



The Basics of Christian Life - Lesson II

(www.mensgroup.org - "Original Study")

INTRODUCTION to Starting Study:

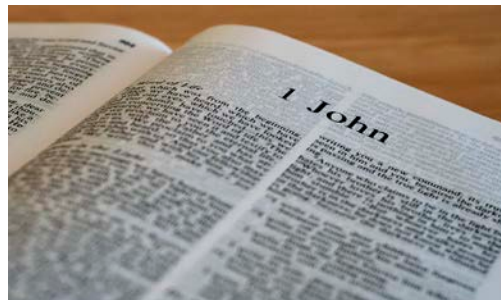
Study 1: Knowing God

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The Basics of Christian Life – Study Guide II

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Study 1: KNOWING GOD

Author Eugene Peterson writes, “The two most difficult things to get straight in life are LOVE and GOD.”

More often than not, the mess people make of their lives can be traced to failure in one or both of these areas. Putting it bluntly, he states, *“If we want to deal with God in the right way, we have to learn to love the right way. If we’re going to love the right way, we have to learn to deal with God the right way. God and love cannot be separated.”* And that, in a nutshell, is the underlying thesis of **the Book of First John** which we will study in this lesson.

In the person of Jesus Christ, GOD and LOVE are inextricably linked. But there have always been people who don’t like being pinned down by this truth. So, throughout history, they’ve created their own ideas about GOD and their own ideas about LOVE, which subsequently has placed them in direct conflict with a central tenant of Christianity: Christ’s atoning sacrifice on Calvary. Toward the end of the first century, there was just such a movement that came to be known as Gnosticism (the word itself is a derivation of the Greek word for *knowledge*). The Gnostics taught that salvation was gained through knowledge rather than through Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. These Gnostics, as they were called, while accepting that Christ may have been a real person, actually “denied that he was the Son of God.” Rather, they held him up as the embodiment of someone who had gained salvation through knowledge. To the Gnostics, knowledge was all-important.

To the Apostle John, knowledge was also of critical importance, but always and only as it kept faith with the TRUTH. And as an eyewitness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Apostle John was keen to ensure that his readers KNEW the truth about Jesus Christ. He actually uses the word knowledge in some form or another over “thirty times” in the **Book of First John**.

In Chapter One, he addresses the importance of knowledge while presenting the first of three imperatives that constitute the “Basics of Christian Life” as outlined in his letter of **First John**.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How highly would you rate “knowledge” in helping you make decisions and chart direction in your life?

Why did you rate knowledge as you did?

Is there a difference between “head knowledge” and “experiential knowledge” (what we experience with our five senses; seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling & touching)? Why is there a difference?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read 1 John 1:1-10 ¹ *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—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.* ² *The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.* ³ *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.* ⁴ *We write this to make our joy complete.*

⁵ *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.* ⁶ *If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.* ⁷ *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

⁸ *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰ *If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.*

Holy Bible - New International Version

As an eyewitness to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, how many of the “five senses” does John reference in his opening paragraph when describing his knowledge of Christ?

1. Verses **1 through 7** of First John communicate a theme very similar to the one contained in the first twelve verses of the Gospel of John. Compare verses **1 through 7** of First John with verses **1 through 12** of the Gospel of John. Who is John referring to as the “Word of Life” in verse 1?

2. What does John mean in Verse 5 when he says, “*God is light*”? (*From the Gospel of John, read Verses 19,20 & 21 of Chapter 3, and Verses 35 & 36 of Chapter 12 to gain additional insight and context*)

3. John uses five “IF” statements in Verses 6 through 10 to address three falsehoods the Gnostics put forward regarding sin, how it affects our relationship with God, and the role Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary plays in addressing our sin. What are those three falsehoods?

False Claim #1 (Verses 6 & 7):

False Claim #2 (Verses 8 & 9):

False Claim #3 (Verse 10):

APPLICATION

1. In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes: *“Everyone has people who we like and others we do not like. ‘If we walk in the light as God is in the light,’ God will give us communion with people for who we have no natural affinity.”* Oswald, as a proper Englishman, used the gentle phrase ‘no natural affinity’ as a way of referring to those in life we may find unappealing for any number of reasons. He goes on the challenge us as Christians to *“show to the other man what God has shown to you.”*

Think of the grace, mercy, forgiveness, understanding, and forbearance God has shown to you. Who in your circle of life might be someone for whom you have ‘no natural affinity’? How in the days ahead might you show the same grace, mercy, forgiveness, etc. to that individual that God has shown to you?

2. Chambers goes on to write that *“the expression of Christian character is not doing, but Godlikeness.”* *If the Spirit of God has transformed you within, you will exhibit Divine characteristics in your life, not human characteristics. God’s life in us expresses itself as **GOD’s life**, not as human life trying to be Godly.”* Consider again what interest God might have in someone for whom you have ‘no natural affinity’. Is His interest in them “any different” than His interest in you? How should that affect your disposition toward them and your interactions with them?

Is there anyone else you would alter your disposition toward or change your interactions with? Why?

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Study 2: OBEYING GOD

Question #1: What difference does the presence of a speed limit make in how fast you drive your car? Do you view the speed limit as the maximum allowable speed, or as a general guideline? Do speed limits make a relative difference or an absolute difference in how fast you drive? Do you ever drive 70MPH in a 65MPH zone, or fudge a little in a 35MPH zone? If you ever get pulled over for speeding, you learn “quickly” how the governing authorities view speed limits. Comments below:

Question #2: As we observed in Lesson #1, the Book of **First John** provides great insight into how God views the matter of obedience. What difference should being a Christian make in the way you obey God’s Word? Should it make a relative difference or an absolute difference? Why?

In **First John**, the Apostle John wrote his letter partly to address false teachers who had begun to mislead Believers concerning the basics of the Christian Faith. Lesson #2 is a continuation of that focus with an emphasis on OBEDIENCE. The first portion of Scripture in today’s lesson addresses the vertical relationship between God and man, while subsequent verses address the horizontal relationship between mankind and his fellowman. The Apostle John tells his readers that truly KNOWING God results in a changed life... and evidence of a changed life is found in our obedience to God’s commands. In Chapter 2, John focuses on obedience as he addresses the second of three imperatives that constitute the “Basics of Christian Life.” His second imperative: **OBEDIENCE**.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In the natural world, the principle of “reaping what we sow” is never contradicted (bean seeds always produce beans) Does the same principle of “reaping what we sow” apply to a person’s thoughts, words and deeds? **Why?**

1. **Think hard about this question:** Does the principle “reaping what we sow” make an absolute difference or a relative difference in how obedient you are to God’s commands? Explain.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Read 1 John 2:1 through 2:29

CHAPTER 2 ¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹ But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

¹² I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁴ I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

¹⁸ Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.^[e] ²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is what he promised us—eternal life.

²⁶ I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. ²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

²⁸ And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears, we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. Holy Bible – New International Version

2. In the **first six verses of** Chapter Two, John addresses the critical role Jesus Christ played in bridging the gap between a sinful man and a Holy God. What does he mean by use of the word PROPITIATION in verse 2? (Hint: has to do with appeasing)

3. In **verses 3 through 6** of Chapter Two, John drills down on the phrase ‘TO KNOW’ by describing as more than a head-knowledge (the Greek word for KNOW (*ginōskō*) expresses a relational and experiential awareness). What does he say in these verses is the actual evidence that we have come to KNOW God?

4. John provides a self-diagnosis in **verses 5 and 6** of Chapter Two for anyone wanting to ‘*KNOW*’ if they are truly a Christian. What does the phrase *ABIDES IN HIM* in **verse 6** mean (Read the first eleven verses of Chapter 15 of the *Gospel of John* to get a word picture from Christ of what it means to ABIDE)?

5. In verses **3 through 6**, John insists that obedience to God is **THE** test for determining a person’s intimacy with God and knowledge of Him. He goes on to remind readers that such obedience is contained in a single command. To which command is he referring (Read **John 13:34-35** for additional insight)?

6. John presents Christ as the “true light.” What imagery does he use to describe a Christian’s walk when Christ’s love is NOT the dominating force in his or her life?

7. In **verses 12 through 14**, John returns to his purpose for writing this letter by reminding his readers of the EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE they possess. What spiritual assets does he ascribe to them in these verses?

8. In **verses 15 through 17**, John reverses course by describing a kind of love that is contrary to the love of God. What two reasons does John give for not loving things in our present-day world?

9. In **verse 17**, John describes the pleasures derived from the things of the world as, “passing.” How enduring and fulfilling have the pleasures derived from the “things of the world” laid out in **verse 16** been in your life?

10. John concludes Chapter Two by returning to his theme of warning about false teachers (Antichrists). What attribute or characteristic does he use in **verses 20** (and repeat in **verse 27**) to describe authentic Christians?

11. What false teaching of the Gnostics does he remind Christians to be on the lookout for in **verses 22 and 23**?

APPLICATION

False teaching wasn't unique to the 1st century world in which John lived. For example, do the values that are applauded in today's pop culture and TV programming really provide lasting fulfillment and purpose in life? How does such false teaching influence your current priorities?

PRAY Take a step of obedience by acknowledging, confessing, and turning from false teaching that may be influencing your life presently, and embrace “God's truth for your life.”

Lord my Prayer is:

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All our Blessings,

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The Basics of Christian Life – Study Guide III

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Study 3: LOVING GOD

Etched over the entrance of the stately Harvard Club in downtown Boston are the following words: *“It is easy in the world of men, to live after the world’s opinion.”* How true! The pressure to accept society’s ever-changing cultural norms has always been intense, and there’s little dispute that the values of contemporary society have become increasingly twisted and perverted. The downward spiral of cultural norms in John’s world was no different than that of ours today. The first-century historian Tacitus lamented that Roman culture had increasingly degraded, until, under Emperor Nero, promiscuity and immoral self-indulgence were commonplace features of first-century Rome.

So, how should we then live? What is our motivation for doing right in a world moving in the wrong direction? John answers this question in Chapter Three by addressing the significance of WHO we are, and the difference it should make in HOW we live. For the Christian, who we are and how we live is motivated and driven by God’s LOVE, the third component of John’s “Basics of Christian Life.”

John reminded his readers in verse 17 of Chapter 2 that *“the world and its desires pass away.”* To LOVE the things of this world as described earlier in Chapter 2, verse 16 (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life) is the consummate description of self-love. And the desires of self-love are never lasting... ultimately, they fail to satisfy. However, God’s LOVE, as described in Chapter 3, is a transforming LOVE...a LOVE that provides both the motivation AND the means for how we should live as Christians.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How different is the context of today’s popular television sitcom programs when compared to those of ten years ago? How do the values and behavioral norms projected by today’s sitcom characters compare to those of ten years ago?

2. How has the definition of “what is sin” changed in the past ten years?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read I John 3 ¹See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Dear 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. ³All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. ⁴Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

⁷Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

¹¹For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹²Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

¹⁶This 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. ¹⁷If 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? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

¹⁹This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰if our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

3. John makes repeated use of the word “KNOW” (Greek: gnōsis) in his Letter to convey the concept of relational, discerning, intimate comprehension. What does he mean in verse one when he says, “*the reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him*”?

4. In creating their own version of truth, first-century Gnostics separated any act of sin committed in the body from the actual individual who committed the sin. To them, sin was associated with the body (matter) which was evil, while the true essence of a person (spirit) remained pure. They indulged themselves in in the flesh accordingly, since it was separate in their eyes from their spirit. For the Gnostics, Christianity was a religion of convenience, and as we saw in Lesson #1, John was keen to point out their heresy. What is John’s central message in verses 4 through 10, and how does it apply to those today who practice a “Christianity of convenience?”

5. In verses 11 through 18 John returns to the horizontal relationships of life. In doing so, he draws on the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-8). Does John define hatred and love in terms of “feelings” or in terms of “behavior?” How do Christians see the world’s hatred for them manifested in today’s culture?

6. What does true love look like to John (verses 16-18)?

7. John quickly transitions from his definition of love to the response that such love should elicit from every Christian. What practical example does he give of how a Christian can demonstrate “laying down our lives” for others?

8. In verses 19 through 24 John diverts briefly from his message of loving God in order to reassure his readers... to put their minds at rest. The phrase *“If our hearts condemn us,”* acknowledges the reality that every Christian will occasionally experience periods of doubt. In addressing the subject, he directs our attention away from *“feelings”* and toward *“knowledge.”* Why?

9. What does he say God *knows* in verse 20? By way of clarification, what does the Bible say (in Micah 7:18-19 and Psalm 103:10-12) that God does with our sin when we confess to Him? What does John say in verse 24 that we can *know* regarding our standing before God as Christians, and how can we know it? What are the conditions we must meet (verses 22 and 23)?

10. What does John say in Verse 24 that we can *know* regarding our standing before God as Christians and how can we know it?

11. What are the conditions we must meet? (verses 22 and 23)?

APPLICATION

What insight from today’s lesson seemed most significant to you and why?

Identify one act/action you can take in the next week to demonstrate God’s love in accordance with verse 17.

The Basics of Christian Life – Study Guide IV

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Study 4: KNOWING, LOVING & OBEYING

How do we KNOW what is true? How do we determine fact from fiction... truth from error? In today's world, the ability to 'Photoshop' pictures and animate videos makes it almost impossible to know whether something is for real or not. MTV built a popular television show around the concept of 'punking' people: intentionally fooling them into believing a lie... and convincingly so. Another surprising phenomenon is where people source for their news. John Stewart's "Daily Show" is not camouflaged as real news... the show's tag line literally reads "The Daily Show with John Stewart - Political Comedy - Fake News." However, a 2012 Pew Research poll found that twenty-one percent of people aged 18 to 29 cited "The Daily Show" and "Saturday Night Live" as their primary source for news. By contrast, twenty-three percent of young people in the same age group mentioned ABC, CBS, or NBC's nightly news as their primary source. Which is fact and which is fiction?

The ability to distinguish between truth and fiction is essential to the well-being of any individual, and to any culture for that matter. John recognized this having explained what Christians SHOULD believe in the previous chapter (Chapter 3, verse 23) He now cautions his readers regarding what NOT to believe in the first six verses of Chapter 4. KNOWING truth from fiction is vital.

But knowledge is only one leg of the stool. Love and obedience are equally important. The remainder of Chapter 4 is a recitation of the central theme behind all Scripture: the love of God! In fact, the Greek word for love (agápē) is found in one form or another twenty-eight times in the final fifteen verses of Chapter 4. John eloquently presents God's love as the central cord around which all other truths are woven. And he concludes in verse 21 with a command to obedience that is a litmus test for every believer: *"Whoever loves God must also love his brother."*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

At one time or another, we have all believed something to be true, only to find out that it wasn't. Thinking about an instance from your own experience, how unsettling was it realizing that

something you thought was true turned out not to be so?

How hard is it to trust anything or anyone when your heart is unsettled?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read I John 4

CHAPTER 4 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

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. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.

The one who fears is not made perfect in love.¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

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1. John understood how important it was that Christians be able to discern between true and false teachers. When exhorting them to “test the spirits,” how does he indicate they will be able to determine whether the spirit is from God or from false teachers?

2. Compare Chapter 2:22-23 with Chapter 4:1-3, and then fill in the blanks below:

- In Chapter 2, our acceptance or rejection of the Son determines whether or not we possess the _____.
- In Chapter 4, our acceptance or rejection of the Son determines whether or not we are inspired by the _____.

No teaching can be accepted which denies that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh... and anyone who rejects the Son can have no claim of association with the Father or the Spirit.

3. Beginning with verse 7, John subjects his readers to what John Stott calls “*the supreme test of love.*” This is probably the best known and most beloved portion of First John, and in it he provides two reasons for ‘loving one another’ that are one and the same:

Reason #1: The source and origin of Love is _____ (vs. 7).

Reason #2: Love is completely defined in the person of _____ (vs. 8).

4. Verse 9 is a restatement of what is perhaps the most famous and most memorized New Testament verse (found in the third chapter of John’s Gospel) What verse is that?

5. As God’s love is made ‘perfect’ (complete) in us, two specific results from such ‘perfection’ are mentioned in verses 17 and 18: the presence of one thing and the absence of another. What are

they? How do these results strengthen our faith walk?

6. Authentic Christian love is expressed not only in our love for God, but also in our love for others. John concludes Chapter 4 by giving two reasons in verses 19-21 why our love for God results in love for others... what are they?

Jesus told his disciples in John (14:21), *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me,”*... and the Apostle Paul reminds believers in Romans 1:5 that it is our faith in Christ that results in obedience to his commands (*“the obedience that comes from faith”*).

Taken alone, these verses sound burdensome. However, John will point out very soon in Chapter 5 that God’s commands are not burdensome, and we as Christians are not left to walk in our own strength... as the old hymn reminds us, *“such striving would be losing.”*

What does the Believer rely on in order to walk in obedience? (See verses 4 and 13)

APPLICATION

What is your current level of confidence in the Holy Spirit’s ability to help you walk in obedience to God’s command to love your brother?

Spend some time reflecting on verses 4 and 13 of chapter 4. Consider how you might lean on the Holy Spirit rather than your own understanding when it comes to the command, “love your brother.”

The Basics of Christian Life – Study Guide V

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Study 5: THREE TESTS, THREE WITNESSES, THREE ASSURANCES

By way of reminder, the Apostle John wrote the letter of First John against a backdrop of false teachers who had begun to negatively influence the first-century church by focusing on knowledge to the exclusion of truth. Sadly, the twenty-first-century church is no safer from such false teachers.

The *Jesus Seminar* is an example of modern-day false teaching. Made up of Ivy League scholars and board members from mainline denominations, the *Jesus Seminar* would hardly be considered a fringe organization on its face. Its positions and pronouncements, however, are completely antithetical to Biblical orthodoxy. Founded in 1985, the *Jesus Seminar* is committed to collaborative research focused on the deeds and sayings of Jesus... sounds good so far. However, it bases all research on the foundational belief that Jesus was a mere mortal man, born of two human parents, who did not perform miracles, nor die as a substitute for sinners, nor rise bodily from the dead. Their position certainly qualifies as “false teaching” according to John. For John, knowledge and truth were imperative elements of true Christianity and both are interwoven in Chapter 5.

Just as he began Chapter 2 with three essential tests of true Christianity (obedience, love, and belief), so he repeats these same three tests in the first five verses of Chapter 5. The critical link between the three tests is seen to be the new birth in Christ (verses 11 and 12). And since Jewish law required the agreement of two or three witnesses before any testimony was accepted, John identifies three witnesses who testify that Jesus is, in fact, the Christ: (1) the water, referring to his baptism, (2) the blood, referring to his death, and (3) the Spirit, referring to the Holy Spirit.

Finally, John provides his readers with three assurances that are essential to what a true Christian IS, and what a true Christian DOES. And since “knowledge” was the “by-line” of false teachers in his day, John begins each assurance with the Greek verb for experiential knowledge (*i-edō*):

- We know the true Christian does not continue in a lifestyle of sin (verse 18)
- We know the true Christian is a child of God, a member of God’s family (verse 19)
- We know the true Christian is given understanding, to know God relationally (verse 20)

John concludes his letter by pointing out what Christians should know (verse 13), and what they do know (verse 15). His final caution: “Do not abandon the real for the illusory.” (E. Blaiklock)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Identify one or two practical tests you can utilize or apply in order to determine whether or not a belief you hold to be true, actually is true.

How often do you apply such tests to your most highly held beliefs?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read I John 5:1-21

Chapter 5. ¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹ We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

¹⁶ If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

¹⁸ We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. ¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. ²⁰ We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. Holy Bible - New International Version

1. What evidence does John point to in Verses 1 - 5 to distinguish the true believer is “born of God”?

2. How are the three evidences of a true believer interrelated?

3. What is God’s testimony through the three witnesses regarding eternal life?

4. John points out that there will be two very different responses to the testimony regarding Christ. How does he describe the condition of anyone who fails to believe God’s record concerning Christ?

5. In Verses 14-17 John describes an assurance all Christians have regarding prayer. Does he condition God’s commitment to answer prayer in Verse 17? (compare to Verse 22 of Chapter 3)

6. Verses 16 and 17 speak about “sin that leads to death.” To what sin is John referring (See Mathew 12:30 for additional insight?)

7. Stressing the ‘importance of knowledge’ (the very concept which false teachers espoused), what three truths does John assert as Christians, “we know” in Verses 19-20?

8. What idols might John have been referring to in Verse 21? What makes something an idol in a person’s life?

APPLICATION

What are some modern-day idols that tempt you to live apart from God? How do these ‘idol temptations’ entice you to believe the lie that they can provide satisfaction or meaning in your life?

In what area(s) might you have abandoned “the real for the illusory” in your faith walk, and need to repent and turn to “the true God and eternal life”?
