

Living
in the
Light of

GOD'S LOVE

INTRODUCTION

Author

- John, the apostle
- his name in Hebrew literally means, *"The Lord is Gracious"*
- he was a fisherman before he was called to be a disciple (see John 1:35-42)
- he was chosen for special training by Jesus along with Peter and James
- when he was crucified, Jesus committed his mother to John's care (see John 19:26-27)
- he publicly confessed his faith before the Sanhedrin with Peter in Acts 4:20: *"For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*
- he also wrote the books of John and Revelation
- later in life, he became the pastor for a group of churches around Ephesus

Recipients

- no specific group or church is mentioned, but John does continually refer to his readers as *"dear children"*
- since John was a *"circuit pastor"* for churches around Ephesus, it seems likely that this letter was intended for the seven congregations around that area (see Revelation 2-3)
- this also seems likely given that Paul addresses some of the same themes and issues in his letter to the Ephesians

Purpose

- to encourage and support his brothers and sisters in Christ (see 1 John 2:12-14)
- John also attacks Gnosticism, a very general false teaching developed by Cerinthus that was paralyzing the early Christian church
- the basic beliefs of Gnosticism were:
 - *there is extra, secret knowledge about life that the Bible doesn't cover*
 - *there is no virgin birth, atoning death, or bodily resurrection*
 - *the heavenly Christ and the earthly Jesus are two separate things, though they did "co-exist" for a while*

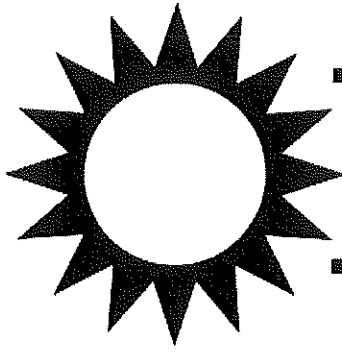
- *matter = evil, mind & spirit = pure (since human bodies are temporary and evil, it doesn't really matter how you live)*
- *the Bible is an insufficient source of information*
- *"spiritually advanced" leaders are not sinful*
- *human reason is more important than scriptural authority*
- *the apostles had no authority to preach and teach*

Style

- John also uses the words "*the Word*" to describe Jesus—a description used only in Revelation, John, and John's letters
- John uses short, simple, encouraging sentences
- he continually repeats and circles back to certain themes
 - *light vs. darkness*
 - *love vs. hatred*
 - *purity vs. sinfulness*
 - *righteousness vs. unrighteousness*
 - *truth vs. deception*

Outline

- Part 1 – The Word of Life (*1 John 1:1-4*)
- Part 2 – Walking in the Light (*1 John 1:5-2:14*)
- Part 3 – Keeping from the Darkness (*1 John 2:15-27*)
- Part 4 – The Children of God (*1 John 2:28-3:10*)
- Part 5 – Love One Another (*1 John 3:11-24*)
- Part 6 – Relying on God's Love (*1 John 4:1-21*)
- Part 7 – Victory in Christ (*1 John 5:1-21*)



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PART 1: The Word of Life

1 John 1:1-4

In 2003, author Dan Brown released a book called "The DaVinci Code." In the book, a series of clues leads to a secret society that undermines Biblical authority. Though the author willingly admitted that the book was a work of fiction, there can be no doubt that many of his readers did not think so. Secret societies, ancient artifacts, undisclosed documents—all are sought desperately by a group of people that think ultimate truth will be found in human reason and effort.

John faced a similar situation as he wrote this letter. Gnosticism was threatening to tear the early Christian church apart. It's most fundamental belief was that human reason was superior to Scripture. Gnostics believed that all matter was evil, but that they could rise about this evil by relying on their own reason and spirits. They also thought that any supposed "apostle" or "disciple" was merely a barrier to the true light. So, John faithfully and lovingly points his readers back to the certainty of Christ's redemptive work—the Word of Life.

Read 1 John 1:1-2 and John 1:1-14

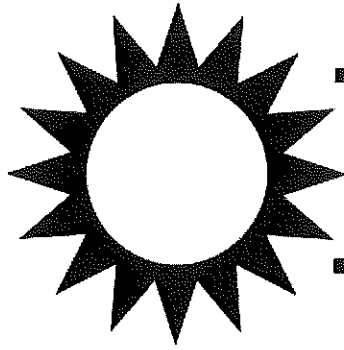
1. In these opening verses, John lets his readers know what his theme throughout the letter will be. What is it? Who is John talking about?
2. For what reasons is "the Word of life" a good title for Jesus?
3. What do the words "that which was from the beginning" teach us about Jesus (see also Revelation 1:8,17-18)? How might Gnostics react to this?
4. What does John say he was able to do in verse 1? For what reasons might this be important for his readers?

Read 1 John 1:3-4

1. Why does John say he is writing this letter?
2. What is John's underlying motivation? Apply that to our lives: what needs to be foremost on our minds when we talk to each other?
3. Define fellowship in view of John's first four verses.
4. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9. What is the Christian's daily comfort?

Doubt can be especially paralyzing, can't it? Satan would have us constantly wondering and worrying about our eternal welfare, and he'll use whatever he can, whether it's Gnosticism or "The DaVinci Code." What a blessing it is to know that our God's promises are certain and solid! We don't need to worry or wonder or doubt. Because of Christ, we can be absolutely sure that we are forgiven, that we stand blameless before our God, and that we have the certainty of eternal life.

For next time: Read 1 John 1:5 – 2:14



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PART 2: Walking in the Light

1 John 1:5 – 2:14

How many of us have had the miserable experience of waking up in the middle of the night and stumbling to the bathroom in the darkness? It reminds us of a simple, obvious truth: it's not easy to walk in the dark, even when we are in a familiar place. Walking in the light, on the other hand, is much better, isn't it?

In his first letter to these Christians, John contrasts light and dark to explain some deep, Biblical truths. It's a contrast that he will return to throughout his letter. And it's a contrast that he uses to make us both sorrow over our sins and rejoice in our loving Savior.

Read 1 John 1:5 – 2:2

1. What is the message this "Word of life" proclaimed? How do you think these words hit home with the Gnostics (see also John 8:12 & 14:6-7)?
2. In what ways does John strike at the sinful nature in verse 6? Where's the comfort?
3. Contrast man's efforts with God's promises. What question always remains unanswered if we rely on our own efforts to win salvation? What comfort do God's promises bring?
4. Discussing sin is not popular in our society. In what ways do we turn God into a liar by not discussing our sin? What's the danger of ignoring our sins?
5. What's another reason John wrote this letter (2:1)? What's his motivation?
6. How can you be sure that God really loves and cares for you?

Read 1 John 2:3-11

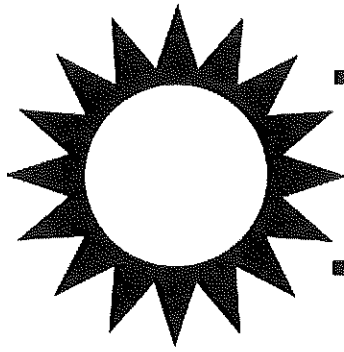
1. How are true believers recognized in this world? For what reasons is that both a frightening and a comforting thing (see Philippians 4:13)?
2. What sort of damage is done when Christians don't lead Christian lives? Can you think of some examples?
3. First John says he's not writing a new command. Then he says he is. What's the deal?
4. If someone "hates" his brother, why would that indicate he is still living in darkness (see Matthew 15:16-19 and 1 John 3:15)?
5. Evaluate: *Well, I don't really love my co-worker, but I certainly don't hate her either.*

Read 1 John 2:12-14

1. Why are we forgiven (see Isaiah 43:25)?
2. Not the verb tenses in these verses. How might these words be powerful ammunition against any form of Gnosticism?
3. "...you are strong, and the word of God lives in you..." Comment on how these words change your daily outlook on life.

John keeps the focus squarely on the light of God's love. It makes all the difference for us. When we live in the light of God's love for us, we can see, think, and act in true love. The darkness has nothing for us. We have been forgiven. We have overcome. We are strong and the Word lives in us. We have God's certain and unshakeable promises right now!

For next time: Read 1 John 2:15-27



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PART 3: Keeping from the Darkness

1 John 2:15-27

Warning signs are God's gift to the ignorant. Notice the big, bright, flashing, blinking signs. Beware of Dog! Caution: Flammable! Warning: Violators will be Prosecuted! Even though the danger is often obvious, though, we still sometimes fail to recognize how serious the threat is.

In this part of his letter, John gives us the big, bright, flashing, blinking sign. He warns us of danger. But this is far more serious than physical danger—it threatens our bodies and our souls. John warns us about the darkness of false teaching. And then he faithfully points us to our only certainty, refuge, and strength: God's Word.

Read 1 John 2:15-17

1. What does John say about the person who loves the world (see Philippians 3:18-19)?
2. When we get stressed, unhappy, or depressed, how does our sinful nature attempt to solve the problem? Where does this ultimately leave us?
3. What passes away? What is permanent?
4. If something does not come from God, from where must it come?
5. Agree or Disagree: *Christians should be in the world, but not of the world.*
6. What comfort do we have about the will of God?

Read 1 John 2:18-23

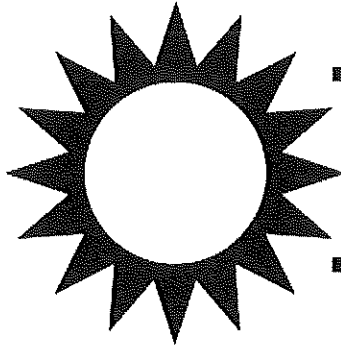
1. How do we know this is the “last hour” (see Matthew 24 & 2 Timothy 3:1-5)? Even though we know this, what’s our comfort?
2. How do we recognize unbelievers? What gives them away? What does this mean we need to be doing daily?
3. Why is John writing (v. 21)? Why is this so important (v. 22-23)?
4. What truth does John lay out in verse 23 (see also John 1:1, 1:34, 1:41, 1:51, 2:11, 3:14, 3:31, 4:26, 5:18, 5:19-23, 5:27, 5:30, 5:36, 6:27, 6:38, 6:41, 6:58, 7:28-29, 7:33, 8:12, 8:14-19, 8:23, 8:28-29, 8:42, 8:46-47, 8:54, 8:58, 9:37, 10:14-18, 10:25, 10:30, 10:38, 11:40, 12:23, 12:44, 13:31, 14:1, 14:6, 14:9, 14:10, 14:20, 16:15, 17:5, etc.)?

Read 1 John 2:24-27

1. What have we “heard from the beginning” (see also 2 Timothy 3:14-17)?
2. What’s in store for us?
3. Why is John writing (v. 26)? What’s his encouragement?
4. What is “anointing”? Why does it give us comfort?
5. What does all this do to the “secret knowledge” of the Gnostics?

Think of how important it is to have a “standard” when measuring something. So it is with false teaching. If we throw away our standard—God’s Word—we are left with only confusion, doubt, and uncertainty. What a blessing it is to have God’s pure Word. By it, God gives us the gift of faith and teaches us what to believe and do. There is nothing else we need to know.

For next time: Read 1 John 2:28 – 3:10



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PART 4: The Children of God

1 John 2:28 – 3:10

We all know that children often see the world in a very simple and beautiful way. And yet, at some point, we all seem to lose that beautiful, simple perspective that we had as children—perhaps especially when it comes to God and his Word. Suddenly, our child-like trust is abandoned, and we are left with questions and doubts.

In this section of his letter, John lays out law and gospel very clearly. He takes a reasonable and logical approach to them, resting on the authority and comfort of God's Word. He encourages us to think, speak, and act as children, trusting in our loving Father. This is what God says; this is who you are; and this is what it means for your daily life!

Read 1 John 2:28-29

1. Whose children are we? Why is acting like a child a good thing for the Christian?
2. How do we "continue in him"?
3. Confident? Unashamed? How is this possible?
4. Which comes first, according to John: doing what is right or being born of him? For what reasons is this a critical thing to remember?
5. Agree or Disagree: *Good works are necessary.*

Read 1 John 3:1-3

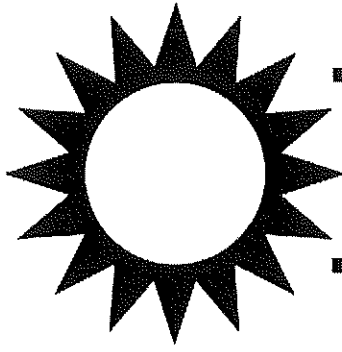
1. Who are we? How does it help to know that this is God's assessment "right now"?
2. Do we always feel like children of God? What does this tell us about our feelings?
3. Why doesn't the world "know" us?
4. John says that we "are" children in v. 1-2, but then he follows by saying, "what we will be has not yet been made known." Explain. What is John talking about?
5. How do we purify ourselves? Is John promoting work-righteousness?

Read 1 John 3:4-10

1. Evaluate: *If you're saved by faith, then works don't matter. OR Deeds not creeds!*
2. Explain v. 7. Is John saying that if I live a good life, then I'm righteous before God?
3. Why did Jesus appear? Contrast this with some of the popular views of Jesus in our world.
4. How do verses 5 and 8 help us resist temptation?
5. How can John say that we "cannot go on sinning" (see Romans 6:15-23)?
6. With all John's talk about the Christian life, where must salvation necessarily rest?

We can do no better than to cling to God and his promises in simple, child-like trust. So often we get distracted by the complexities and confusions of the world. Let's not forget what our loving God has done for us—sending his Son to take away our sins. And let's reflect his love in our lives.

For next time: Read 1 John 3:11-24



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PART 5: Love One Another

1 John 3:11-24

What does it mean to love someone? From a worldly perspective, there seems to be no easy answer to that question. All we see around us is evidence of the failure to love—broken families, dissolved marriages, bitter arguments, crime, etc. All of it comes from our inability to live up to God's righteous demand: Love!

So what do we do? There is only one real answer to the question. It's not going to come from looking to ourselves or just trying harder. The only solution is to look at what Christ has done for us. And the beauty of Christ's work is that not only does it give us a real, personal example of love, it also teaches us "why" to love others.

Read 1 John 3:11-15

1. What is the message we have heard from the beginning? Are there any exceptions?
2. Why were Abel's actions considered righteous (see Hebrews 11:4)? What does this tell us, then, about Cain's actions?
3. What can we expect when we show love to others? Why?
4. In what way have we passed from death to life?
5. How is Christian love different than simply following the "golden rule"?
6. What does showing love to others indicate?

Read 1 John 3:16-18

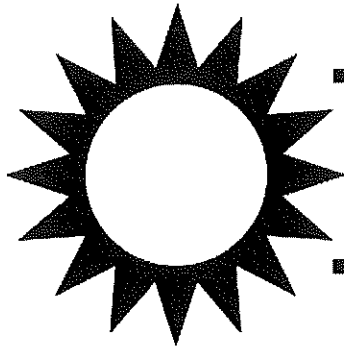
1. What is love?
2. What's the motivation to "lay down our lives for our brothers"?
3. What are some practical ways to display God's love in our lives?
4. Evaluate: *Christians who have the resources but don't help should check for a spiritual pulse.*
5. Define hypocrisy (see Isaiah 29:13). Why is it dangerous?

Read 1 John 3:19-24

1. What sets our hearts at rest?
2. What does God desire for us (see Matthew 11:28)? How do you know?
3. In what ways is doubt a poison in our prayer life?
4. What's our job (verse 23)?
5. How do we know God lives in us? Comment on how this affects your daily life.

A quick look at the world will reveal why it's no wonder that love is so often confused and misunderstood in our world. But thanks be to Christ! He showed us true, complete, and lasting love! He died on the cross to pay for our sins. He gives us his righteousness so that we stand pure and holy before God. What a beautiful example of true love! What a powerful encouragement for us to show love to others!

For next time: Read 1 John 4:1-21



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PART 6: Relying on God's Love

1 John 4:1-21

"To love is to suffer. To avoid suffering one must not love. But then one suffers from not loving. Therefore to love is to suffer, and not to love is to suffer. To suffer is to suffer. To be happy is to love. To be happy then is to suffer. But suffering makes one unhappy. Therefore, to be unhappy one must love, or love to suffer, or suffer from too much happiness. I hope you're getting this down..." -- Woody Allen.

Love is a popular topic in our society. In fact, it's so popular it's confusing. We love movies. We love sports. We love chocolate. But God talks about love differently. In Christ, we see the greatest example and demonstration of love. In this section of his letter, John reminds us of our Savior's perfect love for us, and how it moves us to truly love others.

Read 1 John 4:1-6

1. What is John's warning to his readers? What does he tell them to do? In what ways does that apply to our congregation?
2. What's the giveaway for false teaching?
3. Why is "Jesus in the flesh" such a critical teaching for Christians?
4. In verses 5-6, John lays out more characteristics of false teaching. What are they?
5. Evaluate: *Christians are arrogant if they think that their religion is the only way to get to heaven.*

Read 1 John 4:7-16a

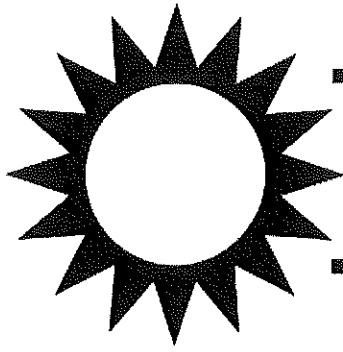
1. From where does true love come? Contrast this with the world's opinion of love.
2. Respond: *If God is love, then why is there so much hate and violence in the world?*
3. What "has happened" if we love? Why are these two words so significant?
4. What does "atoning" mean (verse 10)?
5. How is God's love made complete?

Read 1 John 4:16b-21

1. What comfort does it give you to know that "God is love"?
2. What is our confidence (see also Hebrews 4:14-16)?
3. What's the relationship between fear and love? Can they co-exist?
4. Agree or Disagree: *Love is a give and take.*
5. How is it possible for us to love?

What a comfort to see the perfect and complete love our God has for us! When we struggle with confusion and doubt and anger, we need only look to our loving God. He is love. We see the proof at the cross on Calvary and the empty tomb outside Jerusalem. That is our strength and comfort.

For next time: Read 1 John 5:1-21



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PART 7: Victory in Christ

1 John 5:1-21

A few years ago, a cartoon appeared in a national newspaper showing Christians being attacked by lions in a large coliseum. Above the crowd, a scoreboard displayed the score: Lions 4, Christians 0.

That's sometimes how it seems to go for Christians, doesn't it? We hardly seem like victors, especially in times of persecution and difficulty. But it doesn't change the fact that we are conquerors through Christ. Here in his letter, John reminds us of the complete victory we have in Christ right now!

Read 1 John 5:1-5

1. How much choice did we have in being born? How much choice did we have in being born again?
2. What are we able to do through Christ (verse 2)?
3. John writes that "his commands are not burdensome." Explain.
4. Read Romans 8:35-39 and John 16:33. In what ways have we overcome the world?
5. Agree or Disagree: *Christians are always happy.*

Read 1 John 5:6-12

1. How did Jesus come by water? How did he come by blood?
2. What do expert witnesses do during a trial? How is the Holy Spirit's work similar?
3. John writes that the Spirit, the water, and the blood all testify that Jesus is true God and true man. Can you think of what parallels these things have in the Christian life?
4. What impact does verse 9 have on how we share our faith with others?
5. Who gets the credit for eternal life? Who gets the blame for eternal death?

Read 1 John 5:13-21

1. What three things does John remind us we can know with complete certainty? What impact does that have on your daily perspective?
2. What does love call us to do for those who are caught in sin?
3. What is the "sin that leads to death"? (Don't forget the context of John's letter!)
4. What's the sad reality about the world? What's our comfort in the midst of it?
5. How do we grow in our faith and our understanding of God's grace?

Our emotions are notoriously fickle. They so often fluctuate based on our outward circumstances. And when we are in a world that scoffs at the Word and persecutes Christians, it's not wonder that we don't often "feel" like conquerors. But God's love for us does not change. It is not based on our emotions or circumstances. Rather it is founded on the solid rock of Christ crucified and risen for us! His victory is ours! We are God's dearly-loved children, and heaven is our home!