belief necessarily produces transformed relationships; each authenticates the other. Doctrine without love becomes cold intellectualism; love without proper understanding of Christ becomes mere humanitarianism. Together, they constitute the integrated response to God's grace that defines authentic Christianity.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: The Peanut Butter & Jelly Challenge**

A youth group once tried a fun experiment called the "PB&J Challenge." One person gave step-by-step instructions on how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, but the other person had to follow them exactly as spoken—no assumptions allowed. If the instructions weren't clear, the sandwich ended up as a mess.

The lesson? Love isn't just about words—it's about clear, intentional action. Saying "I love you" doesn't mean much if it isn't backed up with real kindness, generosity, and sacrifice. John makes this clear in 1 John 3:18: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth".

The world often defines love as a feeling, but John defines love as a choice. It's seen in the way we treat people, especially when it's inconvenient. It's choosing patience when someone annoys you, giving when it costs you something, or forgiving when it's hard. Love is laying down our lives, just as Jesus did for us (v. 16).

Think about a time when someone showed you love through action—maybe they helped you when you were struggling, listened when you needed a friend, or forgave you when you didn't deserve it. That's the kind of love God calls us to show every day.

#### **Reflection Questions:**

What's one way you can show love in action this week?

Is there someone in your life who needs to experience God's love through you right now?

How does loving others help strengthen your own relationship with God?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Love in Action" (1 John 3:11-24)

Love for Others → Actively loving fellow believers, not just in words but in actions and truth. →1 John 3:11, 3:18

Sacrificial Service → Willingness to lay down one's life or resources for others, following Christ's example. →1 John 3:16-17

Rejection of Hatred →Turning away from hatred, envy, or murderous attitudes like Cain; choosing love instead. →1 John 3:12, 3:15

Assurance Before God →Gaining confidence and reassurance in one's relationship with God through loving actions. →1 John 3:14, 3:19–21

Obedience to God's Commands →Keeping God's commandments, especially to believe in Jesus and love one another. →1 John 3:22–23

Abiding in Christ →Living in ongoing fellowship with God, marked by obedience and love. →1 John 3:24

Generosity →Meeting the needs of others with material help as an outflow of God's love. →1 John 3:17

Spirit-led Living →Evidence of God's Spirit at work, confirming true relationship with Him. →1 John 3:24

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

At the heart of this passage is John's radical understanding of love—not as a feeling we have but as an action we take. He points to Jesus as the ultimate example: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (3:16). Real love, as demonstrated by Jesus, involves sacrifice for the good of others. It's about giving what costs us something—our time, comfort, resources, or convenience—for someone else's benefit.

What's especially encouraging in this passage is how John connects this kind of practical love to our confidence before God. In verses 19–22, he explains that when we express love through concrete actions, our hearts are assured of our relationship with God. Many Christians struggle with doubt and insecurity about where they stand with God. John offers a practical solution—look at how you're loving others. Are you meeting needs when you see them? Are you extending compassion in tangible ways? If so, this provides evidence that God's Spirit is working in your life.

This doesn't mean we earn God's love through good deeds. Rather, our willingness to love others sacrificially confirms that we've truly received God's love ourselves. Like a mirror reflecting light, our practical love for others reflects the genuine presence of God's love in our hearts. This gives us confidence to approach God openly, even when our hearts try to condemn us, because our actions demonstrate that we belong to the truth.

### **QUICK QUIZ:**

John writes, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (3:16). What might "laying down your life" for others look like in everyday situations? Can you think of a time when someone "laid down their life" for you in a meaningful way?

## Session 6: "Testing the Spirits"- 1 John 4:1-6

**Focus:** Discerning between the Spirit of God and the spirit of antichrist

**Purpose Statement:** To develop criteria for evaluating spiritual claims and teachings

**READ:** 1 John 4:1-6

Alistair Begg Sermon

[Testing the Spirits- 1 John 4:1-6](#)

### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

John provides a test for discerning spirits: whether they confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (v.2-3). What other biblical criteria have helped you evaluate teachings you've encountered throughout your Christian journey?

Verse 4 reminds believers that "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." How has this truth given you courage when facing opposition to your faith or pressure to compromise?

### OVERVIEW:

In this passage, John addresses a critical challenge for early Christians—how to tell the difference between true and false spiritual messages. False teachers claiming special spiritual insight were influencing the church, and John provides practical guidance for testing whether a spiritual message truly comes from God. His central test focuses on what these teachers say about Jesus, while also reminding believers that God's Spirit within them is greater than any opposing spiritual force.

As Charles Spurgeon once said, "Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right." John's instructions help believers navigate the often subtle differences between truth and error.

### THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:

Many people assume that being spiritually open-minded means accepting all spiritual perspectives as equally valid. What might surprise you about 1 John 4:1-3 is that John actually encourages skepticism rather than automatic acceptance of spiritual claims. He writes, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." John doesn't say to reject all spiritual messages, but he doesn't tell us to embrace them all either. Instead, he provides a specific test centered on what a teaching says about Jesus Christ.

The surprising element here is that John doesn't present spiritual discernment as an advanced skill for religious experts—he assumes every believer can and should practice it. In fact, he reminds his readers in verse 4, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them,

because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." John believes ordinary Christians already have the spiritual resources they need to distinguish truth from error. This challenges both blind acceptance of all spiritual ideas and the notion that only religious professionals can properly interpret spiritual matters.

### CULTURE CONNECTION:

We live in an age where spirituality has become increasingly personal and customizable. People often piece together spiritual beliefs from various traditions, creating individualized belief systems. The popular phrase "I'm spiritual but not religious" reflects this trend toward personalized spirituality without institutional boundaries or doctrinal constraints.

John's message speaks directly to this cultural moment by suggesting that not all spiritual paths or teachings are equally valid or beneficial. He provides a clear boundary marker—what a teaching says about Jesus Christ. According to John, spiritual messages that acknowledge Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (affirming both his divinity and humanity) come from God, while those that don't come from the "spirit of antichrist."

This doesn't mean Christians should be closed-minded or disrespectful toward other beliefs, but it does mean being thoughtful about which spiritual influences we allow to shape our lives. In a culture that often treats spiritual exploration like a buffet where we can sample a bit of everything, John reminds us that some spiritual food is nourishing while other portions might be harmful. Discernment isn't about fear or judgment but about making wise choices about what shapes our spiritual understanding.

### SEEDS FOR THOUGHT: 1 John 4:1-6

John begins with "do not believe every spirit" (v.1). Why was this warning particularly necessary in the first century, and how does it remain relevant today? —*The early church existed in a culture saturated with competing spiritual claims—from mystery religions to imperial cult worship. False prophets could cause significant damage to vulnerable young congregations. Today's spiritual marketplace is similarly crowded with voices claiming divine authority. John's warning reminds us that spiritual enthusiasm without discernment leads to deception. Not everything presenting itself as spiritual illumination originates from God, regardless of its emotional appeal or popularity.*

What specific test does John provide in verses 2-3 for determining whether a spirit is from God? Why does he focus on the confession about Jesus Christ? —*John establishes the incarnation—Jesus Christ coming in the flesh—as the definitive theological test. This confronted Gnostic-type teachings that denied*

*Christ's genuine humanity while claiming spiritual enlightenment. The confession isn't merely intellectual agreement but wholehearted acknowledgment of Jesus as both fully divine and authentically human. This criterion remains foundational because proper understanding of Christ's nature determines whether one worships the true God or a philosophical abstraction.*

*How does John describe the "spirit of the antichrist" in verse 3? What distinguishes this from popular notions of a single end-times figure? —John identifies the antichrist spirit as already present and operating through false teaching that denies Christ's incarnation. While not dismissing a potential future embodiment, John emphasizes the current reality of anti-Christian influence manifesting whenever Jesus is misrepresented. This perspective shifts focus from speculative prophecy charts to present vigilance against subtle doctrinal corruption. The greatest danger isn't a distant future threat but present theological compromise.*

*In verse 4, John reassures believers "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." How does this provide confidence for Christians facing spiritual opposition? —This powerful affirmation establishes that the Spirit dwelling in believers exceeds the power of any opposing spiritual force. This isn't triumphalism but realistic assessment of spiritual resources available to even the humblest believer. When facing sophisticated false teaching or cultural pressure, Christians need not feel intellectually or spiritually outmatched. Divine presence within provides capacity for discernment and faithfulness regardless of external challenges.*

*How does John characterize the relationship between false teachers and "the world" in verse 5? What warning does this provide about popular or culturally acceptable teaching? —False teachers speak "from the world's perspective" and receive the world's approval precisely because they affirm its values rather than challenging them. Their popularity stems from alignment with prevailing cultural assumptions. This creates a critical warning: teaching that consistently receives secular culture's approval should prompt careful examination. Authentic gospel proclamation will always contain elements that confront rather than merely confirm societal values.*

*In verse 6, John makes the striking claim "Whoever knows God listens to us." What does this reveal about apostolic authority, and how might it guide our approach to Scripture? —John establishes apostolic teaching as the authoritative standard for discernment—those genuinely connected to God recognize and submit to this authentic witness. This bold claim establishes that spiritual authenticity manifests in receptivity to apostolic testimony (now preserved in Scripture). This provides a critical corrective to subjective spirituality by anchoring discernment in the objective apostolic message rather than personal impressions or cultural trends.*

*How does this passage challenge both uncritical acceptance and cynical rejection of spiritual claims? What balanced approach to discernment does it*

*promote? —John advocates neither gullibility nor dismissiveness but thoughtful evaluation based on established criteria. This middle path requires both theological knowledge and spiritual sensitivity. True discernment distinguishes between peripheral differences among believers and fundamental departures from apostolic faith. It examines teaching's content rather than merely its emotional appeal or presenter's charisma. The goal isn't suspicion but protection of authentic Christian community through loving vigilance.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: The "Sniff Test"**

Have you ever picked up a milk carton from the fridge, unsure if it's still good? You check the date, but just to be sure, you take a sniff. If it smells sour, you know—it's bad. No matter what the label says, your nose tells the truth.

John tells us to do something similar when it comes to spiritual teachings. Not everything that sounds good is actually from God. That's why he warns, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). Just like spoiled milk, false teaching can look fine on the surface, but a closer "sniff test" reveals that something's off.

So how do we test the spirits? John gives us a clear standard: If a teaching acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God, it's from God. If it denies Him, it's not (v. 2-3). The world offers plenty of ideas that sound spiritual but don't align with God's truth. That's why we need discernment—the ability to recognize what is truly from God and what isn't.

Think about the last time you heard a spiritual message—maybe in a book, on social media, or even from a friend. Did you stop to compare it with what the Bible says? The Holy Spirit helps us develop discernment, but we need to stay rooted in God's Word to recognize truth from error.

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Testing the Spirits" (1 John 4:1-6)

Spiritual Discernment → Carefully evaluates teachings and influences, testing whether they are from God or not. →1 John 4:1

Christ-Centered Confession → Affirms and upholds the truth that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, rejecting teachings that deny this. →1 John 4:2-3

Reliance on the Holy Spirit → Depends on the Spirit's guidance and power to overcome deception and remain in the truth. →1 John 4:4

Victory Over Falsehood → Lives in the confidence that God's Spirit within is greater than any worldly or deceptive spirit. →1 John 4:4

Alignment with Apostolic Teaching → Listens to and aligns with the message of the apostles,

distinguishing the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. →1 John 4:5–6

Humility and Vigilance →Maintains a humble, watchful attitude, recognizing that even intelligent people can be deceived. →1 John 4:1, 6

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

At the heart of this passage is John's concern for protecting believers from deceptive teaching. He isn't worried about minor theological differences but about fundamental distortions of who Jesus is. For John, getting Jesus right is essential—everything else in Christian faith flows from a proper understanding of Christ as God's Son who came in human flesh.

John's approach to spiritual discernment involves both content and community. The content test is clear: Does this teaching properly acknowledge Jesus Christ? The community aspect appears in verse 6, where John writes, "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us." He points to the apostolic teaching—what had been passed down from those who knew Jesus personally—as a standard for evaluating new ideas. Today, we have this apostolic teaching preserved in Scripture, which serves as our measuring stick for spiritual claims.

What's particularly encouraging about this passage is verse 4: "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." Even when facing sophisticated or appealing false teaching, believers can stand firm because God's Spirit within them is more powerful than any opposing spiritual influence. This doesn't mean discernment is always easy, but it does mean we're not alone in the process. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, the clear teaching of Scripture, and the wisdom of the Christian community, we can navigate even confusing spiritual territory with confidence.

### **QUICK QUIZ:**

John provides a specific test for evaluating spiritual messages: whether they acknowledge "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (4:2). Why do you think John focuses on this particular truth about Jesus rather than other aspects of Christian teaching? What does it tell us about the false teachings that were circulating in his day?

According to verse 5, those who speak "from the viewpoint of the world" find a receptive audience in the world. Can you think of popular spiritual or religious messages today that seem to align more with worldly values than with biblical truth? What makes these messages attractive, and how can we apply John's guidance when encountering them?

Session 7: "**Perfect Love**"- 1 John 4:7-5:21

**Focus:** God's perfect love, our response of love and faith, and confidence in eternal life

**Purpose Statement:** To understand how God's love motivates our love for others and brings assurance of salvation

**READ:** 1 John 4:7-5:21

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[Let Us Love One Another](#)- 1 John 4:7–12

[Grounds of Assurance](#)- 1 John 4:13–16

[Perfect Love](#)- 1 John 4:16–21

[Faith Is the Victory](#)- 1 John 5:1–5

[Call the Witnesses!](#)- 1 John 5:6–12

[Christian Certainties](#)- 1 John 5:13–21

### **LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:**

John writes that "perfect love casts out fear" (4:18). What fears do you still struggle with, and how might a deeper understanding of God's love help address these fears?

The letter ends with a focus on the assurance believers can have (5:13). After studying 1 John, which aspects of this letter have most strengthened your confidence in your relationship with God?

### **OVERVIEW:**

In this final session, John brings together the major themes of his letter—love, faith, and confidence—showing how they all connect to God's perfect love. He explains that God is the source of all love, proven by sending His Son to save us. This divine love becomes the model and motivation for how we should love one another. John also clarifies how faith in Jesus and love for others go hand-in-hand, giving believers confidence in their relationship with God both now and for eternity.

As Corrie ten Boom beautifully expressed, "The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation." John reminds us that God donated His Son out of love, and we are called to donate ourselves in love to others.

### **THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:**

Many people think that loving others is primarily about feelings or being nice. What might surprise you is that in 1 John 4:10-11, John defines love in a radically different way: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Real love, according to John, begins with God's initiative to solve our sin problem through Jesus' sacrifice.

The surprising part is that John doesn't present love as an emotion but as a costly solution to a real problem. God didn't just feel warm feelings toward us—He took action to address what separated us from Him. This challenges our culture's view of love as primarily about acceptance and affirmation. Biblical love certainly includes those elements, but it goes deeper by seeking the true good of others, even when that requires sacrifice. This might mean having difficult conversations, setting healthy boundaries, or helping someone face consequences that lead to growth—all motivated by genuine concern for their well-being rather than our comfort.

### **CULTURE CONNECTION:**

We live in a culture that's simultaneously obsessed with love and confused about what love actually means. Movies, songs, and social media constantly talk about love, usually portraying it as an intense feeling that happens to us rather than a choice we make. Many people feel intense pressure to find "true love" while also witnessing high rates of broken relationships.

Against this backdrop, John's teaching stands out by grounding love not in changeable feelings but in God's unchanging character. "God is love," John declares in 4:16—not just that God feels love or shows love, but that love defines His very nature. This transforms how we understand love. Rather than a scarce resource we must desperately seek from others, love becomes something we've already received abundantly from God, enabling us to share it freely with others.

John's connection between love and fear in 4:18 also speaks powerfully to our anxiety-ridden society: "Perfect love drives out fear." Many people's relationships are shaped by fear—fear of rejection, abandonment, or not being enough. John suggests that experiencing God's perfect love creates a foundation of security that frees us to love others without these fears controlling us. When we know we're completely loved by God, we can risk loving others openly without the fear of rejection that often holds us back.

### **SEEDS FOR THOUGHT:** Exploring the Roots and Fruits of Perfect Love

What does it mean that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16)? How does this shape our understanding of His character and our own identity as His children? —*John doesn't merely say that God loves, but that God is love—love is essential to His very nature. This challenges us to consider whether our theology begins with the holiness or justice of God in isolation, or whether it must be rooted in this revelation of His essential love.*

Why is love for others presented as a non-negotiable evidence of knowing God (4:20-21)? —*John uses strong, almost uncomfortable language—"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates a brother or sister, he is a liar." This reveals that loving God cannot be separated from loving others, especially those within the community of faith.*

How does "perfect love cast out fear" (4:18)? What kind of fear is John referring to, and how does God's love remove it? —*This verse invites a theological and emotional reflection: fear—especially fear of judgment—has no place in a heart fully rooted in God's perfect love.*

What does it mean to "believe in the name of the Son of God" and how does this faith relate to love (5:1-5)? —*John interweaves faith and love, showing they are not opposing paths but complementary responses to God's self-revelation. Believing in Jesus is not merely intellectual assent but*

*trusting in and aligning with the One who is both the embodiment and source of divine love.*

How can we be confident in eternal life (5:11-13)? What gives this assurance its foundation? — *John speaks of assurance—not as arrogance but as the natural result of believing in Jesus and abiding in Him. Many Christians wrestle with doubt and insecurity regarding salvation.*

How does knowing that “we are from God” and that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (5:19) affect how we live as people of love and faith? — *John’s closing thoughts remind us of the stark contrast between those who belong to God and the world under the influence of evil.*

**DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY:** “The Porch Light”

Imagine a cozy little house on a quiet street. Every evening, just before the sun goes down, the porch light clicks on. It’s not the fanciest light—just a warm glow—but it tells you something important: Someone’s home. And someone’s waiting for you.

God’s love is like that porch light. It’s steady, never flickering. It doesn’t wait for us to be perfect. It turns on before we even walk up the driveway. 1 John 4 says, “We love because he first loved us.” God’s love comes first—always. We don’t earn it. We just respond to it.

And when we really know that kind of love—the deep, forever kind—we don’t have to be afraid anymore. Not of judgment. Not of death. Not of anything. “Perfect love drives out fear,” the Bible says (4:18). God’s light is on. He’s not hiding. He wants us to live in that love, and to turn around and show it to others. So today, think of God’s love like a porch light that never goes out. And maybe... you can be that kind of light for someone else. Kind, welcoming, unshakable.

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously “Perfect Love” (1 John 4:7–5:21)

Active Love for Others → Demonstrates selfless, practical love for others as the defining mark of knowing God. → 1 John 4:7–8, 4:11–12, 4:21

Confidence Before God → Lives with assurance and freedom from fear, knowing God’s perfect love casts out fear. → 1 John 4:17–18

Confession of Jesus as God’s Son → Openly confesses and believes that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. → 1 John 4:15, 5:5

Abiding in God → Remains in ongoing relationship with God, marked by mutual indwelling and love. → 1 John 4:12–13, 4:16

Love Initiated by God → Recognizes that love originates with God and responds to His love by loving others. → 1 John 4:19

Obedience to God’s Commands → Keeps God’s commandments, especially to believe in Jesus and love one another. → 1 John 5:2–3

Victory Over the World → Overcomes the world through faith in Jesus Christ. → 1 John 5:4–5

Rejection of Fear → Grows in love that drives out fear, especially fear of judgment. → 1 John 4:18

Intercessory Prayer → Prays for others, especially fellow believers, as an expression of love and concern. → 1 John 5:16

Discernment and Protection → Gains discernment to recognize truth from error and confidence in God’s protection from the evil one. → 1 John 5:18–20

**TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

At the heart of God’s plan for us is one powerful truth: God is love. Not just that He shows love, but that love is part of His very nature. From the beginning, God has been reaching out to us in love—through creation, through Christ, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we understand that kind of

love—not a love we have to earn, but one freely given—we can rest in the security of knowing we are truly His.

But God’s love doesn’t stop with us. His plan is that this perfect love would flow through us to others. Love becomes our way of life—loving family, loving the church, even loving people who are hard to love. When we love like that, it’s evidence that God’s Spirit is alive in us. It brings peace in the present and confidence about the future. We don’t have to be afraid of judgment or death—because His perfect love gives us assurance of eternal life. Living in that love changes everything.

**QUICK QUIZ:**

According to 1 John 4:18, how does God's perfect love affect our fears—especially about judgment or the future? → Follow-up discussion: What does it look like to live with that kind of fearless confidence today?

How can we tell if someone truly loves God, based on how they treat others (1 John 4:20–21)? → Follow-up discussion: Why is loving others such a powerful sign of real faith?

**The book of 2 John** emphasizes the importance of walking in truth and love while standing firm against false teachings that threaten the faith. Historian and theologian F.F. Bruce reflects, "Truth and love are inseparable in the Christian life, for only by adhering to the truth can love flourish as God intended."

Session 8: "**Walking in Truth and Love**"- 2 John 1-6

**Focus:** The connection between truth, love, and obedience in the Christian life

**Purpose Statement:** To understand how Christian love is always grounded in truth and expressed through obedience to God's commands

**READ:** 2 John 1-6

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[Truth and Love](#)- 2 John 1:1-3

[Response, Request, Reminder](#)- 2 John 1:4-6

**LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:**

John addresses his letter to "the elect lady and her children" and mentions loving "in truth" four times in verses 1-4. How does knowing God's truth deepen our love for one another in ways that mere sentiment cannot?

In verse 5, John emphasizes that he's writing about a command "we have had from the beginning." Why do you think Christians need to be continually reminded of the command to love one another, rather than just hearing it once?

**OVERVIEW:**

In this brief letter, John addresses a Christian community (the "chosen lady and her children"), emphasizing the inseparable connection between truth, love, and obedience. Unlike his first letter, 2 John is much shorter but reinforces the same essential message—that genuine Christian faith involves both holding firmly to the truth about Jesus and demonstrating love through obedience to God's commands. John shows that truth and love aren't competing values but complementary aspects of authentic Christian living.

As Augustine once said, "Love without truth is blind; truth without love is cold." John's message reminds us that truth and love must always walk hand in hand in the Christian life.

**THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:**

Many people view truth as rigid and impersonal, while they see love as flexible and relational. What might surprise you in 2 John 1-6 is how strongly John connects these seemingly opposite values. He doesn't just say that truth and love are both important; he presents them as completely

intertwined: "I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands" (vv. 5-6).

The surprising aspect is that John defines love not primarily as an emotion or even as kind actions, but as "walking in obedience to his commands." This challenges our cultural tendency to separate what we believe (truth) from how we treat others (love). For John, authentic love isn't just doing what feels loving; it's acting in accordance with God's definition of love as revealed in His commands. This means that sometimes the most loving action might not seem loving on the surface—like when a parent disciplines a child or when a friend speaks an uncomfortable truth that someone needs to hear. John reminds us that real love is guided by truth, and real truth is always expressed through love.

**CULTURE CONNECTION:**

We live in a society that increasingly views truth as personal and subjective—"my truth" versus "your truth." At the same time, we often define love primarily as acceptance and affirmation of whatever someone believes or chooses. In this cultural context, suggesting that love should be guided by objective truth can seem judgmental or intolerant.

John's message speaks directly to this tension by showing that true love and truth aren't enemies but allies. When John writes about "walking in the truth" (v. 4), he's referring to a way of life built on the reality of who Jesus is and what He taught. This isn't about imposing rigid rules but about aligning our lives with how God designed reality to work—similar to how following the "truth" of gravity keeps us from jumping off buildings.

John's emphasis on "the command we have heard from the beginning" (v. 6) also addresses our culture's fascination with what's new and innovative. While our society often values the latest trends or evolving beliefs over traditional wisdom, John reminds us that some truths are timeless. The command to love one another—grounded in Jesus' teaching and example—remains as relevant today as when it was first given. In a rapidly changing world, this connection between enduring truth and authentic love provides a stable foundation for navigating complex relational and ethical challenges.

**SEEDS FOR THOUGHT:** 2 John 1-6

John introduces himself as "the elder" writing to "the elect lady and her children" (v.1). What might these designations tell us about John's relationship with this community and his understanding of authority? —*John's self-identification as "elder"*

suggests humble authority based on spiritual maturity rather than demanding recognition based on apostolic office. This indicates spiritual leadership characterized by relational wisdom, not mere positional power. The designation of recipients as "elect lady and her children" likely refers to a local church and its members, portraying the church as both dignified (a lady) and beloved (elected by God). This imagery establishes church communities as family units under God's special care and selection, worthy of respectful address.

John emphasizes that he loves the recipients "in truth" and that others "who know the truth" also love them (vv.1-2). How does this connection between truth and love challenge contemporary notions that often separate these qualities? —By repeatedly linking truth and love, John challenges both truth-without-love approaches (rigid orthodoxy lacking compassion) and love-without-truth sentimentality (permissive acceptance without moral boundaries). For John, authentic love always operates within truth's framework, while genuine truth always expresses itself lovingly. This confronts contemporary tendencies to pit doctrinal fidelity against loving inclusion, showing they properly function as complementary, not competing, virtues. Truth provides the essential structure within which genuine love flourishes.

What significance lies in John's statement that the truth "abides in us and will be with us forever" (v.2)? How does this permanence affect our confidence in Christian teaching? —John portrays truth not merely as information we possess but as living reality that actively dwells within believers through the Spirit. Truth's permanent abiding quality provides stability amid cultural shifts and intellectual fashions. This perspective creates confidence—the fundamental realities of Christian faith aren't temporary insights subject to revision but eternal verities that transcend changing opinions. Believers can trust that what was true for first-century Christians remains equally true for twenty-first century followers.

The blessing John pronounces in verse 3 connects "grace, mercy, and peace" with "truth and love." Why does he emphasize this particular combination of divine gifts? —This unique blessing reveals that God's gifts flow specifically within the balanced framework of truth and love. Grace (unmerited favor) operates through truthful understanding of our condition and God's solution. Mercy (compassionate help) expresses genuine love toward the undeserving. Peace (wholeness and harmony) results when truth and love properly interact. This teaches that spiritual blessings flourish only where truth and love coexist—neither rigid legalism nor boundless permissiveness creates the environment where divine gifts properly function.

What does John's expression of joy at finding "some of your children walking in the truth" (v.4) reveal about the challenges facing early Christian communities? —John's qualified commendation ("some of your children") suggests the community included both faithful adherents and potential wanderers from apostolic teaching. This partial

affirmation acknowledges the perennial reality that not all professing believers maintain consistent faithfulness. Early churches, like contemporary ones, experienced varying degrees of commitment to apostolic truth. John's joy over partial faithfulness models realistic leadership that celebrates existing obedience while implicitly encouraging greater consistency throughout the community.

How does John's reminder about the command to "love one another" being "from the beginning" (vv.5-6) address potential claims of new, progressive revelation? —By emphasizing the foundational, unchanged nature of the love command, John counters any suggestion that spiritual advancement means moving beyond basic ethical requirements. This refutes proto-gnostic tendencies that prioritized special knowledge above moral transformation. The reference to "from the beginning" grounds Christian ethics in Jesus' original teaching rather than recent innovations. This creates a critical standard: authentic spiritual development deepens commitment to foundational commands rather than replacing them with supposedly superior insights.

In verse 6, John defines love specifically as "walking according to his commandments." How does this definition challenge contemporary understandings that often separate love from obedience? —John's explicit connection between love and obedience confronts the modern tendency to define love primarily through emotion or affirmation rather than alignment with divine standards. True love isn't merely feeling positively toward others but actively pursuing their ultimate good according to God's design. This definition establishes that genuine compassion operates within moral boundaries rather than disregarding them. Love and law aren't opponents—authentic love fulfills God's commands rather than seeking exemption from them.

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: The Train Tracks of Truth and Love**

Imagine a train speeding down the tracks. The tracks must be perfectly aligned, or the train will derail. Now, think of those two rails as truth and love—both are essential for the Christian life. If we try to follow truth without love, we become harsh and legalistic. If we focus on love without truth, we end up accepting anything, even if it's harmful. The key is keeping both together.

John emphasizes this in 2 John 1-6. He reminds us that "walking in love" isn't just about feelings—it means obeying God's commands (v. 6). And those commands are rooted in truth. Love without truth can lead us away from God's way, but truth without love can make us cold and unkind. The two must go hand in hand.

Think about a time when you had to speak the truth to someone, but you had to do it with love. Maybe it was correcting a friend in a way that wouldn't hurt them or setting boundaries with

kindness. That balance isn't always easy, but it's what God calls us to.

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Walking in Truth and Love" (2 John 1-6)

Commitment to Truth → Lives in alignment with God's revealed truth, holding firmly to the teachings of Christ. →2 John 1:1-2, 4

Active Love for Others → Demonstrates genuine love for fellow believers, rooted in truth and expressed in action. →2 John 1:5

Obedience to God's Commands → Shows love by walking according to God's commandments, not separating love from obedience. →2 John 1:6

Faithfulness → Continues steadfastly in the faith, bringing joy to other believers through consistent Christian living. →2 John 1:4

Discernment → Exercises wisdom and caution, especially regarding whom to support and welcome, to guard the truth. →2 John 1:7-8 (context)

Joy in Others' Faithfulness → Finds deep joy in seeing others walk in truth and love, reflecting shared values in the Christian community.

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

At the heart of this passage is John's concern that believers "walk in the truth" (v. 4) and "walk in love" (v. 6). His repeated use of "walking" imagery suggests that truth and love aren't static concepts but active ways of living that affect our daily decisions and relationships. Like two legs working together to move us forward, truth and love together enable us to progress in our Christian journey.

John's greeting beautifully captures this dual emphasis: "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love" (v. 3). Notice that God's blessings come to us "in truth and love"—not just one or the other. When we separate truth from love, we distort both. Truth without love becomes harsh and condemning; love without truth becomes empty sentiment that may actually harm rather than help others.

The encouraging message here is that we don't have to reinvent what truth or love means. John points us back to "the command we have had from the beginning" (v. 5)—Jesus' teaching that we should love one another as He loved us. Jesus himself perfectly embodied both truth and love, never compromising one for the other. When we struggle with how to balance these values, we can look to His example. Did Jesus always speak truth? Absolutely. Did He always act in love?

Without question. By keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, we learn to walk the same path of truth

and love that characterized His life and should characterize ours as well.

## Session 9: "Guarding the Faith"- 2 John 7-13

**Focus:** Discernment regarding false teaching and maintaining appropriate boundaries

**Purpose Statement:** To learn how to protect the church from deception while maintaining Christian hospitality

**READ:** [2 John 7-13](#)

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[Confessional Christianity](#)- **2 John 1:7–13**

[The Danger of Deception](#)- **2 John 1:7–13**

### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

John warns about "deceivers" who deny Christ came in the flesh (v.7). What modern teachings or philosophies have you encountered that subtly deny core Christian truths about Jesus? How can we recognize these deceptions?

In verses 10-11, John gives strong instructions not to welcome false teachers. How do we balance this command with Christian hospitality and the call to evangelize? When is it appropriate to set boundaries with those who oppose Christian truth?

### OVERVIEW:

In this session, we explore the Apostle John's heartfelt warning to the early church about the dangers of false teachers and the importance of staying rooted in Christ's teachings. John emphasizes discernment and the need to maintain boundaries to protect the faith community. As he writes, "Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2 John 8). This passage reminds us that guarding the faith is not just about defense but also about preserving the joy and truth of the gospel.

### THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:

John's instruction in verse 10, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them," may seem harsh at first glance. In the context of the early church, hospitality was a cornerstone of Christian life. However, John is not discouraging kindness but rather urging believers to avoid endorsing or enabling false teachers. By welcoming such individuals, the church risked legitimizing their deceptive teachings. This teaching challenges us to balance love and truth, showing hospitality without compromising our faith.

### CULTURE CONNECTION:

In today's world, false teachings can come in many forms—social media influencers, popular ideologies, or even well-meaning but misguided individuals. This passage reminds us to be discerning about the messages we consume and share. Just as John urged the early church to protect their community, we too must guard our hearts and minds, ensuring that our faith remains anchored in Christ's truth.

### SEEDS FOR THOUGHT: 2 John 7-13

In verse 7, John identifies "many deceivers" who deny "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." Why was this specific doctrinal error so dangerous, and what modern parallels might exist today? —*Denial of Christ's physical incarnation undermined both His genuine humanity and the reality of His physical suffering for sin. This Docetic heresy effectively denied the gospel itself by spiritualizing Jesus and rejecting His bodily sacrifice. Modern parallels include teachings that emphasize Christ as merely exemplary rather than redemptive, philosophies that separate spiritual "truths" from historical events, and approaches that prioritize subjective spiritual experience over objective revelation. Each similarly diminishes the concrete, historical reality of God entering human existence to provide actual atonement.*

John uses strong language, calling these teachers "deceivers" and "antichrist" (v.7). How does this help us understand the proper balance between charitable dialogue and decisive rejection of harmful teaching? —*John's uncompromising language demonstrates that genuine love includes protecting communities from destructive influence. While Christians should engage respectfully with different perspectives, certain teachings so fundamentally distort the gospel that they require clear identification as dangerous. This balanced approach distinguishes between secondary theological differences that permit charitable dialogue and core distortions that require decisive rejection. True spiritual leadership includes the courage to identify teaching that undermines salvation itself, regardless of how unpopular such discernment might be.*

What does John mean by "going on ahead" in verse 9, and how does this warn against claims of progressive spiritual insight? —*"Going on ahead"*

*describes teachers claiming advanced spiritual knowledge beyond apostolic teaching. John warns that such supposed progression actually constitutes regression—moving away from rather than deeper into relationship with God. This timeless principle challenges all claims of spiritual innovation that require abandoning foundational gospel truths. True spiritual growth always deepens understanding of established revelation rather than contradicting it. The desire to appear cutting-edge spiritually can actually sever connection with authentic Christian faith.*

*How does John connect "abiding in the teaching" with having "both the Father and the Son" (v.9)? What does this reveal about the relationship between doctrine and spiritual life? —John establishes that doctrinal faithfulness directly affects relationship with God—incorrect teaching about Christ inevitably damages communion with both Father and Son. This counters the notion that doctrine and spirituality exist in separate compartments. Beliefs shape relationship; theological error has spiritual consequences. This doesn't demand perfect understanding but persistent commitment to apostolic teaching about Christ's nature and work. Genuine relationship with God happens within the boundaries of truthful understanding, not apart from it.*

*In verses 10-11, John gives strong instructions about not receiving or greeting false teachers. How might these boundaries be appropriately applied in contemporary contexts? —John prohibits extending hospitality that would facilitate the spread of false teaching or imply approval of it. These boundaries shouldn't be applied to all theological disagreements but specifically to fundamental distortions of Christ's nature and work. Modern application involves discernment about platforms, partnerships, and endorsements that might legitimize harmful teaching. This doesn't prohibit evangelistic engagement with those holding different beliefs but addresses formal association that grants credibility to deceptive teachers.*

*How do we reconcile John's warning against welcoming false teachers with the Christian call to hospitality and evangelism? What principles might guide this discernment? —This apparent tension resolves by recognizing John addresses specific circumstances—teachers claiming*

*Christian identity while fundamentally distorting its message. Different principles apply to those honestly seeking or holding different beliefs without claiming Christian authority. Key discernment questions include: Does the interaction enable harmful influence over vulnerable believers? Does it communicate endorsement of deceptive teaching? Does it provide resources that further false doctrines? Christian hospitality remains vital but must be exercised with wisdom that protects spiritual integrity.*

*John mentions his preference for face-to-face communication over writing (vv.12-13). What might this reveal about the importance of personal presence in addressing difficult issues and building community? —John's desire for personal interaction suggests that sensitive matters benefit from direct engagement where tone, expression, and relationship dynamics enrich communication. Written instruction serves important purposes but cannot fully replace in-person community. This reminds us that while digital communication offers convenience, formative spiritual conversation and conflict resolution often require personal presence. The mention of "complete joy" through in-person fellowship suggests something irreplaceable happens when believers gather physically that cannot be duplicated through distance communication.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: The Wrong Delivery**

*Imagine you're expecting an important package—maybe a new phone or a special gift. The delivery driver knocks, and you open the door. But as you glance at the box, something seems off. The label has your name, but the sender is unfamiliar. You check again and realize—it's a scam package! If you accept it, you might be letting in something harmful.*

*John warns us about a similar danger in 2 John 7-13. False teachers may look like they're delivering truth, but if their message doesn't align with Jesus, it's a spiritual scam. John even tells believers not to welcome or support them (v. 10), because spreading false teaching is serious. At the same time, we're called to be hospitable to those who do bring God's truth. The challenge is knowing the difference.*

*Think about a time when you had to be careful about what you allowed into your life—maybe a*

questionable message on social media, a misleading news story, or bad advice from someone well-meaning. Discernment means checking everything against God's truth before we accept it.

### **Reflection Questions:**

How can you recognize false teaching when you hear it?

How can we balance kindness with protecting our faith?

What are some practical ways to guard your heart and mind against deception?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Guarding the Faith" (2 John 7-13)

Vigilance → Staying alert and watching oneself to avoid deception and spiritual loss. → 2 John 8

Doctrinal Discernment → Testing teachings and teachers, refusing to accept or support those who deny Christ's true identity. → 2 John 7, 10-11

Abiding in Christ's Teaching → Remaining steadfast in the original apostolic teaching about Jesus, not moving beyond it. → 2 John 9

Protection of Community → Guarding the faith and the church by not enabling or endorsing false teachers. → 2 John 10-11

Perseverance → Continuing in truth and love so as not to lose spiritual reward. → 2 John 8

Commitment to Truth and Love → Holding together truth and love by obeying Christ's commands while also protecting the community. → 2 John 7, 9

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

Guarding the faith is not about building walls but about cultivating a strong foundation. John's words remind us that the church is a community of truth and love, and both are essential for its health. By staying rooted in Christ's teachings, we protect not only ourselves but also the generations to come.

God's plan for His church is one of unity and purity. While we are called to love and welcome others, we must also be vigilant against anything that could lead us astray. This balance of grace and truth reflects the heart of God, who desires His people to walk in love while holding fast to His Word.

### **QUICK QUIZ:**

Why does John warn against welcoming those who do not bring Christ's teaching? How can we apply this principle today without being unkind? What does it mean to "continue in the teaching of Christ" (2 John 9)? How can this guide our daily decisions and interactions?

**The book of 3 John** highlights the importance of hospitality and support for faithful workers of the Gospel while warning against self-centeredness and divisive behavior within the church. Biblical scholar William Barclay explains, "The elder sets forth a beautiful example of Christian friendship and fellowship, urging believers to act as coworkers in the truth."

### Session 10: "**Walking in Truth: Christian Character on Display**"- 3 John 1-8

**Focus:** Gaius as a model of faithful Christian hospitality and support for ministry

**Purpose Statement:** To explore how genuine faith expresses itself through practical support of fellow believers and gospel workers

**READ:** [3 John 1-8](#)

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[Walk in the Truth – Part One](#)- [3 John 1:1-8](#)

#### **LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:**

John rejoices greatly in verse 3 when he hears that Gaius is "walking in the truth." Beyond church attendance and Bible reading, what does "walking in the truth" look like in the daily life of a mature Christian?

Verses 5-8 commend Gaius for his hospitality toward traveling ministers, calling such support "fellow workers for the truth." In what ways can seniors in today's church become "fellow workers for the truth" even if they cannot actively serve in frontline ministry?

#### **OVERVIEW:**

In this session, we delve into the Apostle John's letter to Gaius, a faithful believer whose life exemplified Christian hospitality and support for ministry. John commends Gaius for his unwavering commitment to walking in truth and for his generosity toward

traveling gospel workers. As John writes, "Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you" (3 John 5). This passage highlights how genuine faith is demonstrated through practical acts of love and service.

#### **THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:**

In verse 7, John notes that the gospel workers "went out for the sake of the Name, receiving no help from the pagans." This underscores the early church's reliance on the support of fellow believers rather than external sources. It may surprise us to realize how much the spread of the gospel depended on the sacrificial giving and hospitality of ordinary Christians like Gaius. This teaching challenges us to consider how we can actively support ministry efforts today, even in small but meaningful ways.

#### **CULTURE CONNECTION:**

In a world where individualism often overshadows community, Gaius's example reminds us of the importance of supporting one another in faith. Whether it's hosting missionaries, donating to ministry efforts, or simply encouraging fellow believers, our actions can have a ripple effect in advancing the gospel. This passage calls us to be intentional in building a culture of generosity and hospitality within our own communities.

#### **SEEDS FOR THOUGHT:**

What does John's commendation of Gaius teach us about walking in truth? —*In 3 John 3-4, John rejoices because Gaius is living out the truth, not just believing it. This shows that walking in truth involves a visible, faithful life rooted in integrity and love. It challenges us to examine whether our actions reflect the truth we profess.*

How is Christian hospitality portrayed in 3 John 5–6, and why does it matter? —*Gaius is praised for showing hospitality “to strangers,” especially gospel workers. His generosity reflects God’s heart and supports the advance of the kingdom. This teaches us that practical acts of kindness are a vital expression of faith and partnership in the gospel.*

Why is it important to support fellow believers and gospel workers, according to verse 8? —*John urges believers to support such people “so that we may be fellow workers for the truth.” This highlights a shared mission: even if we are not on the frontlines, we play a critical role through our encouragement, resources, and hospitality. Faith is not just personal; it’s collaborative.*

What can we learn from Gaius’s example about how faith should shape our relationships? —*Gaius’s faith showed itself in tangible care and love. He built trust, offered help freely, and lived in a way that others could witness. His story invites us to reflect on whether our own relationships reflect the selfless, truth-based love of Christ.*

How might we cultivate a lifestyle that actively supports others in their walk with God? —*By being attentive to the needs of those around us—offering time, prayer, encouragement, or material help—we live out our faith. Gaius didn’t wait for ideal conditions; he simply responded in love. Likewise, we’re called to show up for others with consistent faithfulness and joy.*

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: "The Open Door Diner"**

Imagine a small-town diner known by everyone in the community—a place where the owner always leaves one table open, even

if the restaurant is full. When a weary traveler or a hard-working community helper stops by, they are welcomed without question. You might recall a news story about a local restaurant that became a refuge during a severe winter storm, offering free meals and a warm place to rest for people in need. That open table wasn’t just about food; it was a sign of genuine care and trust.

In 3 John, Gaius shows us what true Christian hospitality looks like. Instead of keeping his home closed off, he opened his door to fellow believers and gospel workers. In the same way, our simple acts of kindness—an open door, a shared meal, or a kind word—speak powerfully about our faith. They remind us that true Christian character is not just about what we say, but also about how we support and care for one another, just as the diner owner supported those in need during that storm.

### **Reflection Questions**

How have you experienced the impact of someone’s open hospitality in your life or community?

What are some simple ways you might “open your door”—both literally or figuratively—to show kindness and support to others?

In what ways does practicing hospitality deepen your faith and reflect the love of Christ?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Walking in Truth: Christian Character on Display" (3 John 1–8)

Faithfulness to Truth → Consistently walks in and upholds the truth, living with integrity and sincerity. → 3 John 1:3–4

Hospitality → Welcomes and supports fellow believers, especially traveling teachers and missionaries. → 3 John 1:5–8

Love in Action → Demonstrates love not just in words but through practical support and generosity. → 3 John 1:5–6

Support for Gospel Workers → Provides for and partners with those spreading the gospel, treating them “in a manner worthy of God.” → 3 John 1:6–8

Good Reputation → Earns the commendation of others for consistent Christian conduct and service. → 3 John 1:6, 1:12

Imitation of Good → Intentionally follows positive examples, striving to do what is good and godly. → 3 John 1:11

Encouragement of Others → Brings joy to other believers and leaders by living out the truth faithfully. → 3 John 1:3–4

### **TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:**

Walking in truth is not just about personal integrity; it's about living out our faith in ways that bless others. Gaius's life serves as a powerful reminder that even seemingly small acts of kindness can have eternal significance. By supporting gospel workers and showing hospitality, we become partners in the mission of spreading God's truth.

God's plan for His church involves every believer playing a role in advancing His kingdom. Whether through prayer, financial support, or acts of service, we are all called to contribute to the work of the gospel. Gaius's example encourages us to embrace this calling with joy and faithfulness, knowing that our efforts, no matter how small, are part of a much larger divine purpose.

### **QUICK QUIZ:**

How does Gaius's example of hospitality and support for gospel workers challenge us to live out our faith today?

What does it mean to "work together for the truth" (3 John 8)? How can we apply this principle in our daily lives?

## **Session 11: "Power and Humility in the Church"** - 3 John 9-15

**Focus:** The contrast between Diotrephes' self-promotion and Demetrius' good testimony

**Purpose Statement:** To examine the dangers of pride in church leadership and the beauty of humble service

**READ:** [3 John 9-15](#)

*Alistair Begg Sermon*

[The Commendation of Demetrius](#) - **3 John 1:9-14**

[The Condemnation of Diotrephes](#) - **3 John 1:9-10**

### **LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:**

Diotrephes is described as someone who "likes to put himself first" (v.9). What are some subtle ways that the desire for prominence, recognition, or control can manifest in church settings today, even among well-meaning believers?

John mentions he has "much to write" but prefers to speak "face to face" (v.13-14). In our digital age, what are the benefits of face-to-face communication in addressing church conflicts or mentoring relationships that cannot be achieved through other means?

### **OVERVIEW:**

This session highlights the stark contrast between two individuals in the early church: Diotrephes, who sought personal power and recognition, and Demetrius, who earned a good reputation through his humility and faithfulness. The Apostle John warns against the destructive nature of pride in leadership while commending the beauty of humble service. As John writes, "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God" (3

John 11). This passage calls us to reflect on the kind of legacy we want to leave in our faith communities.

### **THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:**

Diotrephes' behavior, described in verse 9, reveals a troubling reality: even in the early church, there were leaders who prioritized their own status over the well-being of the community. John writes that Diotrephes "loves to be first" and even spreads malicious gossip to undermine others. This may surprise us, as we often idealize the early church as a perfect model of unity. However, this passage reminds us that pride and self-promotion are timeless challenges that can disrupt any community. It also emphasizes the importance of addressing such issues with courage and grace.

### **CULTURE CONNECTION:**

In today's world, the temptation to seek recognition and power is amplified by social media and other platforms that reward self-promotion. This passage challenges us to examine our own motives and to value humility and service over personal gain. Demetrius' example reminds us that true influence comes not from seeking the spotlight but from living a life of integrity and faithfulness.

**SEEDS FOR THOUGHT:** Power and Humility in the Church (3 John 9-15)

What does Diotrephes teach us about the corrupting nature of pride when left unchecked in church leadership? —*Diotrephes "loves to be first" (v. 9), rejecting apostolic authority and refusing hospitality to faithful believers. This love of prominence is not just personal arrogance—it is spiritual rebellion that fractures fellowship and distorts the gospel witness of the church. His behavior reflects the age-old temptation*

to seize control rather than serve. Leaders today must guard against similar impulses by regularly examining their motives and submitting themselves to the pattern of Christ, who “came not to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45).

How does the commendation of Demetrius model the kind of character we should affirm and follow in church life? —In contrast to Diotrephes, Demetrius is “well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself” (v. 12). His character aligns with both communal testimony and gospel integrity. This suggests that spiritual authority should not rest merely on charisma or position but on consistent, observable faithfulness. Churches are called to honor those who quietly serve in humility, reflecting the character of Christ rather than seeking the platform of Diotrephes.

Why is the pursuit of humility not weakness, but a mark of true spiritual authority in the body of Christ? —Humility is often misunderstood as passivity or lack of ambition. However, in the biblical sense, humility is strength under submission—power surrendered to the purposes of God. The church is healthiest when leadership reflects Christ’s example of washing feet (John 13) rather than demanding titles. This passage in 3 John implicitly calls the church to discern the difference between domineering control and spiritual maturity. True authority is rooted in love, truth, and service.

What role does accountability play in preserving the church from the influence of individuals like Diotrephes? —John intends to address Diotrephes’ behavior “when I come” (v. 10), indicating that spiritual leaders must be prepared to confront sin openly and courageously. This underscores the importance of biblical accountability structures—elders, community, and

Scripture—that resist manipulation and ensure leadership remains Christ-centered. Without such correction, pride grows unchecked and spiritual harm follows.

How do we cultivate a church culture where Demetrius-like character is celebrated more than Diotrephes-like power? —Communities often reflect what they honor. If leadership is celebrated for visibility, charisma, or control, the body will mirror those values. But if the church lifts up humble servants, encourages integrity, and recognizes Christlikeness over prestige, it will naturally foster a healthier, more faithful community. Creating space for testimonies, mentoring, and shared leadership can help cultivate such a culture.

### **DEVOTIONAL ALLEGORY: "The Two BBQ Organizers"**

Imagine your local community gathering for a big summer BBQ. Two volunteers are in charge of running the event. One of them, let’s call him John, loves to be in the spotlight. He’s always talking about how great he is at organizing the event and makes sure everyone knows it was his idea. He even stops others from sharing their ideas because he believes his is the only one that matters.

Then there’s Peter, the other volunteer, who works quietly in the background. Peter makes sure every helper feels important. He welcomes suggestions, gives credit to others, and gently nudges the team along. At the end of the day, while John is remembered for his loud self-promotion, it’s Peter’s humble service that brought the team together and made the BBQ a warm, united success.

In 3 John 9-15, we see a similar contrast. Diotrephes, like John, seeks to promote himself and rules with pride, causing division in the church. Meanwhile, Demetrius is

remembered for his good testimony—his actions show humble service and true love for others. This story reminds us that real power in the church comes from serving quietly and selflessly, instead of seeking personal acclaim.

### Reflection Questions

What does the story of the two organizers teach us about the value of humility in leadership?

Can you recall a time when someone's humble service made a difference in your life or community?

How can we encourage and celebrate humble service in our own church gatherings and community events?

**SERIOUSLY THINKING-** Growing Traits in the Person Who Takes Seriously "Power and Humility in the Church" (3 John 9–15)

**Humility** →Rejects self-promotion and the desire to be first, choosing instead to serve others and submit to godly authority. →3 John 9–10

**Respect for Authority** →Honors apostolic and spiritual authority, rather than rejecting or undermining it. →3 John 9

**Hospitality** →Welcomes and supports fellow believers, especially those serving in ministry, despite opposition. →3 John 10

**Imitation of Good** →Intentionally follows positive examples (like Demetrius), not negative ones (like Diotrephes). →3 John 11

**Discernment** →Distinguishes between good and evil in leadership and conduct, refusing to imitate what is evil. →3 John 11

**Good Reputation** →Lives in such a way that even outsiders and the wider church community can affirm their character. →3 John 12

**Peacemaking** →Seeks to promote peace and blessing within the church, rather than division and strife. →3 John 14–15

### TAKE-HOME THOUGHT:

The contrast between Diotrephes and Demetrius serves as a powerful reminder of the kind of leaders and followers God desires in His church. Pride and self-promotion may bring temporary recognition, but they ultimately harm the community and dishonor God. On the other hand, humility and faithful service reflect the heart of Christ and build up the body of believers.

God's plan for His church is one of unity and mutual support. By following the example of Demetrius, we can contribute to a culture of encouragement and integrity. This passage invites us to consider how we can use our influence—whether great or small—to serve others and glorify God.

### QUICK QUIZ:

How does Diotrephes' behavior serve as a warning for church leaders and members today?

What qualities in Demetrius' life made him a positive example for the early church, and how can we emulate those qualities in our own lives?

**The historical context of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John** is tied closely to the Apostle John and the challenges faced by the early Christian church in the late first century. Tradition holds that John, likely the last surviving apostle, wrote these epistles while residing in or near Ephesus, around 85–95 AD. The church was grappling with internal and external pressures, including the rise of false teachings such as Gnosticism, which denied the incarnation of Christ and undermined core Christian doctrines.

John's writings reflect his pastoral concern for the spiritual health of the community. In 1 John, he addresses the need for discernment, truth, and love to combat these heresies. In 2 John, he cautions against extending hospitality to false teachers who might lead believers astray. Finally, 3 John shows a more personal side, dealing with matters of hospitality, church authority, and interpersonal conflict within the community. These letters provide insight into the apostle's deep love for the church and his firm resolve

to safeguard its unity and doctrinal purity during a tumultuous time.

### **What were the main conflicts in the early church during this time?**

Many conflicts were tied to theological disagreements, cultural tensions, and challenges to church unity. One of the major issues was the rise of false teachings, particularly Gnosticism, which denied the humanity of Christ and distorted foundational Christian beliefs. These heresies created divisions and confusion among believers, prompting John to emphasize truth and sound doctrine.

Additionally, the church contended with conflicts over authority and leadership, as seen in 3 John, where a figure named Diotrephes is mentioned for rejecting apostolic guidance and acting in a self-serving manner. There were also challenges in maintaining fellowship and love within a diverse and growing community, as cultural differences between Jewish and Gentile believers sometimes led to tension. Amid these struggles, the early church was also navigating its identity within a hostile Roman Empire, striving to stay faithful under external persecution while addressing internal divisions. These conflicts shaped much of the pastoral and theological focus of John's epistles.

**Gnosticism**, a prominent heresy during the early church, encompassed a variety of beliefs that diverged significantly from orthodox Christian doctrine. **Some key examples include:**

**Dualism:** Gnostics often believed in a strict dualism between spirit and matter, viewing the physical world as inherently evil and created by a lesser, flawed deity (sometimes called the Demiurge). Only the spiritual realm was considered pure and good.

**Denial of Christ's Humanity:** Many Gnostics taught that Christ did not truly take on human flesh because matter was seen as corrupt. Instead, they claimed He only appeared to be human (a belief known as Docetism).

**Salvation through Secret Knowledge:** Gnostics believed that salvation came not through faith in Christ's atoning work, but through acquiring hidden, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) about the divine realm. This knowledge was said to be accessible only to a select group of enlightened individuals.

**Rejection of Resurrection:** Because they viewed the material body as corrupt, Gnostics often rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection, which is a core teaching of Christianity.

**Divine Sparks:** Some Gnostic sects taught that within certain people were divine "sparks" trapped in the material world, and the goal of salvation was to liberate these sparks to reunite with the divine realm.

These beliefs caused significant conflict within the early church as they directly contradicted foundational teachings about the incarnation, resurrection, and the nature of salvation. This is why the Apostle John and other early church leaders strongly opposed such teachings in their writings.

### **How do these early conflicts influence contemporary Christianity?**

The early church conflicts, like those surrounding Gnosticism and false teachings, continue to shape contemporary Christianity in significant ways. These struggles led to the development of core doctrines, creeds, and a commitment to preserving the integrity of Scripture. For instance, the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed emerged as responses to early heresies, and they remain vital confessions of faith for many Christian traditions today.

Moreover, the emphasis on discernment and guarding against false teachings persists, with churches actively working to address challenges such as modern relativism, secularism, and theological distortions. The call to balance truth and love—seen in John's writings—still resonates as Christians navigate cultural and moral complexities, striving to hold onto biblical convictions while fostering unity and compassion. The foundation laid by the early church provides a roadmap for dealing with similar tensions and challenges in our present age.

### **What historical events contributed to these early church conflicts?**

Several historical events contributed to the early church conflicts during the time of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John:

#### **The Spread of Christianity Beyond Jewish**

**Communities:** As the Gospel spread among Gentiles, cultural and theological tensions emerged between Jewish and non-Jewish believers. These differences led to disputes over practices such as circumcision, dietary laws, and the application of the Mosaic Law, forcing the church to address issues of unity and inclusivity (e.g., Acts 15 and the Council of Jerusalem).

**The Rise of False Teachings:** During the late first century, movements like Gnosticism began to infiltrate Christian communities. These teachings questioned the nature of Christ, salvation, and creation, creating division and prompting leaders like John to reaffirm orthodox doctrines.

**The Persecution of Christians:** Under Roman emperors such as Nero and Domitian, Christians faced severe persecution, which tested the faith of believers and caused both external pressure and internal anxiety. Persecution sometimes led to conflicts over who could be trusted within the community and how the church should respond to threats.

**The Decline of Apostolic Leadership:** As the first generation of apostles and eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry passed away, the church faced a leadership vacuum. This gap made communities more vulnerable to division, as seen in the power struggles within 3 John, where Diotrephes rejected apostolic authority.

**Geographical and Cultural Expansion:** Christianity's growth across different regions introduced diverse languages, customs, and philosophies into the church, sometimes leading to misunderstandings and the need to establish clear theological boundaries.

These historical developments laid the groundwork for the early church's need to navigate doctrinal

clarity, community integrity, and faithful perseverance in the face of internal and external challenges. The writings of John and other New Testament leaders arose directly from this context.