

MEN'S GROUP FOUNDATION

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STUDY GUIDE II - THE BASICS OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

INTRODUCTION

There are so many facets to the Christian life...where does one begin in order to secure a good understanding of the BASICS...the bedrock core and foundation of the Christian Life?

The Apostle John expressly addressed his Letter of First John to first century Christians (and by extension, to Christians across the centuries) as a vehicle of providing just such a strong foundation regarding the essentials of a strong and vibrant personal relationship with Christ.

In John's day, and in every subsequent generation, false teachers have arisen who seek to compromise and alter the truths contained in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John wrote his Letter of First John precisely to help fellow Christians identify and understand the BASICS. His letter focuses on three essentials: KNOWING GOD, LOVING GOD, and OBEYING GOD...and it concludes with THREE TESTS, THREE WITNESSES and THREE ASSURANCES as a means of reinforcing the Faith Walk for every Believer.

John states emphatically in his letter, "I write to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (John 5:13) His overriding concern was the health and well-being of each individual Christian. Thus was the Letter of First John a labor of love on John's part, intended for every Christian's eternal benefit!

Before you begin this study, please spend a minute quietly asking God to use this material and His Word to help you develop stronger character by conforming more into the image of His Son.

STUDY #1 - KNOWING GOD

KNOWING GOD

Acclaimed 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 First John.

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 have 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... and 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. And 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

1. How highly would you rate the importance of “knowledge” in helping you make decisions and chart direction in life?

2. Is there a difference between “head knowledge” and “experiential knowledge” (what we experience with our five senses)? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read I John 1:1 through 1:10

CHAPTER 1 1That 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. 2The 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. 3We 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. 4We write this to make our joy complete.

5This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7But 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.

8If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

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1. As an eye-witness to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, how many of his five senses does John reference in his opening paragraph when describing his knowledge of Christ?

2. Verses 1 through 7 of First John, John communicates 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?

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

4. 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?

a. False Claim #1 (Verses 6 & 7):

b. False Claim #2 (Verses 8 & 9):

c. False Claim #3 (Verse 10):

APPLICATION

1. In *My Utmost For His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes: "Everyone has people 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 whom 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 to 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 qualify as 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 good-doing, but God-likeness. 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 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?

STUDY #2 - OBEYING GOD

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 perhaps fudge a little in a 35MPH zone? If you ever get pulled over for speeding, you learn very quickly how the governing authorities view speed limits.

Question #2: 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? The Book of First John provides great insight into how God views the matter of obedience.

As we observed in Lesson #1, the Apostle John wrote his letter in large part 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 in the lesson address the horizontal relationship between mankind and his fellowman. The Apostle John tell 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 Two of his Letter, John focuses on the importance of OBEDIENCE as he addresses the second of three imperatives that constitute the "Basics of Christian Life." His second imperative: OBEDIENCE.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. 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?
2. 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?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read I John 2:1 through 2:29

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

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

7Dear 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.

8Yet 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. 9Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. 10Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. 11But 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.

12I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13I 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. 14I 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.

15Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16For 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. 17The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

18Dear 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. 19They 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. 20But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. 21I 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. 22Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. 23No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. 24As 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. 25And this is what he promised us—eternal life.

26I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. 27As 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.

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

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1. 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?

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

3. 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)?

4. 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)?

5. 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?

6. 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?

7. In verses 15 through 17, John reverses course and describes a kind of love that is contrary to the love of God. What two reasons does John give for not loving things of the present world system?

8. 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?

9. 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?

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

APPLICATION

1. False teaching wasn't unique to the first century world in which John lived. For example, do the values that are applauded in today's pop culture and television programming really provide lasting fulfillment and purpose in life? How might such false teaching be influencing your current priorities or pursuits in life?

2. 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.

STUDY #3 - LOVING GOD

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 coarse. The downward spiral of cultural norms in John's world was no different from that of ours today. 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 that is moving in the wrong direction? John answers this question in Chapter Three of his Letter by addressing the significance of Who's 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 content of today's popular television sitcom programs when compared to those of 10 years ago? How do the values and behavioral norms projected by today's sitcom characters compare to those of 10 years ago?

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

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read I John 3

CHAPTER 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 brother's 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.

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1. John makes repeated use of the word “KNOW” (Greek: gnosis) 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”?

2. 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 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?”

3. 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?

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

5. 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?

6. 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.”

a. What does he say God knows in verse 20? By way of further 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 it to Him?

b. What does John say in verse 24 that we can know regarding our standing before God as Christians, and how we can know it?

c. What are the conditions we must meet (verses 22 & 23)?

STUDY #4 - KNOWING, LOVING & OBEYING

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 error is essential to the well-being of any individual, and also to any culture for that matter. John recognized this, and having just 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 error is vital.

But knowledge is only one leg of the stool. Love and obedience is equally important 'Basics' of Christian Life'. And 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 (agáp?) 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

1. At one time or another, we have all believed something to be true, only to find out later that it wasn't. Thinking about an instance from your own experience, how unsettling was it to realize that something you thought was true turned out not to be so?

2. 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. 2This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3but 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.

4You, 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. 5They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 6We 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.

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

13This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14And 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. 16And 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:

a. In Chapter 2, our acceptance or rejection of the Son determines whether or not we possess the _____.

b. 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 in 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?

7. Jesus told his disciples in of the Gospel of 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 very 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

1. 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?

2. Spend some time reflecting on verses 4 and 13 of Chapter 4, and consider how you might lean on the Holy Spirit rather than your own understanding when it comes to walking in obedience to God's command to love your brother.

STUDY #5: THREE TESTS, THREE WITNESSES, THREE ASSURANCES

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 but one 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. Such a position certainly qualifies as “false teaching” according to John’s definition. For him, both knowledge and truth were essential elements of true Christianity... and the imperatives of 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 byline of false teachers in his day, John begins each assurance with the Greek verb for experiential knowledge (i-edo):

1. We know the true Christian does not continue in a lifestyle of sin (verse 8)
2. We know the true Christian is a child of God, a member of God’s family (verse 19)
3. We know the true Christian has been given understanding, to know God relationally (verse 20)

John concludes his letter by once again 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

1. 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?

2. How often do you apply such tests to your most strongly held beliefs?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read I John 5:1-21

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

6This 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. 7For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9We 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.

11And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13I 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. 14This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

15And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

16If 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. 17All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

18We 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. 19We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the

evil one. 20We 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. 21Dear children, keep your selves from idols.

Holy Bible - New International Version

1. What evidence does John point to in verses 1 through 5 to distinguish that 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 important assurance that all Christians have regarding prayer. How does he condition God's commitment to answer prayer in verse 17 (compare answer 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 Matthew 12:30-32 for additional insight)?

7. Stressing the 'importance of knowledge' (the very concept which the false teachers espoused), what three truths does John assert that as Christians, "we know" in verses 18- 20?

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

APPLICATION

1. 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 lasting satisfaction or meaning and purpose in your life?

2. 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"?