



the **WISDOM JOURNEY**  
LESSON 753

# 1 JOHN

## HOW TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

### 1 JOHN 1:1—2:2

---

As we begin a study of the epistle of 1 John, we get eyewitness testimony of the eternal life found in Jesus Christ and invaluable instruction on how to remain in close fellowship with God in a world filled with darkness.

---

I have read that the Bible is still the best-selling book, not only of all time—some 5 billion copies—but also annually with around 100 million sold each year. To me the tragedy is that it is probably one of the most ignored books of all time. For instance, here in America, 25 million Bibles are sold every year, but only 2 million people read it regularly.

For most people, the Bible is something to have; but for genuine Christians, the Bible is something that *has us*.

We now set sail into the first of three letters written by the apostle John. We call it 1 John. And it is clear that John cannot get over this treasure God gave him—the unique privilege of recording inspired words of the living Lord. He even states early on that this fills him with complete joy.

John is the last living apostle. He has written the Gospel of John, and he will later write the book of Revelation; but he has also written these three little letters, as an eyewitness to the person and ministry of Jesus. And near

the end of the first century, an eyewitness account was desperately needed.

An early form of Gnosticism was already making inroads into the church. False teachers claimed Jesus was not divine, because deity would never take on evil humanity. So, they said that Jesus was *only* a man. He could not provide forgiveness or promise eternal life to anyone, and His body did not rise from the dead. He simply had the essence of God, the spirit of Christ, upon Him, they taught.

So, John steps up and immediately testifies to the reality of who Jesus is:

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and*

*proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us---that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (verses 1-3)*

That is a long way of saying, “Listen, I saw Jesus, I knew Jesus, I heard Him speak, I traveled with Him. He was fully human and fully divine; He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

John clarifies that Jesus was “the eternal life, which was with the Father.” This means Jesus had a preexistent, face-to-face relationship with God the Father. This is rich doctrine: Jesus Christ, the preincarnate Son of God, existed in eternity past in fellowship with God the Father.

JESUS CHRIST, THE  
PREINCARNATE SON OF GOD,  
EXISTED IN ETERNITY PAST IN  
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE  
FATHER.

To John, this is not some dry doctrinal statement. This is an electrifying truth of life-changing power in Jesus Christ.

John then moves on to tell us about our relationship with God the Father. He writes in verse 5, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

So, the God of the Bible—the God proclaimed in John’s letters—is not like the gods created by world religions. Those gods cheat and lie; they are immoral and spiteful toward mankind; they quarrel and fight with each other and are just as covetous and corrupt as mankind.

John is saying here, “No, no, our God is different. There is nothing in Him that is evil or deceitful. There is *no darkness in Him at all.*”

But here is the question: Since God is light, and light dispels darkness—and we daily demonstrate darkness in our lives—how do we have fellowship with God? John gives us four answers in verses 6-10.

First, *we have to be honest.* Verse 6 says, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

Now some say that John is not talking to believers here. They argue that it is not possible for a Christian to walk in darkness or not practice the truth. I would like to talk to their supervisors and their spouses!

John *is* writing to Christians. Throughout this paragraph, he uses “we” and “us” to remove any doubt. We *can* lose our fellowship with God, and we *do* when we sin against Him.

If you are married, you can offend your spouse and ruin the fellowship you once shared. But when you come to your senses and apologize, you do not have to get married again. And I am glad—that costs a lot of money! But you can restore your fellowship.

But we have to get honest about our sin. John writes in verse 8, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” In verse 10 he adds, “If we say we have not

sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

You will never reach perfection in this lifetime. So, get off your pedestal and admit the truth about yourself. We all sin, and the light of God and His Word exposes that dark sin within us.

Second, *we need to stay close*. If we desire fellowship with God, we must intentionally, consciously purpose each day to live like He tells us to live in His Word. Note verse 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 cleanses us from all sin.*

Beloved, do not be afraid to hold your life up to His light. No matter what stains the light reveals, Jesus Christ cleanses and forgives.

**DO NOT BE AFRAID TO HOLD  
YOUR LIFE UP TO GOD'S  
LIGHT.**

That means we not only need to get honest and stay close, but third, *we need to come clean*. Look at verse 9:

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The word translated “confess” means “to say the same thing.” Confession means saying

the same thing that God says about our sin; we actually take *His* side against ourselves.

I have had people sit in my office and try to convince me that their immoral lifestyle was not sinful. I have had many others tell me their sin was excusable—they could not help it.

Well, God does not forgive victims; He forgives sinners. He does not forgive excuses; He forgives admissions.

**GOD DOES NOT FORGIVE  
VICTIMS; HE FORGIVES  
SINNERS.**

And here is the good news, as John wraps up this theme in chapter 2:

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*  
(verses 1-2)

John obviously wants us to avoid sin. He knows the most miserable person on the planet is a believer who is pursuing sin. The believer knows better; he knows God is not happy with him; he knows he has lost fellowship with His heavenly Father.

So, here is the fourth thing we need to do to have fellowship with God: *we must confess sin quickly*. Avoid sin, but then confess quick-

ly when you do sin. Spiritual maturity is not measured just by how little you sin but by how long it takes for you to confess sin.

**THE MOST MISERABLE  
PERSON ON THE PLANET IS A  
BELIEVER WHO IS PURSUING  
SIN.**

And when you confess, John writes here that you have an advocate—a divine Defense Attorney—and He has never lost a case. And that is because Jesus can point to Himself as the one who satisfied the payment for our sin. That is what “propitiation” means—satisfying justice. Jesus satisfied the demands of divine justice, and through Him our fellowship can be restored immediately as we walk with God.

The apostle John is right, as he wrote earlier in verse 4: this letter will bring us joy. And there is much more joy to come.

---

How much priority do I give to reading and studying the Bible daily?

Does the Bible have an active influence on my decisions and lifestyle, or do I tend to ignore its guidance?

Do I regularly examine myself in the light of God’s Word to see where I fall short or walk in darkness?

Am I quick to confess my sins to God, acknowledging them fully rather than offering excuses or self-justifications?

Do I experience the joy of forgiveness when I confess, knowing that Jesus is my advocate and has satisfied divine justice on my behalf?

---

**Plot your Wisdom Journey.**

How would the Lord have you respond to what you’ve learned today?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:

[www.wisdomonline.org](http://www.wisdomonline.org)



the **WISDOM JOURNEY**  
LESSON 754

# 1 JOHN

## UNSINKABLE TRUTHS

### 1 JOHN 2:3-17

---

In today's passage, the apostle John gives us both assurances and warnings. We are assured of God's absolute forgiveness and faithfulness, but we are cautioned to avoid tying ourselves to the ungodly world around us.

---

When the *Titanic* set sail on her maiden voyage in April 1912, it was the most luxurious vessel ever built. It had state-of-the-art safety features, including a double hull with sixteen watertight compartments. It was declared “unsinkable.”

On that first voyage, an iceberg in the North Atlantic sliced through the ship's hull like a knife cutting through butter. In less than three hours, the unsinkable *Titanic* went to the bottom of the ocean, and tragically, 1,500 passengers went to a watery grave.

I have read that first-class tickets would have cost, in today's economy, nearly \$100,000. But do you think anyone would have paid even one dollar, had they known the outcome? No one buys a ticket to board a sinking ship!

Yet people today are investing their lives in a ship that God has publicly announced is going to sink. That ship is this world, and it is swiftly sailing toward the iceberg of God's judgment.

But here is the good news. God has a guarantee of safety—unsinkability—that only He

can ensure. And that guarantee is our current text, on our Wisdom Journey.

We are in 1 John 2, where John presents three commands for us to follow as we sail toward our eternal, heavenly harbor.

Here is the first command: *Do not walk in the darkness but in the light!*

Look at verses 3-4:

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

After reading these verses, maybe you are thinking, “I am going to be thrown overboard, because I cannot keep God's commandments. Never mind an iceberg.”

I have read commentators who are convinced John is trying to identify unsaved people here

for daring to think they were genuine Christians. But that is not the heart and spirit of John's letter. He is writing to reassure believers, not terrify them.

And let me add, John is not promoting a works salvation, suggesting that if we obey God's commandments, we get to sail into heaven. If that were the case, we would all sink.

John is referring to our personal priorities and desires. A genuine believer truly wants to obey the Lord. I like to say this is the direction his toes are pointed.

John goes on to say that those who claim to know the Lord but show no desire to obey Him are lying. They are lying to you, and they are lying to God. They are not fooling anyone, except maybe themselves.

This is no different from what Jesus said about determining true believers: "You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20). In other words, a genuine believer wants to obey God because he truly loves God.

In fact, that is what verse 5 says. If we set the priority of our lives to obey God's Word, "the love of God is perfected" in us. "Perfected" does not mean we reach perfection; it means that God's love is demonstrated fully in and through our lives.

John then tells his readers that he is not teaching them something new: "Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning" (verse 7). He is talking about Jesus' teaching that the greatest commandment in God's law is love (Matthew 22:37-39).

Now John gets back to talking about light and darkness. He writes, "The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining"

(verse 8). That is, the love of Christ is shining in the world through us, His followers.

And if it is not shining—if we are hating a brother in Christ or treating him like an enemy—then John says here in verse 9 that we are walking back there in the shadows of darkness from our old lifestyle of sin. We are acting just like the dark and blinded world around us.

Is it possible for a true Christian to be hateful toward others? Can true Christians carry a grudge and develop resentment that turns down the light of their testimony and makes them look no better than a shadowy dark world? Absolutely. I have met a few of them along the way. I myself have been unkind and resentful at times, and maybe you have too.

Beloved, it is possible for a believer, somewhere along the way—because of some painful insult, or mistreatment, or loss, or disappointment—to choose to water the seeds of resentment and hatred, to turn down the light of joy and obedience and live back there in the shadows. Well, neither John the apostle nor God wants you living in the shadows but rather walking in the light.

Here is the second command: *Do not walk in fear but with courage.*

John gives a shot of encouragement here as he addresses believers who are in differing stages of maturity. He says in verse 12, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven." That is a basic reminder that needs to be reinforced to new believers.

Then in verse 13, and again in verse 14, the apostle writes, "I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning." John is reassuring more spiritually

mature believers of the deeper truths of Jesus' eternal preexistence from eternity past.

In the middle of verse 13, John says, "I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one." These are believers standing in the thick of the fight against the Evil One, and they are reassured of their ultimate victory in Christ.

Here is the third command: *Do not live for a doomed world but for eternity!*

John states this rather bluntly in verse 15:

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

When you hear these words, your first reaction might be one of dread. "Oh, no! There are a lot of things in this world I love! I love the mountains, beautiful sunsets, playing golf every now and then."

Well, before you go out there and burn your golf clubs, John defines what he means by "the world"—verse 16:

*For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*

He is basically talking about sinful cravings and forbidden desires. And note the warning: "And the world is passing away along with

its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" (verse 17).

This world is a sinking ship. It is heading for a collision with the truth and justice of almighty God.

I remember reading that following the *Titanic's* sinking, the challenge was how to inform the relatives whether their loved ones were alive or dead. At the White Star Line's office in Liverpool, England, a huge board was set up. On one side was a heading that read "Known to Be Saved." On the other side was the heading "Known to Be Lost."

Hundreds of people gathered to watch the updates whenever a messenger brought news. They held their breaths as the names were added to the columns. Although the passengers were first class, second class, and third class, after the ship went down, there were only two categories: the saved and the lost.

I could not help but think that today, every passenger on Planet Earth belongs to one of only two categories. It will not matter how nice your house was or whether you were wealthy or struggled financially. What will matter is in which category your name is written: known to be lost or known to be saved.

WHAT WILL MATTER IS IN  
WHICH CATEGORY YOUR  
NAME IS WRITTEN: KNOWN  
TO BE LOST OR KNOWN TO  
BE SAVED.

If you are not already among the saved, there is a lifeboat that stands ready in the person of Jesus Christ. Climb aboard; be rescued by faith in Christ, forever.

How seriously do I take the command to obey God's Word, and do my actions reflect a genuine desire to follow Him?

How does my life demonstrate the "fruit" of a true believer, as mentioned by Jesus and John?

What steps can I take to cultivate courage and overcome fear in my spiritual journey, especially during trials?

Am I focused on living for the things of this world, or am I investing my time and energy into eternal matters?

How can I be more intentional about walking in the assurance that my sins are forgiven, and how does that truth impact my life?

---

Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:

[www.wisdomonline.org](http://www.wisdomonline.org)





the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 755

# 1 JOHN

## ANTICHRISTS FROM THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

### 1 JOHN 2:18-27

---

The apostle John speaks not only of the coming Antichrist, but also of “antichrists” present right now—people who have left the faith and are working against Christ, even seeking to replace Him. With the Spirit’s counsel through God’s Word, we need not be taken in by them.

---

Ever since the church began on the day of Pentecost, the prophecies of a coming Antichrist have captured the fascination of just about everybody. His arrival will initiate a seven-year period of horror and cataclysms in a futile attempt to prevent Christ from establishing His kingdom on earth. He will not succeed. Christ will vanquish him utterly.

Through the centuries, numerous people have been perceived to be this coming Antichrist: Nero, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, to name a few. I remember people wondering if it was Ronald Reagan, because there were six letters in each of his three names—Ronald Wilson Reagan—which they believed represented 666.

In contrast to all that foolish, time-wasting speculation, the apostle John presents divine revelation about the Antichrist. By the way, it was John, under the inspiring Holy Spirit, who actually coined the term *antichrist*. Now he is going to offer some warnings and some encouragement to the church in relation to this subject.

So, let’s set sail again into 1 John 2. We are now at verse 18, where John makes an amazing statement: “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.”

What does John mean when he says it is “the last hour”? He wrote that nearly 2,000 years ago. Was he mistaken? Not at all. The New Testament consistently uses phrases like “the last hour” or “the last days” to designate the time between Christ’s first coming and His future second coming. The apostles did not know how long this “hour” would last, of course, and neither do we.

Clearly, John uses the word “antichrist” in two ways here. His first mention refers to the coming deceiver we mentioned a moment ago—the final, satanically empowered individual who will attempt to rule the world and be worshiped as God.

But John also begins to warn, here in the next few verses, about dangerous deceivers who have already shown up and are posing a problem for the church. In a more general sense,

John calls these people “antichrists.” Who are they? And since they happen to be in every generation, how do we deal with them?

This title *antichrist* is made up of two parts: the noun *Christ*, which means “Messiah,” and the preposition *anti*, which means “against” or “instead of.” John seems to have had both meanings of *anti* in mind: “antichrists” are individuals who are *against* Christ but also present themselves as replacements for Christ—as ones to be followed *instead of* Christ.

John says these antichrists are already here. In verse 19 he says of them, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.” He is indicating that while they joined with the people of God for a while, they never *belonged* to the people of God.

In other words, antichrists are not Christians who lost their salvation; they were never Christians to begin with. They are radically different from backsliding Christians—those true believers who have become entangled in sin and grown spiritually cold and in need of revival. These antichrists are apostates. They have walked away from the church, and they say without any embarrassment or regret, “I never believed any of that gospel stuff anyway.”

Maybe for a time they fooled themselves (and everybody else) that they believed. But eventually their opposition to the moral standards of the Bible and their resentment against the claims of Christ in Scripture came out, and they walked away. And as John writes here, “They went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us” (verse 19).

Now the problem is, they usually stay in contact with their Christian friends, hoping to

draw them away as well. “Hey, I have found some new truth, a better way, an easier path to be right with God.” They do not show up at your house wearing a name tag that says, “I am an antichrist, and I am here to lead you astray.” They are much more subtle than that. They will show you a verse where God seems vindictive or a command that seems so old-fashioned.

So, what defense do ordinary Christians like us have against this kind of deception? John would answer, “Plenty!”

In verse 20 he writes, “But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.” He repeats this truth in verse 27: “The anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you.”

The anointing he refers to is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit Himself, the Counselor or Helper Jesus promised to send to abide in us and teach us all things about Him (see John 14–16).

John is not saying that we know everything; instead, he is affirming that all Christians have the true knowledge from God about the gospel and Christ. And he is not saying we do not need teachers either but assuring us we do not need anyone who claims to have secret knowledge or some hidden truth to add to Scripture. By the way, that is a major characteristic of an antichrist, or a cult—they always have something other than the Bible or in addition to the Bible as a source of authority.

John identifies another key feature of these false teachers in verses 22-23:

*Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is*

*the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father.*

*Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.*

Here is a mark of every cult and false religion in the world today: They reject this core doctrine that Jesus is equally divine with the Father and the Spirit. They might even say it is just a minor technicality that we should not get hung up on. They agree with us in all the things that *really* matter, they say.

But John is clear: You cannot belong to God the Father if you reject God the Son. Jesus Christ is the anointed, sovereign, eternal, Prophet, Priest, and King of Kings. John knew what he was talking about. He had heard it straight from Jesus' lips when the Lord said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

**YOU CANNOT BELONG TO  
GOD THE FATHER IF YOU  
REJECT GOD THE SON.**

Is that offensive? To many, it is; but the truth often offends and challenges people. It demands that all repent and yield to our sovereign Lord. And we do not do anybody any favors by trying to hide the truth.

Let me say it again: you cannot get God without the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

John then urges us to stick with the truth we have heard from the beginning:

*Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you [take up residence in you]. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. (verses 24-25)*

No antichrist, no false teacher, can take that away from you!

Yes, there is plenty of deception and confusion out there. There always has been and always will be. But John returns to his encouragement about the anointing we have and repeats his exhortation in verse 27:

*But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.*

Beloved, remain in Jesus. Stick with Jesus. Stand with the truth about Jesus. He is the only faithful Savior and Lord of all. You are safe in His care. So, draw closer to Him. Thank Him, love Him, obey Him, and depend on Him today to carry you through.

**DRAW CLOSER TO JESUS.  
THANK HIM, LOVE HIM,  
OBEY HIM, AND DEPEND ON  
HIM TODAY TO CARRY YOU  
THROUGH.**

---

How aware am I of false teachings and antichrists in today's world? How can I guard myself against deception?

Have I ever encountered someone who left the faith or denied Christ? How did that affect me, and how should I respond?

What are practical ways I can abide in Christ daily and let His truth "take up residence" in me?

How do I discern the difference between true biblical teaching and deceptive, misleading doctrines?

Am I actively sharing the truth of Christ with others, even when it might offend or challenge them?

---

Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:

[www.wisdomonline.org](http://www.wisdomonline.org)



the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 756

# 1 JOHN

## CHANGING OUR IDENTITY

### 1 JOHN 2:28—3:24

---

In today's passage, John drives home the amazing truth that God calls us His very own children. He then gives us three areas in which this truth should impact our lives on a daily basis.

---

Identity theft has become an incredible problem today. I have read that there are more than 130 million computer programs designed to steal your personal information: a credit card number, a Social Security number, a PIN number. Thieves will then use that information to obtain some benefit—to purchase some item or simply empty your bank account if they can.

Frankly, I am amazed at how clever and deceptive they are at trying to get our personal information—to steal our identity—for their own benefit.

Has it ever occurred to you that as a Christian, by definition, you possess someone else's identity? You are called a *Christian* because you have taken Christ's identity.<sup>1</sup>

You did not steal it, but you were not born with it either. Your new identity as a Christian is not the result of identity theft. Your new identity happens to be God's *gift* to you.

As we set sail today, back into 1 John 2, the apostle is going to talk about our new identity

in Christ, and he is going to carry this theme all the way through chapter 3. His main point is found here in 1 John 3:1:

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*

John is excited to write this truth. He is saying, "Look at this! Look at this great love God has for us! It is a kind of love the world never thought of! God has invited you into a new, personal identity as a child of God."

It has now been decades since John first met and began following Jesus. John still has not gotten over the privilege of being one of God's children. I am afraid that when we meet new believers who are so excited about their conversion, we think, *Eventually, they'll get over it.* John never got over his new identity.

We have been given a new name: Christian. And that is not a label; it is not a little sticky name tag we wear on Sundays that does not

match our outfit. This is who we *are* by faith in Christ.

In verse 2 John adds, “We are God’s children *now*.” It is not some far-off future thing. He is treating us now as His beloved sons and daughters because we are related by faith to God the Son. That is still not all. John goes on to write, “And what we will be has not yet appeared.” He is saying, “You have begun your lives as God’s children, but you have not seen anything yet!”

John continues, “When he appears we shall be like him.” We will be like Jesus one day! That does not mean we will become divine, but it does mean we will be without sin; we will be glorified, shining with the brilliance of the sun, just as Moses and Elijah shone with brilliant light when they met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. You, beloved, will one day become a magnificent, shining immortal.

Then, in verse 3, John makes a point of application: “And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” We are God’s children *now*, and that will never change. But since we are God’s children, we ought to change; we ought to live like His children.

SINCE WE ARE GOD’S  
CHILDREN, WE OUGHT TO  
CHANGE; WE OUGHT TO LIVE  
LIKE HIS CHILDREN.

John helps us out here by giving us three major ways we should live pure lives.

First, *we live like God’s children by putting away sin*. In verses 4-10 John shows that sin is a disfiguring, destructive agent that distorts the image of Christ in us. Frankly, sin makes

us look more like the devil’s kids than God’s (verse 8).

John reminds us that Jesus, who has no sin at all, came to take sin away (verse 5). That means people who claim to be believers but keep on sinning without any regret or guilt or caution are proving they do not know Him. John writes in verse 7 that true believers “practice righteousness.” On the other hand, those who make “a practice of sinning [are] of the devil” (verse 8).

He is not saying Christians do not sin. He has already written in 1 John 1:8 that if we claim we do not sin, we are lying. He is saying that one whose life is characterized by the practice of righteousness is a believer. In contrast, a person whose life is characterized by sin is a follower of the devil. He does not confess his sin; he desires it and defends it.

I can remember not long after giving my life to Christ, I had a summer job before heading off to college. I worked for the Norfolk Bridge Tunnel, a tunnel and bridge system that linked Portsmouth with downtown Norfolk, Virginia. In those days there were toll booths set up where we collected money from people driving through that tunnel system.

One night as I stood outside with another employee who was about five years older than me, he pointed across the water to a large hotel and said, “Look at all those hotel rooms over there with the lights on. Can you imagine all the parties going on right now over there and all the girls and all the guys who are going to get together tonight? And I’ve got to be working here when I could be over there.” I will never forget thinking, *Here I am as a young man fighting temptation to sin, and this guy is longing to sin.*

Well, that is who John is describing here—a person who is “practicing” sin and longing for the day when he gets to sin again. A believer is longing for the day when he will never sin again.

Second, as children of God, *we ought to love one another*. John shows how vital this is by contrasting love for one another with the life of Cain, the world’s first murderer. Cain murdered his own brother, Abel, because he hated him. And verse 12 says he hated him “because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s [were] righteous.” Imagine that. He killed his brother simply because his brother was living for God.

The world hates Christians for the same reason. Look at verse 13: “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.” But our response is not to return hate for hate but to return love—especially toward other believers (verse 14).

John illustrates the very practical nature of love with his question in verse 17:

*If anyone has the world’s goods  
and sees his brother in need, yet  
closes his heart against him, how  
does God’s love abide in him?*

Love is not just a topic of conversation; it is a call to action.

Finally, *we demonstrate our identity in Christ by keeping His commands*. John knows that his strong exhortation on practicing righteousness and love will raise doubts in some of his readers minds. They are going to think, *I fall short of these things so often. Am I really a Christian?*

So, in the remainder of this chapter, John provides some reassurances. In verse 20, he writes, “Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”

He already knows the worst about you and me and yet loves us still. And that is because Jesus has already paid for every sinful thought and deed. So, as John wrote back in chapter 1, let us be quick to confess our daily sins so that our fellowship stays fresh with the Lord.

When you do that, verse 21 says, you “have confidence before God.” This kind of confidence frees us to keep the Lord’s commands, not by our own strength, but “by the Spirit whom [God] has given us” (verse 24).

This passage is a wonderful reminder that through faith in Christ our identity has entirely changed. It was not identity theft; it was God’s identity gifts to us. We belong to the family of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit for life, and we even have a new name—His name. We are Christians because we belong to Jesus Christ.

THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST  
OUR IDENTITY HAS ENTIRELY  
CHANGED.

How does the reality of being called a child of God impact the way I view my identity today?



In what ways am I striving to live in purity, reflecting my identity as a child of God?

How can I better practice loving others, especially other believers, as evidence of my identity in Christ?

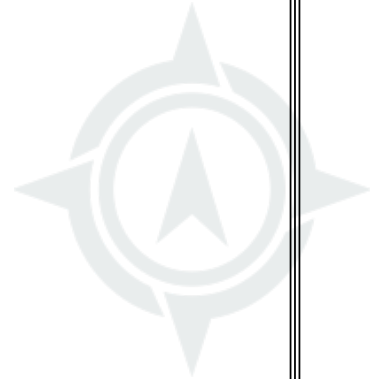
When I doubt my salvation or identity in Christ, how can I remind myself of God's greater knowledge and love?

How can I actively depend on the Holy Spirit to help me live out my identity as a Christian and obey God's commands?

---

<sup>1</sup>Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Because He Loves Me* (Crossway Books, 2008), 51.

Plot your Wisdom Journey.  
How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?



Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:  
[www.wisdomonline.org](http://www.wisdomonline.org)





the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 757

1 JOHN

## DETECTING COUNTERFEIT TRUTH AND GENUINE LOVE

### 1 JOHN 4

---

False teaching is all around us, and it is seductive and dangerous. In our passage for today, John reminds us how to recognize it. He then gives us some of the most definitive statements on God's love that we will find anywhere.

---

I have mentioned in the past that there are people in the financial world who have received special training in detecting counterfeit currency. Much of the training involves handling genuine currency in order to more quickly detect the counterfeit.<sup>1</sup>

One individual told me this training included a session when the lights were turned out and the trainees handled money in complete darkness, learning to detect counterfeit money simply by its texture.

Detecting and avoiding counterfeit teachers is a major theme throughout John the apostle's first letter. And as we sail into chapter 4 of 1 John, he is going to raise the issue again. This is clear from the first verse:

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

The word for "test" here was commonly used in John's generation for testing the genuineness of coins.<sup>2</sup>

There was evidently counterfeit money in the first century—probably in every century for that matter. And there are certainly counterfeit teachers as well. When you were in school, you listened to your teachers, and then they gave you tests to take. Of these teachers John says, "No, no. You test the teacher first, and then listen to him. Put your teacher to the test!"

He even gives us the test for them in verse 2:

*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.*

In other words, what does that Bible teacher, that prophet, that spiritual guide, say about

*Jesus?* John effectively says, “Be specific. Do they confess that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, from God?”

Christ (*christos*) was the term for the coming anointed Messiah from heaven—the one literally dispatched by God the Father to come in the flesh.

Jesus’ existence did not begin at Bethlehem. Bethlehem was simply where He first appeared in human flesh. He existed from eternity past, was miraculously, invisibly conceived in a virgin by the overshadowing presence of the Holy Spirit, and joined the human race.<sup>3</sup> At a point in time, at Bethlehem, He was born in the flesh, but prior to that, He was—and ever will be—the eternal second member of the Godhead.

By the way, this loaded phrase from John provides the critical defense against Gnosticism, Liberalism, Judaism, Mormonism, Islam, and, frankly, every other religious system that does not confess that Jesus Christ is eternally preexistent deity—one of the three persons of the Trinity—and yet also fully human.

And notice that John does not let false teachers off the hook by suggesting they are harmless in their mistaken doctrine. He writes, “This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already” (verse 3).

In contrast, he writes in verse 6, “We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us.”

When John writes of listening to “us,” he is referring to the apostles as God’s messengers, along with the Old Testament prophets, who were God’s spokesmen. This is another way of saying, “Listen to the Old Testament and to

the New Testament.” Do not let anyone lead you away from the Bible or try to add to it!

John then returns to the theme of love, which is another way you can discern a true believer from a deceiver. Love is one characteristic that is impossible to fake—and it is John’s theme through the rest of chapter 4.

LOVE IS ONE  
CHARACTERISTIC THAT IS  
IMPOSSIBLE TO FAKE.

In these verses, John gives us four statements about genuine love. First, *love is who God is*. He begins in verses 7-8:

*Beloved, let us love one another,  
for love is from God, and whoever  
loves has been born of God and  
knows God. Anyone who does not  
love does not know God, because  
God is love.*

Everyone who has been born again by faith in Christ has been given the capacity to reflect the character of God, who is love.

Now part of our problem is we use the word *love* for a lot of things in life. We say we love pasta or football; we use the word *love* in reference to our pet animals and our spouses—hopefully not in the same sentence.

The focus of that kind of “love” is often on how the objects of our love make us feel—what they do for *us*. When the apostle John talks about love here, he uses the Greek word *agapē*, which never focuses on what we get out of love but on what we give to others through love.

*Agapē* is the word used for loving the unlovely; loving the unlikeable. *Agapē* is a self-sacrificing commitment to another person's highest good. Emotions and affections and compatibilities do not determine *agapē* love; they flow from it.

And John writes in verse 8 that God is *agapē*. He does not love us because we are attractive or because we make Him happy—and aren't you glad for that? His love is a self-sacrificing commitment to our redemption.

And that is John's second point. Not only is love who the Lord is, but *love is why the Lord died*. Here is how John puts it:

*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son . . . to be the propitiation for our sins.  
(verses 9-10)*

Jesus satisfied the demands of divine justice out of love for His redeemed.

And why would God the Son do that for you and me? That is John's third point: *love is what God does*. Here is what he writes:

*No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us . . . So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (verses 12, 16)*

God has said this *to us*, God has done something *for us*, and now God wants to do something *through us*.

Since no one has seen God the Father, and since Jesus Christ is no longer visible—for the time being—people are not going to be able to see God's love unless you and I demonstrate it.

When John says in verse 12 that God's love is "perfected" in us, he doesn't mean *we* are perfect. He means God's love is made real and tangible when we imitate Him and practice love for one another—and the rest of the world.

You cannot see God, but you can see the effects of His presence. It is called *agapē*—love.

Finally, *love is what God demands*. We see this in verses 19-20:

*We love because he first loved us.  
If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

God has set the pattern for *agapē*. Now it is up to us as Christians to duplicate the pattern in loving one another. This is not a suggestion of something to do when we feel like it; this is a command to obey because God said it.

And this is also how our world today can discern that we are the genuine item, a true Christian. Why? Because the characteristic of *agapē*/love cannot be found in counterfeit Christians or false teachers. Eventually they

will be revealed to simply be in love with themselves.

John recorded Jesus saying it this way in John 13:35: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Let us demonstrate *agapē* love today.

<sup>1</sup>Ben Patterson, *Waiting* (InterVarsity Press, 1989), 153.

<sup>2</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John* (BJU Press, 1991), 178.

<sup>3</sup>Joel Beeke, *The Epistles of John* (Evangelical Press, 2006), 152.

---

How am I testing the spiritual influences around me to ensure they align with God’s truth?

What criteria do I use to discern whether a teacher or message is from God?

In what ways can I grow in my love for others, especially when they are difficult to love?

How does my understanding of God’s love motivate me to love others unconditionally, as He loves me?

Do I seek to demonstrate God’s love through my actions, not just my words?

---

Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you’ve learned today?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:

[www.wisdomonline.org](http://www.wisdomonline.org)



the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 758

1 JOHN

## CERTAINTY AND ASSURANCE

### 1 JOHN 5

---

In a world of increasing uncertainty, the apostle John offers absolute certainty on three key issues: our standing with God, Jesus' identity as our fully divine and fully human Savior, and our sure salvation in Him. We can stand on these truths with confidence and joy.

---

Some years ago, a university professor wrote about what he perceived to be an obvious loss: a decreasing level of happiness in the world. Along with this loss was an increase in depression. He did not believe it was the result of financial insecurity, or increasing crime rates, or personal debt. He rather insightfully connected decreasing happiness to an increasing level of what he called *uncertainty*.<sup>1</sup>

I believe he is pretty close to the truth. People today are more and more uncertain about their future and their hope for a better world.

Ironically—and sadly—at the same time our world is feeling the devastating effects of uncertainty, many churches and Christian organizations today are diluting the certainty of the gospel so they will not offend anybody. Beloved, certainty is the heartbeat of the apostle John in his first letter.

As we sail into chapter 5, John focuses the inspired lens of Scripture on this very subject. He gives us three areas in which we can have absolute certainty.

First, *we can have certainty about our standing with God*. John starts out with an unapologetically absolute statement in verse 1: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”

We need to remember that when John uses the word *believe*, he is talking about trust in Jesus as the Messiah. To believe is more than mumbling through a church creed or reciting a prayer half awake.

John writes that when you genuinely trust Christ with your life—when you claim Him as your Messiah, your Lord and Savior—you are born of God. You are a new creature, having been born again to spiritual life into the family of God.

Along with that, something else happens to you. You not only love the Lord, but you also love those who belong in your new family. Verse 1 again: “And everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.”

Maybe you have discovered that no matter where you go in the world, you find an immediate kinship with those believers you happen

to meet. And that is because they are kin—they are your brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Now here is the evidence of genuine love for God—verse 3: “that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”

God’s directives are not designed to discourage us or slow us down, but to free us up. They direct us to the kind of lifestyle and goals in life that free us from regrets and guilt and sin.

John goes on to write, “Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world” (verse 4). It may not always look like it, but God’s people are on the winning side. Before passing away at age of ninety-two, my missionary father would call me every Sunday morning to pray for me before I left the house to preach. He would often say, “I’m so glad we’re on the winning team.”

That victory will be fully evident when Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth. And here is the good news: we who belong to His family will get to share in His victory, and we can be certain of that.

WE WHO BELONG TO JESUS’  
FAMILY WILL GET TO SHARE IN  
HIS VICTORY.

Second, we not only have certainty about our standing with God, but *we also have certainty that Jesus is the Son of God.*

In verse 6 John affirms that Jesus is the one who came “by water and blood.” He takes pains to emphasize it was not only by the water but also by the blood. Before we get too confused about this expression, let us follow his train of thought to the end. In the rest of

verse 6, he mentions the Holy Spirit as “the one who testifies.”

Then in verses 7-8, John writes, “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.”

He is talking about three witnesses here. One is the Holy Spirit, who testifies to Jesus’ identity and mission. That is easy enough to understand. But what about the water and the blood?

The Gospels give us two signature events in Jesus’ earthly life that are *uniquely* related to water and blood. First is Jesus’ baptism. His immersion in water was a sign of agreement with John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet, so to speak (see John 1:29-34). Jesus’ baptism was then followed by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, who descended upon Jesus like a dove (Matthew 3:16-17). So, we have the testimony of water and Spirit.

What about the blood? Well, there was nothing more blood-stained than that old rugged cross, where He shed His blood for our redemption.

John is giving us the bookends to Christ’s earthly ministry. It began with water immersion, and it ended with crucifixion. It was all ratified by His resurrection and ascension.

So, the water, the Spirit, and the blood are unique witnesses in the courtroom of history, testifying to the truth that Jesus Christ is the God-Man. Because He is fully human, He could shed His blood; and because He is fully God, He could pay for our sins through His death and then conquer death through resurrection.

How is that for certainty? John writes, “This is the testimony of God that he has borne

concerning his Son” (verse 9). Then he adds, “Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony” God provided (verse 10).

Third, *we can have certainty about our eternal life with God.* Look at verses 11-12:

*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

The testimony John refers to is God’s inspired Word. Do you think God’s Word is uncertain? Oh no, the Bible testifies that God’s grace gives eternal life. In fact, John emphasizes here that without Jesus, it is impossible to have eternal life.

Then in verse 13, John writes, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Not *think* so, *hope* so, *maybe* so, but I *know* so. It is not proud or presumptuous to say you *know* you have eternal life; you are simply believing the truth God has revealed.

IT IS NOT PROUD OR  
PRESUMPTUOUS TO SAY YOU  
KNOW YOU HAVE ETERNAL  
LIFE.

Years ago, when our children were little, a couple in our church came up to us after a Sunday service and said they would like to keep our four little children each week so Marsha and I could go out on a date. They

asked, “Can we keep your four children every Thursday night?”

I said, “You can keep them all week!”

Years later, I stood in the hospital room where this gentleman was nearing the end of his life. He was slipping in and out of consciousness; I leaned down and said, “Dennis, it looks like you might make it to heaven before me. I have just come by to reassure you that because you have believed in Jesus Christ, God’s Word says, “You have eternal life; the Lord is ready and waiting to welcome you home.” His mouth opened, and he whispered, “I know.” Not, “I hope so” or “I think so.”

“Dennis, you’re going to heaven.”

“I know!”

John ends his letter with an even stronger statement about our certainty in Jesus:

*And we know 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, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (verse 20)*

How is that for certainty? If you are not trusting Him for your eternal assurance and certainty, what are you waiting for? Trust Him as your Savior today.

---

Do I understand the difference between merely reciting beliefs and genuinely trusting Christ for my salvation?

How does my love for other believers reflect my relationship with God?

How often do I reflect on the victory I have in Christ, knowing that I am part of His winning team?



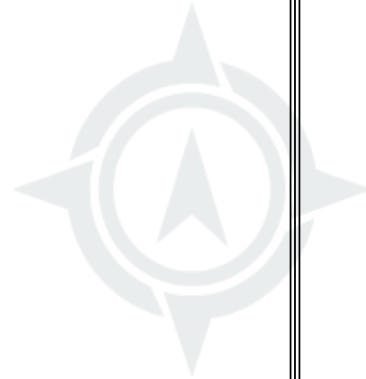
What does the cross mean to me personally, and how does it shape my daily walk with Christ?

Do I have confidence in my eternal life with God, or do I struggle with doubts? How can I address those doubts?

---

<sup>1</sup>Daniel Gilbert, "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous," *New York Times*, May 20, 2009, [opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com).

Plot your Wisdom Journey.  
How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?



Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:  
[www.wisdomonline.org](http://www.wisdomonline.org)