

# **Back to Basics**

## **Year 5, Quarter 3**

**In this quarter we will study the epistles of James and John. As these writers address unique problems, they do so by going back to basics. Thus we read of faith and obedience, love for God and fellow man, pride and humility, forgiveness of sins, overcoming temptation, prayer and other fundamental components of the Christian life.**

### **Outline**

#### **Week 1: The Book of James**

- ◆ Introduction; Overcoming Trials (Jas 1:1-8)
- ◆ A Balanced View of Material Possessions (Jas 1:9-11)
- ◆ Temptation and Blessing (Jas 1:12-18)
- ◆ The Firstfruits of God's Creatures (Jas 1:18-21)
- ◆ A Hearer AND a Doer (Jas 1:22-27)

#### **Week 2: The Book of James**

- ◆ Judges with Evil Thoughts (Jas 2:1-4)
- ◆ Role-Reversal (Jas 2:5-9)
- ◆ Judgment and Mercy (Jas 2:10-13)
- ◆ Dead Faith (Jas 2:14-19)
- ◆ Justified by Works, Not by Faith Only (Jas 2:20-26)

#### **Week 3: The Book of James**

- ◆ The Tongue of the Teacher (Jas 3:1)
- ◆ A Small Organ with Great Influence (Jas 3:2-8)
- ◆ Blessing and Cursing from the Same Mouth (Jas 3:9-12)
- ◆ Earthly, Sensual and Demonic Wisdom (Jas 3:13-16)
- ◆ Wisdom from Above (Jas 3:17-18)

#### **Week 4: The Book of James**

- ◆ Brethren at War (Jas 4:1-3)
- ◆ Becoming God's Enemy (Jas 4:4-6)
- ◆ Becoming God's Friend (Jas 4:7-10)

- ◆ Judges of the Law (Jas 4:11-12)
- ◆ “If the Lord Wills ...” (Jas 4:13-17)

### **Week 5: The Book of James**

- ◆ The Wicked Rich (Jas 5:1-6)
- ◆ The Patient Saints (Jas 5:7-9)
- ◆ In the Final Analysis ... (Jas 5:10-12)
- ◆ Prayer: Appropriate for All Occasions (Jas 5:13-18)
- ◆ Turning Back the Wanderer (Jas 5:19-20)

### **Week 6: The Book of First John**

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Fellowship with the Son (1 Jn 1:1-4)
- ◆ Walking in Darkness and Light (1 Jn 1:5-7)
- ◆ Denying and Confessing Sin (1 Jn 1:8-10)
- ◆ Our Advocate with the Father (1 Jn 2:1-2)

### **Week 7: The Book of First John**

- ◆ Keeping the Commandments (1 Jn 2:3-6)
- ◆ The New/Old Commandment (1 Jn 2:7-8)
- ◆ Further Contrast of Darkness and Light (1 Jn 2:9-11)
- ◆ Words of Assurance (1 Jn 2:12-14)
- ◆ Love for the World (1 Jn 2:15-17)

### **Week 8: The Book of First John**

- ◆ Antichrists Have Come (1 Jn 2:18-19)
- ◆ Denial of the Son (1 Jn 2:20-23)
- ◆ Mutual Abiding (1 Jn 2:24-27)
- ◆ Confidence at Christ’s Coming (1 Jn 2:28-29)
- ◆ A Purifying Hope (1 Jn 3:1-3)

### **Week 9: The Book of First John**

- ◆ Turning from Sin (1 Jn 3:4-6)
- ◆ “He Who Sins Is of the Devil” (1 Jn 3:7-9)
- ◆ More on Brotherly Love (1 Jn 3:10-15)
- ◆ Signs of Love (1 Jn 3:16-18)
- ◆ Assurance of Heart (1 Jn 3:19-23)

### **Week 10: The Book of First John**

- ◆ The Spirit of the Antichrist (1 Jn 3:24-4:6)
- ◆ God Is Love (1 Jn 4:7-11)
- ◆ Abiding in God Through Love (1 Jn 4:12-16)
- ◆ Perfect Love Casts Out Fear (1 Jn 4:17-19)
- ◆ Proving Our Love for God (1 Jn 4:20-21)

### **Week 11: The Book of First John**

- ◆ Victory over the World (1 Jn 5:1-5)
- ◆ Three-Fold Witness (1 Jn 5:6-8)
- ◆ Eternal Life in the Son (1 Jn 5:9-13)
- ◆ The Power of Prayer (1 Jn 5:14-17)
- ◆ Blessed Assurance (1 Jn 5:18-21)

### **Week 12: The Book of Second John**

- ◆ Salutation (2 Jn 1-3)
- ◆ Walking in Truth (2 Jn 4-6)
- ◆ Going Beyond the Doctrine of Christ (2 Jn 7-9)
- ◆ Fellowship with False Teachers (2 Jn 10-11)
- ◆ Conclusion (2 Jn 12-13)

### **Week 13: The Book of Third John**

- ◆ Salutation and Prayer (3 Jn 1-4)
- ◆ Gaius' Ministry to Evangelists (3 Jn 5-8)
- ◆ Rebuke of Diotrephes (3 Jn 9-10)
- ◆ Praise of Demetrius (3 Jn 11-12)
- ◆ Conclusion (3 Jn 13-14)

## MEMORY VERSES: YEAR 5, QUARTER 3

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- Week 1:** But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.  
↪ James 1:25
- Week 2:** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.  
↪ James 2:24
- Week 3:** But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.  
↪ James 3:8-9
- Week 4:** For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."  
↪ James 4:14-15
- Week 5:** Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.  
↪ James 5:7
- Week 6:** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.  
↪ 1 John 1:8-9
- Week 7:** He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.  
↪ 1 John 2:10-11
- Week 8:** Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.  
↪ 1 John 3:2
- Week 9:** In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.  
↪ 1 John 3:10

**Week 10:** Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

↪ 1 John 4:17

**Week 11:** Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

↪ 1 John 5:14

**Week 12:** Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

↪ 2 John 9

**Week 13:** Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

↪ 3 John 11

**Day 1: Introduction; Overcoming Trials (Jas 1:1-8)**

Identifying the author of this book is speculative, but the weight of the evidence favors James, the brother of the Lord. Certainly he is the most prominent and influential of the various ones named James in the NT, and the early death of the apostle James (Ac 12:2) makes his authorship unlikely. James identifies himself simply as “*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Jas 1:1). If he is the Lord’s brother (half-brother, actually) why doesn’t he refer to himself as such? His hesitancy may be due to the fact that James initially *disbelieved* in the Messiahship of Jesus (Jn 7:5).

Like Peter (and there many similarities between James and 1 Peter), James addresses Christians undergoing trials. Those trials, he reminds them, spur growth unto spiritual maturity (Jas 1:3-4). But it takes insight to appreciate the value of hardship, and the wisdom to see all things as we should is readily available to those who request it from God in faith (1:5-6). If the tribulations of life are not properly assessed, however, they will produce doubt – doubt about God’s love, care and interest in us. This leads to double-mindedness, a condition which is spiritually fatal (1:6-8).

1. What is the nature of God’s giving?
2. What must be the nature of man’s asking?

**Day 2: A Balanced View of Material Possessions (Jas 1:9-11)**

James addresses social inequities in various places in the epistle. He first urges both rich and poor to define themselves apart from their possessions. The lowly brother should “*glory in his exaltation*”; that is, such brethren are “*rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom*” (Jas 2:5). The rich must grapple with the reality that, in spite of material prosperity and all its privileges and pleasures, he will eventually “*fade away in his pursuits*” (1:11).

3. How does James describe the frailty of life? Where did Peter use the same figure?

**Day 3: Temptation and Blessing (Jas 1:12-17)**

The fabric of life is woven with the threads of good and evil, and James wants his readers to understand the proper origin of each. Man, not God, is the author of evil. As each is “*drawn away by his own desires and enticed*” (Jas 1:14), he perpetrates evil upon himself and others. The seeds of sin, and its ultimate fruit – death, are sown by man himself. On the contrary, “*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights*” (1:17). But how easy it is to excuse ourselves and blame God for the sorry state of affairs in this world! Thus James’ warning: “*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren*” (1:16). Satan loves it when God is charged with his nefarious work.

4. Describe the person who will ultimately receive the crown of life.
5. What gives birth to sin?
6. What do you think this means: “*with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*”?

#### **Day 4: The Firstfruits of God’s Creatures (Jas 1:18-21)**

James now focuses on the greatest gift bestowed by God upon man: the opportunity of being born into His spiritual family. Through the instrumentality of His word (Jas 1:18; comp. 1 Pet 1:23-25) we may obtain a favored and privileged position before God. The term “firstfruits” is a figurative expression drawn from the OT practice of dedicating the firstborn of man and animal and the first-reaped crops to God. This acknowledged God as the ultimate source of blessing and reminded Israel of their dependence upon Him. Thus Christians become among the general human population “*a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*” But this honor brings obligations: we must be “*swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” and “*lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness*” (1:19, 21). Impulsive, unbridled anger and residual wickedness will choke out the implanted word by which we have been spiritually regenerated.

7. What quality enables the word of God to grow within us to full maturity (Jas 1:21)?
8. What weaknesses make us “slow to hear” and “quick to speak”?
9. What is meant by “The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God”?

#### **Day 5: A Hearer AND a Doer (Jas 1:22-27)**

Mere access to and familiarity with the truth is not enough to gain acceptance with God. Truth must be mixed with conviction resulting in action. Incredibly, many people hear the word of God proclaimed throughout life but it makes little impact upon them. James likens this to a person who looks into a mirror only to have the image fade when he walks away (1:23-24). “The mirror is an object used to alter man’s external appearance; the Word, however, confronts man internally and demands a response” (Kistemaker, **NTC James and I-III John**, p. 61). God’s word gives crucial insight into His will; it reflects our flaws and gives us opportunity to make appropriate corrections. To hear and not do is to deceive ourselves (Jas 1:22). On the other hand, he who “*is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does*” (1:25). Those who genuinely conform themselves to the character which God enjoins will bridle their tongues (1:26), care for the unfortunate and keep themselves undefiled by the world (1:27).

10. What do James 1:16, 22 and 26 have in common?
11. Contrast “pure and undefiled religion” and “useless” religion.

**Day 1: Judges with Evil Thoughts (Jas 2:1-4)**

James addresses with some vigor a problem apparently plaguing the brethren to whom he writes. Love and unity has given way to unkind favoritism and divisiveness. Specifically, they are showing partiality even in the worship assembly. The rich are given preferential treatment and the poor are demeaned. He subtly reminds them that Jesus, not man, is the “*Lord of glory*” (2:1). All men are equals before Him, and He is the righteous Judge of all (2 Tim 4:8). To differentiate between the relative worth of man on the basis of externals makes one a judge with evil thoughts.

1. What was the nature of the preferential treatment given to the man in fine apparel?

**Day 2: Role-Reversal (Jas 2:5-9)**

“You have it backwards,” James charges. First, the poor brother is really rich in the things that matter: faith, the kingdom and love for God (Jas 2:5). Yet his brethren dishonor and snub him. On the other hand, it is the rich who oppress them and defraud them via the courts (2:6). Further, these Christians endure the blasphemous insults hurled by the wealthy. Why court them? Why cater to them? Like moths to the flame, men are often drawn to the things (or people) that ruin them. James, writing to a distinctly Jewish audience, urges upon them the “royal law”: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (2:8). This principle, of course, is trans-covenantal. It underlies all relations of men regardless of the covenant in force, so James could quote it from Moses’ law and apply it in this situation with due justification.

2. Why might these brethren (or we) show favoritism toward the wealthy?
3. What is the outcome of showing such partiality?

**Day 3: Judgment and Mercy (Jas 2:10-13)**

Lest his readers think James is making too much of a minor matter, he makes a sobering assertion: “*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all*” (Jas 2:10; cf. Gal 3:10). But James hastens to bring mercy into the picture: “*For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment*” (2:13). James’ point seems to be along this line: Since the demands of law are impossibly stringent, no man will be saved without mercy. But to *receive* mercy, each must *extend* mercy to others. These brethren were not being merciful to the unfortunate; rather, they were judging them with evil thoughts (2:4). Thus, if they did not repent, they would likewise be judged without mercy.

4. By what law will we be judged?



5. Over what does mercy triumph? What does this mean?

#### **Day 4: Dead Faith (Jas 2:14-19)**

The teaching and exhortation of James in 2:14-26 are sorely needed today by a religious world that has abandoned him in favor of Calvin. The vast majority of so-called Christians in our day accept one form or another of Calvin's notion of "grace only" salvation. Consequently, they writhe and wriggle around James' plainly spoken words in this passage. James asks: "Is a merely verbal faith enough to save a man? Is faith without any substantiating works worth anything?" His own answer is "no": "*Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*" (2:17). James illustrates the kind of works he is talking about in 2:15-16. They are not slavish works of merit wherein a man endeavors to atone for his own sins; rather, the works are simply actions which complement words. It **says** to the destitute "*Depart in peace, be warmed and filled*" but does not **give** them the things which are needed. The man who **says** he believes in God (or has accepted Jesus as his personal Savior, or has "gotten saved" in the past, etc.) but does not **live** by God's law is no better than **demons** – for they also believe and do not act accordingly (2:19). James is plain and clear, but those who have embraced John Calvin will not hear.

6. How can a man show his faith apart from works?

7. How does a demon react to his belief in God? Is he saved by this reaction?

#### **Day 5: Justified by Works, Not by Faith Only (Jas 2:20-26)**

James presses his argument further. He turns to the very scriptures hallowed by his readers and extracts two seemingly incongruous examples of active faith: Abraham and Rahab. Abraham was the revered father of the nation, a paragon of virtue and trust in God. "*Abraham,*" says James, *was "justified by works when he offered Isaac ... on the altar"* (Jas 2:21). Thus "*faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect*" (2:22). Faith **must** have this quality of compliance or it does not justify a man in the sight of God. The same pattern holds true for the Gentiles, as evidenced by Rahab. Though an alien from the covenant and an immoral woman, Rahab responded in humble faith to the imminent invasion of Israel and so saved herself and her family from death. For the **third** time in this passage, James declares that "*faith without works is dead*" (Jas 2:17, 20, 26). There is no need to fret over an imagined contradiction between James and Paul; both are consistent. Paul insists that a man cannot justify himself before God by sheer meritorious effort; rather, "*there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith*" (Rom 3:30). James, however, amplifies the **character** of the faith in question. It must be an active, submissive faith that finds expression in obedient behavior.

8. What designation is given to Abraham by his working faith (Jas 2:23)?

9. How did Abraham's behavior "fulfill" Genesis 15:6 (see James 2:23)?

**Day 1: The Tongue of the Teacher (Jas 3:1)**

James has more to say about speech than any other book of the NT. Prayer, blasphemy, evil-speaking, boasting, singing, swearing, lying, future plans, contemplation, partiality and empty profession of faith are all addressed in this short book (Jas 1:5-6, 19, 26; 2:3, 7, 12, 14, 16, 18; 3:1-12, 14; 4:3, 11, 13, 15-16; 5:4, 9-10, 12-14, 16-18). Perhaps in reference to the erroneous concept of faith/works he has just discussed (2:14-26), James warns that not many should become teachers (3:1). The timid or lazy may seize upon this verse as an excuse to not fulfill their teaching potential, but other passages in the NT either encourage teaching (2 Tim 2:2) or rebuke not teaching (Heb 5:12). James' admonition is not to rush into teaching for glory or adulation. It is a sober responsibility because the eternal welfare of men's souls is affected by what is taught.

1. In what sense shall a teacher receive stricter judgment?

**Day 2: A Small Organ with Great Influence (Jas 3:2-8)**

James' thoughts upon the misuse of the tongue in teaching lead him to reflect upon speech in general and the power to do great harm by ill-spoken words. The tongue is likened to a bridle's bit, a ship's rudder and the spark which ignites a conflagration. Of course, it is not the fleshly member itself that wields influence but the thoughts of man expressed by the organs of speech. And the overwhelming use of the tongue, as James assesses the human condition, is for wickedness: "*It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*" (Jas 3:8). What a terrible waste of power that could be used for good!

2. Describe the challenge of controlling the tongue as discussed by James.
3. What kind of man does not stumble in word?

**Day 3: Blessing and Cursing from the Same Mouth (Jas 3:9-12)**

Whatever the specific circumstance giving rise to this epistle, it is obvious that James knows of some very specific and serious problems among his readers. There is discord, infighting, selfishness and even the cursing of one another. What is especially frightening is that the guilty parties still give God lip-service. They speak glowingly of God and berate and insult those made in His likeness (Jas 3:9). James turns to nature, as Jesus did so often, to highlight the inconsistency of both blessing and cursing emanating from the same source. Howson comments: "There is more imagery drawn from mere natural phenomena in the one short Epistle of James than in all St. Paul's epistles put together" (Robertson, **Word Pictures**, Vol. 6, p. 40). Whether strictly true or not, James has already mentioned stormy seas (1:6); sun-wilted flowers (1:11); the birth process (1:15); heavenly bodies (1:17); sewn seed (1:21); a mirror (1:23-24); horses, ships and

forest fires (3:3-5); beasts, birds, reptiles and sea-creatures (3:7); poison (3:8); a water-spring (3:11) and fruits such as figs, olives and grapes (3:12). He will mention several others later in the epistle. This language strongly resembles the teaching of Jesus, including the present reference to fruit-bearing trees (see Mt 7:15-20).

4. How many times in this chapter does James address his readers as “my brethren”?
5. Explain why a spring cannot produce both salt and fresh water. What kind of water would it be?

#### **Day 4: Earthly, Sensual and Demonic Wisdom (Jas 3:13-16)**

James is still pursuing the general concept of words vs. actions. In chapter two he indicated that words alone do not comprise saving faith but active conviction. He then focused on words of false teaching and cursing which nullify a genuine faith. He now concentrates upon practical evidence of wisdom and understanding, a subject introduced back in Jas 1:5: “*Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom*” (Jas 3:13). The scene described is reminiscent of Corinth: bitter envy, self-seeking, confusion and other accompanying evils. If these things characterize one’s behavior, it is proof that he does not possess the true wisdom that he espouses.

6. What quality accompanies true wisdom (James 3:13)?
7. Describe the origin of “wisdom” that results in envy and self-interest.

#### **Day 5: Wisdom from Above (Jas 3:17-18)**

“Above,” “ascend to,” or “descend from” are all spatial terms relative to heaven. Materially speaking, all that is “up” is the expanse of the universe, and what is “down” is the planet upon which we live. But these accommodative terms are designed to raise our attention from the evil and pollution that so dominate this realm ruled by “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). We should strive for loftier standards, for “*the wisdom that is from above,*” that is, the attitudes and behavior that reflect God and His will. Such wisdom is characterized by things such as purity, peace, gentleness, willingness to yield, etc. (Jas 3:17). The man who is graced with faith and wisdom will demonstrate it by a spirit free from self-promotion and hurtful ambition. It is easy for men to talk a good religion, but “where the rubber meets the road” is the flavor of his words and actions. We would be wise to look beyond the bluster, the banter and the bravado and taste the fruit of a man’s life (3:18).

8. The fruit of righteousness is produced by the sowing of what seed?
9. What degree of mercy is characteristic of wisdom from above?
10. What two things is the wisdom from above without?

**Day 1: Brethren at War (Jas 4:1-3)**

James' tone distinctly toughens in this part of the epistle. He issues pointed rebukes for the wayward attitudes of his readers which have resulted in open warfare. He characterizes them as lustful, covetous and pleasure-seeking. Their prayers sound like those of the modern proponents of the "health and wealth" gospel: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (Jas 4:3). These brethren, who should have been comrades in the spiritual battle against evil, had defected to the enemy and were fighting each other. Like the armies of Moab, Ammon and Edom, they would eventually destroy themselves (2 Chr 20:22-23; Lk 11:17; Gal 5:15).

1. In what way do you think these brethren were guilty of murder (James 4:2)?
2. Why were they not receiving anything from God?

**Day 2: Becoming God's Enemy (Jas 4:4-6)**

James bluntly accuses his readers of spiritual adultery; their adoption of the principles and values of the world is considered infidelity. What follows in Jas 4:5-6a is, as noted by all commentators, a passage virtually impossible to exegete with certainty. Though various explanations are possible, the sense seems to be that the Holy Spirit is jealous of any rival affections. God demands complete devotion and loyalty to Him and Him only, and to enable us to submit so completely "He gives more grace." That is, "the more we surrender, the more He bestows ... Even in this world He gives far more than we give up, and adds a crown of life in the world to come" (Plummer, **The Expositors' Bible**, p. 236). Note that this is an either/or proposition: we cannot be partially loyal to God and partially enamored with the world, for the two are diametrically opposed. To be a friend of the world is to be an *enemy of God*. What a horrible, hopeless designation!

3. Who qualifies to receive God's grace?
4. Contrast the "friendship" in James 2:23 and 4:4.

**Day 3: Becoming God's Friend (Jas 4:7-10)**

James now issues several rapid-fire imperatives which are necessary to restore the readers to a proper relation to God. Some are commands with corresponding promise; others are stinging rebukes ("*Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded*" – 4:8). James 4:9 must be understood in the overall context; it does not prohibit having a good time. Rather, the laughter and joy of these brethren was a raucous, sensual preoccupation with the frivolities of the world. James urges them to replace this unholy amusement with sober contemplation of their spiritual condition. Be-

cause they had made themselves enemies of God, their proper frame of mind should be lamentation, mourning, weeping and gloom.

5. List the three commands which have a corresponding promise.

6. Where did James previously use term “double-minded”?

#### **Day 4: Judges of the Law (Jas 4:11-12)**

Whatever James means by his condemnation here must exclude his own observations that his readers were “adulteresses,” “sinners,” “double-minded” and “transgressors of the law.” In other words, not all accusations of fault constitute evil speaking which makes one a judge of the law, else James violates his own words. “The slanderer, by contrast, generally neglects to learn the facts, avoids speaking in the presence of the accused, sets aside the law of love, and as a self-appointed judge hands down the verdict” (Kistemaker, **NTC James & I-III John**, p. 144). Slander is making judgments which go beyond what can be readily observed. It involves attributing impure motives without cause and accusing falsely. This is a far cry from making a legitimate observation about someone based upon behavior. James could clearly see that these brethren were not walking in harmony with God’s will. To expose that is not to “judge” in the sense that so many people use the term. To defend the truth and uphold the integrity of the Lord’s body, there must be evaluations of the lives of men. But we must be careful to evaluate properly lest we become “*not a doer of the law but a judge*” (Jas 4:11).

7. How does speaking evil of a brother judge the law?

8. What two things is the Lawgiver able to do?

#### **Day 5: “If the Lord Wills ...” (Jas 4:13-17)**

The arrogance of these brethren and total absorption in their worldly affairs had caused them to think that they controlled their own destiny. They were making their future plans totally oblivious to the will of God and how it might affect their decisions. But James reminds them that life is as tenuous and brief as warm breath on a cold night (Jas 4:14). Life gives the illusion of length, and prosperity gives the illusion of superiority and control. James flatly says that “*all such boasting is evil.*” He then states what is often called “the sin of omission” (Jas 4:17). In context, this failure to do good arises from sinful preoccupation with the world. We *all* see many things every day that we *could* do that would be helpful and beneficial, but not all failure to do so constitutes sin. These people were so wrapped up in themselves – their plans, goals, riches, etc. – that they had neither the time nor the care for others (cf. Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan, Lk 10: 25ff). When an obligation that rightfully falls upon our shoulders is neglected or refused, we become guilty by omitting what should have been done.

9. What do we know about tomorrow?

**Day 1: The Wicked Rich (Jas 5:1-6)**

James now returns to a subject previously touched upon in Jas 1:10-11 and 2:6-7. His readers apparently were suffering extreme oppression at the hands of the wealthy. James unleashes his righteous fury against the rich by accusing them of fraud, condemnation and murder and warns them that “*the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth*” (5:4). The God of Hosts (Sabaoth) will turn their revelry into weeping, howling and misery; His judgment would consume their flesh like fire. Their actions have “*fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.*”

1. What had been done to the laborers of the fields?
2. How does the above quotation from James 5:4 comfort the faithful?
3. What would be a witness against the rich in the judgment?

**Day 2: The Patient Saints (Jas 5:7-9)**

Again, James returns to the subject of patience introduced in Jas 1:3. “Patience” is from *makrothumos*: long-tempered, the ability to endure unpleasantness or disfavor without losing hope or flagging in faith. The exhortations that “*the coming of the Lord is at hand*” (5:8) and “*the Judge is standing at the door*” (5:9) may refer literally to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and its consequent effect upon wealthy, oppressive Jews throughout the Empire, or they may be taken figuratively in reference to the relative brevity of life (4:14) and the reality that our Judge stands one heartbeat away from each of us at any given moment. Even ruling out the first possibility as non-applicable today, we must all endure trials in the knowledge that our cries are heard by the Lord of Sabaoth, that God will sustain us adequately in every situation, and that when justice is finally rendered we will appreciate the timeliness of it from an eternal perspective.

4. How does the farmer set an example for patience?
5. What can a lack of patience lead to among brethren?

**Day 3: In the Final Analysis ... (Jas 5:10-12)**

In addition to the farmer who depends upon the providential blessing of rain, the prophets of the OT are now cited by James as “*an example of suffering and patience*” (Jas 5:10). Here were men obediently following the will of God, who “*who spoke in the name of the Lord,*” and were abused for it. Yet they continued to rise above their circumstances and trust in God’s love and care. Finally Job is singled out to instill hope that in the end all will be made right and the faithful will enjoy the full benefits of God’s compassion and

mercy. At first, Jas 5:12 seems out of place, but when we consider the context the connection becomes clearer. It is in times of distress and hardship that words may be embellished with contingencies and conditions. The idea of swearing and oath-making is not that of profanity but of illegitimately qualifying words so that they may be contradicted if necessary. James, alluding to Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:34-37), says in effect, "Just make it a simple 'yes' or 'no' and keep your word."

6. Who do we count "blessed"? What does this mean?

7. Give an instance of an OT prophet who suffered for preaching the truth.

#### **Day 4: Prayer: Appropriate for All Occasions (Jas 5:13-18)**

It is helpful to consider these closing exhortations of James in the overall context of the book. He has previously criticized the brethren for their wrath, prejudice, lust, envy and pride. Against this backdrop he pleads for patience (Jas 5:7-11) and prayer (5:13-18). In this present section "pray" or "prayer" is used seven times. The overarching principle is that no matter what our circumstance, a proper response of godliness should be forthcoming. These observations are not absolutes. Rather, James seems to imply "instead of" in his exhortations. For example, when suffering, pray – *instead of* blaming God and being envious of those who are at ease. When cheerful, sing psalms – *instead of* gloating over your good fortunes to the shame of others. When sick, solicit the prayers of the elders – *instead of* sinking into despair and being overwhelmed with a sense of sinfulness (as illness often highlights). When convicted of wrong, confess your trespasses to each other – *instead of* getting angry, rationalizing and letting bitterness take root in your heart.

I confess to an unsettled mind on James 5:15-16. Is the sickness physical or spiritual? Is the anointing medicinal or symbolic (comp. Mk 6:13)? Are the elders specified to the exclusion of others? Is the assurance that "*the prayer of faith will save the sick*" absolute? Is the illness a consequence of sin? These and other questions pose difficulties with this text, but we must not forget the overall principle: "*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*" (5:16b). Righteous men pray, and a prayerful attitude promotes godly behavior in every situation.

8. What prophet is cited for the power of his prayer? What "nature" did he possess?

#### **Day 5: Turning Back the Wanderer (Jas 5:19-20)**

James' final exhortation is a concern for wayward brethren. In Jas 1:15, James said that "*sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*" To reclaim a wandering Christian is a difficult task, but the one who succeeds "*will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*" Is this not the very essence of God's involvement in this world from the start?

9. What phrases indicate that the wanderer was a saved person?

**Day 1: Introduction**

The author of this epistle, supposed through history to be the apostle John, is addressing a particular though unnamed brand of heresy – probably an early form of gnosticism. John writes to challenge these heretics: *“These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you”* (1 Jn 2:26). It is crucial, probably more so than with any other NT epistle, to account for this background in interpreting various passages in 1 John. Some of the features of this heresy:

- Denial of the actual commission of sin: 1 Jn 1:8, 10.
- Denial of the need to obey God’s commandments: 1 Jn 2:3-4.
- Denial that Jesus was God’s Son: 1 Jn 2:22-23; 4:15; 5:5, 10.
- Denial that Jesus had truly come in the flesh: 1 Jn 4:2-3.
- Absence of brotherly love: 1 Jn 2:9, 11; 3:14-15; 4:20-21.

John writes not only to neutralize false doctrine but also to strengthen the brethren in their convictions: *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God”* (1 Jn 5:13).

1. What does John call the heretics about whom he writes (1 Jn 2:18, 22; 4:3)?

**Day 2: Fellowship with the Son (1 Jn 1:1-4)**

In a manner similar to the book of Hebrews, the author bypasses personal greetings and plunges headlong into his defense of the nature of Christ. His conviction is sharp: he has heard, seen, deeply contemplated and handled the “Word of life.” He has not merely learned about Christ; he has *experienced* Him. He thus repudiates any notion that the Christ was something less than a living being among men, and he confidently bears witness of Him to his readers *“that you also may have fellowship with us”* (1 Jn 1:3).

2. Compare 1 Jn 1:1-2 and John 1:1. What similar points are made by John?
3. What results from fellowship with the Father and His Son (1 Jn 1:4)?

**Day 3: Walking in Darkness and Light (1 Jn 1:5-7)**

After having affirmed that fellowship with God comes only through His Son, John explores some of the elements of that fellowship in 1 Jn 1:5-2:17. He differentiates between “saying” (profession) and “walking” (doing; living). The immediate problem of fellowship with God is tackled first: How can sinners have fellowship with a Being of absolute moral and spiritual purity (*“God is light”* – 1:5)? It is not by separating the ac-



tions of the body from the integrity of the spirit, for “if we **say** we have fellowship with Him, and **walk** in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1:6). John affirms that our general behavior (walk) is the key to fellowship. If we “walk in the light, as He is in the light,” (1:7), if we pattern our lives after the character of God, “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.” It is logical impossibility and practical nonsense to say that “walk in the light” equates with “sinlessness,” for in that case there would be nothing to forgive and fellowship would be determined by perfect performance. Instead, John says that **cleansing** is the key. Remember the backdrop: some were teaching that fellowship with God was maintained **in spite of** what one did. This John denies. The only way for sinful people to secure fellowship with a flawless God is to have their sins removed. This cleansing of sin is attained through the blood of Jesus.

4. The blood of Jesus cleanses sin to what degree?

5. What does John call the man who says he is saved yet openly practices sin?

#### **Day 4: Denying and Confessing Sin (1 Jn 1:8-10)**

John will continue to define the believer’s “walk in the light” throughout the epistle. One element of this walk is confession of sin. It is spiritually fatal for a man to deny his sins, for the denial itself bars him from the only remedy. God demands that we confront our failures. When we do so, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). This promise takes the fear out of admitting our shortcomings. Anything less than forthright admission means that we “do not practice the truth” (1:6); “the truth is not in us” (1:8); and “His word is not in us” (1:10).

6. Who is self-deceived?

7. How do we make God a liar?

#### **Day 5: Our Advocate with the Father (1 Jn 2:1-2)**

The fact that we **do** sin is no **excuse** for sin, for John exhorts “these things I write to you, that you **may not** sin” (1 Jn 2:1). Every believer’s goal must be to duplicate the holiness of God (1 Pet 1:16; 2 Cor 6:17-7:1). But “if anyone sins,” John continues, “we have an Advocate with the Father.” This is another feature or benefit of walking in the light: only those who do so have Jesus as their Advocate (*paraclete*, “one called alongside,” as a lawyer or a personal representative). And not only is Jesus our representative, He doubles as the propitiation, the remedy or solution for the guilt of sin. In conclusion, sin is real but it does not have to estrange us from a holy God. Let us not deny our sinfulness, but rather acknowledge it, turn from it and lean upon Jesus as our Advocate in its removal.

8. For whom did Jesus provide atonement? What Calvinistic doctrine does this refute?

9. How many times does John use “if” in 1 Jn 1:6-2:1? What is its significance?

**Day 1: Keeping the Commandments (1 Jn 2:3-6)**

The three-fold structure of 1 John 2:3-5 is similar to 1:5-7. First a general principle is stated – “*by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments*” (2:3). Then the negative is refuted – “*He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*” (2:4). This probably reflects the assertions of the false teachers: “*if we say*” (1:6, 8, 10) and “*he who says*” (2:4, 6, 9). Finally, a word of assurance is given – “*But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him ...*” (2:5). The theme of fellowship continues but with different words: “*we know Him*” (2:3); “*we are in Him*” (2:5); “*abides in Him*” (2:6). “Walking in the light” is commensurate with keeping – respecting and observing as a daily habit – the commandments of God. The gnostic view was that unique spiritual insight loosed the reins of obedience. But if the Lord, Himself, walked in obedience (2:6; Heb 5:8), no less is expected from His brethren.

1. What phrases are parallel to “the truth is not in him” (2:4; comp. 1:6, 10)?
2. What is perfected in the believer when he obeys God’s commandments?

**Day 2: The New/Old Commandment (1 Jn 2:7-8)**

John now begins to introduce another concept of walking in the light, that of love. In fact, as Jesus makes clear (Mk 12:29-31), love is the essence of man’s relationship with God. But how can love be an old and new commandment at the same time? It is not new in relation to *time*, for God had commanded active good will of the patriarchs and the Israelites. But the love which Jesus exemplified and enjoined upon His disciples was certainly novel in respect to *quality* and *expression*. By Jesus’ incarnation in the form of a servant, by his humble life and acceptance of humiliation, abuse and death at the hands of wretched sinners, and by virtue of that death’s atoning value, God raised the bar of love to a level heretofore unknown. Any doctrine that denigrates genuine love is heretical and demonic.

3. What is passing away? What is already shining? What does this mean?

**Day 3: Further Contrast of Darkness and Light (1 Jn 2:9-11)**

Note again the coordinate phrases: “*in the light*” (2:9); “*abides in the light*” (2:10); “*walk in the light*” (1:7). The contrasting condition is “*in darkness*” (2:9, 11) and “*walk in darkness*” (2:11). What is the featured characteristic of walking in darkness? “*He who hates his brother ...*” (2:9, 11). “Hate” in modern English is a strong emotion, one which few people would admit to harboring. But any feeling which leads to unjustifiable injury, including withholding material supplies from the needy, is hatred (1 Jn 3:17).

4. What condition prevents one from stumbling?

5. Who does not know where he is going?

#### **Day 4: Words of Assurance (1 Jn 2:12-14)**

While the repetition, tenses and the identity of the addressees (little children, fathers, young men) of this section may be puzzling, the basic message is of great encouragement. John reassures his readers that though he is critical of the smug self-assurance displayed by those in error, he is not suggesting that genuine believers cannot have confidence in their own salvation. Likewise, just because “once saved, always saved” doctrine poses false security doesn’t mean that there is **no** security in the gospel. Note John’s declarations: “*your sins are forgiven you*” (1 Jn 2:12); “*you have known Him*” (2:13-14); “*you have overcome the wicked one*” (2:13-14); “*you are strong, and the word of God abides in you*” (2:14).

J.W. Roberts comments on this passage: “God’s children do not live in fear of judgment as the consequence of sin. They know that their sins are forgiven. John uses the perfect tense, which usually expresses the present condition following a past act: their sins had continued to be forgiven following their obedience to Christ, which had secured their initial pardon. As John had explained in 1:7-9, confession and the blood of Jesus bring cleansing. Perfect love casts out fear and torment about sins (4:18; cf. 3: 19ff. of our confidence). Peace of mind is the possession of God’s children” (**The Living Word Commentary**, p. 52). John’s assurance is evidence that these brethren are walking in the light.

6. Knowing the Father is the key to overcoming whom?

7. If John is so confident of their faith, why is he writing to them?

#### **Day 5: Love for the World (1 Jn 2:15-17)**

John’s use of “world” encompasses the forces of sin and rebellion among the creation of God. Thus “the Father” and “the world” are polar opposites. At any given moment a significant portion of the human population is allied with Satan. Many are motivated by selfish lusts and personal ambitions, and they corrupt everything possible to achieve their aims. It is this aspect of the world, not the magnificent spectacles of creation and the wholesome joys which glorify God, which John says “*do not love*” (1 Jn 2:15). Do not quickly pass over the last phrase of 2:17: “*but he who does the will of God abides forever.*” This is fellowship with God and walking in the light projected into the future; the Word of life was manifested that we might *abide forever* (1:2).

8. What two things are mutually exclusive in 1 John 2:15?

9. Why will our hopes be disappointed if they are centered in the world?

**Day 1: Antichrists Have Come (1 Jn 2:18-19)**

To this point John has been combating false ideas in general terms. He now points out in more direct language that “*now many antichrists have come*” (1 Jn 2:18). In spite of wide publicity given the term “antichrist” by the millennial theorists, John is the only one to use it and only in 1 & 2 John, *not* in Revelation. It is plain that antichrist does not mean one particular individual yet in our future but an apostate movement in John’s day that preceded “the last hour” (2:18). Antichrists – many, not one – existed *then*. We need not assume that “last hour” refers to the end of the world but the final moments leading to a time of anticipated crisis. Jesus, for example, warned that “*false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect*” before the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt 24:24). John says these antichrists, though once in association with faithful brethren, were not of the same spirit and thus “*went out from us*” (2:19). We witness the same kinds of apostasy today.

1. What had the brethren heard about the antichrists before?
2. What became clear about these apostate antichrists when they went out?

**Day 2: Denial of the Son (1 Jn 2:20-23)**

One effective tactic of Satan is to confuse people with a barrage of conflicting ideas. They become demoralized, thinking that if the “experts” are hopelessly at odds surely they will never be able to figure out the truth. John here encourages the brethren to be confident in their ability to distinguish truth from error – particularly the truth about Jesus. They “*have an anointing from the Holy One*” (1 Jn 2:20); i.e., they have been blessed with revelation by the Holy Spirit which gives them divine access to the truth. The Spirit has testified that Jesus is the Christ. Consequently, “*Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?*” (2:22), regardless of his claims of deeper awareness.

3. What is the consequence of denying the Son?

**Day 3: Mutual Abiding (1 Jn 2:24-27)**

To John, it is important for his readers to tenaciously hold to what they “*heard from the beginning*” (1 Jn 2:24). He has already reminded them of the “*old commandment which you have had from the beginning*” (2:7). They must continue to let these truths abide in them; if so, “*you also will abide in the Son and in the Father*” (2:24b). This exhortation is reminiscent of Paul’s to the Galatians who were “*turning away ... to a different gospel*” (Gal 1:6-9). When John says “*you do not need that anyone teach you*” (1 Jn 2:27), he does not mean that they have nothing to learn. He means they do not need “new truth” that conflicts with what they have already learned. The Gnostics had nothing for them.

4. What is the essence of God's promises through the gospel?
5. Why did John write this epistle (compare 1 Jn 2:21 and 26)?

#### **Day 4: Confidence at Christ's Coming (1 Jn 2:28-29)**

The concepts of boldness and confidence before God are touched on by John several times in this epistle (1 Jn 3:21; 4:17-18; 5:13-15). He believes that the truth presents an ample basis for security without embellishment or amendment. He exhorts his readers to "abide in God" (2:28) because those who do so can calmly and joyously anticipate the Lord's coming in judgment. Such abiding necessitates practicing righteousness (2:29), for such is the nature of God. To practice righteousness is to keep His commandments (2:3), to walk as He walked (2:6) and abide in the light (2:10). It has probably been noted by now that John uses a great deal of repetition. He addresses the same subject or principle from a variety of perspectives. First John is not a logical treatise like Romans; it is overlapping exhortation. This structure makes it more difficult to understand in an orderly fashion.

6. What is a primary feature of one who has been born of God?
7. What two terms describe the return of Jesus?

#### **Day 5: A Purifying Hope (1 Jn 3:1-3)**

"Behold" is from the Gk. *eidon*, to see. John says, "Look at this; ponder the love of God that has made lowly sinners like us his children!" John returns to the alienation of the Christian from the world: "Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 Jn 3:1; comp. 2:15-17). But the price of alienation pales in comparison to the future glories of being a child of God. Though "it has not yet been revealed what we shall be ... we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (3:2). God has not seen fit to elaborate on the details of our heavenly existence. This leads to some unnecessarily troubling questions. To the man and woman of faith, it should be enough to know that their image will resemble that of Jesus, Himself. This is sufficient motivation to strive for purity while living in the midst of pollution (3:3). We must not buy into any perverted doctrine that denigrates the desire for personal holiness.

8. What is God's nature from 1 John 1:5; 2:29 and 3:3?
9. Compare 1 John 3:2 with Philipians 3:21 and comment.
10. What is meant by the world does not "know" us? Comp. John 7:6-7.

**Day 1: Turning from Sin (1 Jn 3:4-6)**

John now begins to develop the concept of moral obligation. Sin, he says, is not some meaningless technicality but “lawlessness” (1 Jn 3:4). One cannot be born of God and continue as a child of God and indifferently violate divine law. Secondly, the whole reason for Jesus coming to the earth can be summarized by “*He was manifested to take away our sins*” (3:5). How, then, can we take a casual approach toward sin in our lives? This passage is similar to Rom 6 wherein Paul says “*that we should no longer be slaves of sin*” (6:6), that we should “*reckon (our)selves to be dead indeed to sin*” (6:11), and that we should “*not let sin reign*” in our bodies (6:12). The main objective: “*sin shall not have dominion over you*” (6:14). John makes essentially the same point: “*Whoever abides in Him does not sin*” (1 Jn 3:6). The present tense, which John uses, is not apparent in the NKJ. He does not say that those who abide in God cannot commit a sinful act, for that would contradict 1 Jn 1:8, 10. Rather, he says that one cannot abide in God and keep on sinning as the rule of life.

1. In spite of claims to the contrary, what is true of the persistent sinner (1 John 3:6)?

**Day 2: “He Who Sins Is of the Devil” (1 Jn 3:7-9)**

The present tense of the verbs in this section is made more clear in the NAS version: “*the one who practices righteousness*” (1 Jn 3:7); “*the one who practices sin*” (3:8); “*no one who is born of God practices sin*” (3:9). John indicates that one’s habitual behavior identifies his nature. Habitual righteousness identifies one as a child of God. Habitual sin identifies one as being “of the devil” (3:8; comp. Jn 8:44). The Gnostics held that one’s spiritual rebirth so elevated the spirit above the flesh that the activities of the body left the soul untouched. John says this is false. God’s people do not rationalize away or continue in sin because it is lawlessness (3:4); Jesus was manifested to take away sin and was Himself sinless (3:5); sins are of the devil and Jesus died to destroy his works (3:8); and they are born of God and God’s seed remains in them (3:9). It is ironic that Calvinists will wrest these verses to substantiate their position when they actually condemn the very notion that sin makes no impact upon the life of a saved individual.

2. What warning is issued to John’s readers in 1 John 3:7?

3. What is the devil’s nature from the beginning?

**Day 3: More on Brotherly Love (1 Jn 3:10-15)**

John returns to the subject he introduced in 1 Jn 2:7-11. While “practicing righteousness” covers a broad spectrum of behavior, proper regard for brethren is featured by John – perhaps due to the gnostic influence. Those who do not love their brethren are

children of the devil (3:10) and brethren of Cain (3:12). Cain and Abel are representative of two classes of men: those who respect and honor God and the rest of humanity who hate them for their godly convictions. The absence of love means that one “*abides in death*,” i.e., he possesses the nature of the world that is hostile to godliness. Not only does brotherly love identify us objectively as God’s children, it provides subjective evidence as well: “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren*” (3:14). Love is not the only indicator of spiritual life, but it is a reliable one.

4. What is John’s explanation of Cain’s murder of Abel?

5. How should we not react to the world’s hatred of us?

6. Hatred is tantamount to what act?

#### **Day 4: Signs of Love (1 Jn 3:16-18)**

One particular error noted repeatedly by John in this epistle is people who **say** one thing but **do** (or fail to do) another. Genuine love, as Christ both taught (Jn 15:13) and exemplified, will give the ultimate gift – life – for the benefit of another (1 Jn 3:16). If that is true, then what lesser gifts will be withheld? Yet John speaks of the one who sees material need among his brethren and yet “*shuts up his heart from him*” (3:17). This application brings “hatred” down to a concrete level: it is demonstrating less than the proper degree of regard for brethren even in mundane material matters. It is so easy to profess our love for people but fail to show it in everyday life. John’s words should make all of us take a good, hard look in the mirror.

7. How has love been defined and demonstrated for us?

#### **Day 5: Assurance of Heart (1 Jn 3:19-23)**

The standards of godliness of which John has been speaking are lofty, indeed. We can become discouraged by repeatedly missing the mark. Thus John amplifies the role of brotherly love in fostering confidence before God. If we can see the development of divinely-patterned love in our lives, this “*shall assure our hearts before Him*” (1 Jn 3:19). “*If our heart condemns us ...*” (3:20), that is, if our conscience convicts us of failure, then we can take heart that “*God knows all things.*” He knows our weaknesses, frustrations, self-loathing, failed intentions **and loves us still!** He has forgiven us. But if there is comfort when we miss the mark, how much more confidence there is when “*our heart does not condemn us*” (3:21), when our conscience is clear! Such confidence leads to a close communion with our heavenly Father who hears and answers the prayers of His obedient children (3:22).

8. What other phrases used by John parallel “of the truth” in 1 John 3:19?

9. What two principles of John’s epistle are summarized in 1 John 3:23?

**Day 1: The Spirit of the Antichrist (1 Jn 3:24-4:6)**

John returns to the “antichrist” theme he introduced in 1 Jn 2:18-20. While God had greatly blessed His people in the beginning days of the kingdom by the Holy Spirit, there were unscrupulous men who saw the Spirit’s work as an opportunity for personal gain. Thus false prophets had gone out teaching unauthorized doctrines yet claiming that the Spirit gave them utterance. John proposes this simple test: *“By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God”* (1 Jn 4:2-3a). He augments this with: *“We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”* (4:6). The apostles taught a consistent message that was based upon eyewitness knowledge of the nature of Jesus. The Gnostics were inauthentic theorists *“who speak as of the world”* (4:5). Regardless of the significant impact these false teachers were apparently having, John reassures his readers that *“You are of God ... and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”* (4:4).

1. Who would pay attention to the false prophets?
2. Who is the one who truly abides in God, and He in him?

**Day 2: God Is Love (1 Jn 4:7-11)**

The fatal mistake made by those who denied the real and actual incarnation of Jesus is that this denial robs God of His ultimate expression of love for mankind. *“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him”* (1 Jn 4:9). This greatest of all gifts becomes the basis for our love for God and for each other (4:7, 11). The essence of knowing God is the possession and expression of love, *“for God is love”* (4:8).

3. T/F True love is not defined by man’s love for God but God’s love for man.

**Day 3: Abiding in God Through Love (1 Jn 4:12-16)**

No attention should be paid to grandiose claims of men who say they know God. Even men in our day claim to have seen God, but John confirms that *“no one has seen God at any time”* (1 Jn 4:12). The claim of fellowship can be tested in two ways: *“If we love one another, God abides in us”* (4:12) and *“whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God”* (4:15). These are the two major themes of John’s response to Gnostic doctrines. The assurance that our fellowship with God is real and not an illusion is that *“He has given us of His Spirit”* (4:13). The Spirit was evidenced not only by miraculous gifts bestowed in the early years of the church but the character transforma-



tion of believers (fruit of the Spirit – Gal 5:22ff), the progress of the kingdom against all efforts to destroy it, the power of prayer and a number of other indicators that God was working among His people. All of this causes the aged apostle to confidently affirm, “we have known and believed the love that God has for us” (4:16).

4. From 1 John 4:12, 16 what is the *agency* through which God abides in us?
5. If we cannot see God, how can we know that we have a relationship with Him?

#### **Day 4: Perfect Love Casts Out Fear (1 Jn 4:17-19)**

As we learn to love as God loves and, in so doing, abide in Him, this intimate communion prepares us for eternity. Specifically, says John, “we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world” (1 Jn 4:17). God has made man in His image, and He wishes us to bear that image as we live. Since God is love, we replicate His image as we rise above hatred, jealousy, indifference and selfishness and actively seek the welfare of our fellow man. This mutual love replaces fear, for “there is no fear in love” (4:18). The child of God who walks in the light, confesses sin, acknowledges Christ in fullness, and loves as he should will find the confidence to face death without irrational fear of punishment. This is the purpose for which Christ died – “to release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:15). As noted earlier, boldness and confidence are major threads woven throughout the book. John does not want to undermine the faith of his readers even as he assails the false notions of the Gnostic heretics.

6. The Christian who is fearful and uncertain about the judgment has not yet matured in an understanding of what?
7. What gives us confidence to love God with all our heart?
8. What is it about the judgment that we fear? What erases that fear?

#### **Day 5: Proving Our Love for God (1 Jn 4:20-21)**

John has been quite blunt in identifying “liars” in the epistle (1 Jn 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 22; 4:20). Now he indicts as a liar the one who says he loves God but hates his brother (4:20). His reasoning: God’s children are before us day by day; we see them, interact with them and are exposed to God’s nature through them. If we do not love these whom we see, how can we possibly love Him who is what they are, only greater? The “measuring stick” of our love for God is our love for God’s children, those whom He loves dearly.

9. What is God’s commandment to His followers (1 John 4:21; 3:11; 2:7-11)?
10. What do you think some Gnostics were claiming based on 1 John 4:12, 20; 3:2?

**Day 1: Victory over the World (1 Jn 5:1-5)**

There are so many optimistic notes struck by John in this epistle. Even as he seeks to neutralize false teachers, he continually buoys the spirits of his readers by emphasizing the proper grounds of hope and assurance. Truth does not need embellishment; it can stand quite well on its own. In this passage, belief, love and obedience are bundled into a single package. Spiritual rebirth rests upon faith in the Sonship of Christ (1 Jn 5:1, 5). A full appreciation of Jesus leads to deep love for God, which in turn leads to an extended love for others begotten of God (5:1b). And genuine love for God is naturally expressed in obedience (5:3). And what does such comprehensive faith achieve? **Victory that has overcome the world!** (5:4). One message should ring loud and clear from this book: Christians have every reason for security, boldness and confidence as victory for God's people is guaranteed (1 Jn 2:12-14, 24, 28; 3:19-21; 4:17-18).

1. What does John say is not burdensome?
2. Who overcomes the world?

**Day 2: Three-Fold Witness (1 Jn 5:6-8)**

This passage presents difficulties both in textual integrity and in interpretation. First, the NKJ gives a marginal notation that the phrase "*in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth:*" (1 Jn 5:7b-8a) is found only in four or five very late manuscripts. There is clear evidence that this section is inauthentic. Second, what is the significance of the testimony of the Spirit, the water and the blood? Contextually, it seems that John is stressing the reality of the incarnation. Gnostic doctrine held that the divine Son came upon the man Jesus at his baptism and departed from him before the crucifixion, thus denying that deity actually died upon Golgotha. John says no; Jesus came "*not only by water, but by water and blood*" (5:6). Jesus was not only baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" but shed His blood as well. And the Spirit gave incontrovertible testimony that Jesus was "God with us" (cf. Acts 2:22). Those who deny the complete humanity of God's Son corrupt the truth.

3. How is the Spirit described in 1 John 5:6? How is Jesus described in John 14:6?

**Day 3: Eternal Life in the Son (1 Jn 5:9-13)**

A total embracing of the Son is vital to obtaining eternal life, for "*this life is in His Son*" (1 Jn 5:11). Most of our knowledge as human beings is secured by the testimony of others; we know very little through actual, personal experience. If we accept so much as truth from human sources, how can we reject the testimony of God with impunity (5:9)? All of God's divine works throughout the span of human existence point to one thing:

*“that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”* There is no source of life outside the Son. It is vital for God’s people to maintain their belief in the Son, for this is their hope and assurance of eternal life. John wrote to keep these flames of faith burning (5:13).

4. What does 1 John 5:12 say about a good moral person who does not believe in Jesus?
5. How do we make God a liar (1 John 5:10; 1:10)?

#### **Day 4: The Power of Prayer (1 Jn 5:14-17)**

John has previously affirmed the effectiveness of prayer (1 Jn 3:22), and he now returns to this topic at the conclusion of the epistle. After establishing the power inherent within the Christian’s appeals to God (1 Jn 5:14-15), he introduces an instance wherein prayer can be of the utmost value. These verses (5:16-17) are made difficult by the phrase *“sin which does not lead to death.”* “Death” in 1 Jn 3:14 was spiritual death; John here speaks of sin which returns one to such a condition. But what kind of sin does that? John has spoken of a failure to confess sin (1 Jn 1:9); he has spoken of continuing in sin (3:8); he has spoken of denial of the Son (2:22-23). These things exempt one from life. On the other hand he has spoken of forgiveness of sin on the basis of confession (1:7, 9; 2:12), walking in the light (1:7; 2:10) and abiding forever (2:17) or eternal life (2:25). Thus, it would appear, that “sin not leading to death” is that which is confessed and repented of by the believer and expunged by God. “Sin leading to death” would then be the opposite: transgression which remains upon one’s account by failing to deal with it according to God’s instructions. John hastens to add that *“all unrighteousness is sin”* (5:17), but not all unrighteousness produces spiritual death. The prayers of the godly on behalf of their erring, penitent brethren are influential with God (cf. Jas 5:15).

6. Who does John not instruct brethren to pray for?
7. On what condition does God hear us (1 John 5:14)? What condition is in 3:22?

#### **Day 5: Blessed Assurances (1 Jn 5:18-21)**

John closes with words of hope. The phrase “we know” begins 1 Jn 5:18-20, and several other imperatives are designed to increase spiritual assurance. Of what are we assured? 1) The wicked one does not touch the faithful (5:18); 2) We are of God, though the whole world is under Satan’s influence (5:19); and 3) Jesus has come and given us an understanding of God (5:20). Truly, God has done all to ensure our eternal life. All we need to do is *“know Him who is true”* and be *“in Him who is true”* (5:20).

8. Describe “the wicked one” in 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19 and our relation to him.
9. What is John’s closing exhortation of the epistle?

**Day 1: Salutation (2 Jn 1-3)**

John writes this second epistle specifically to identify false teachers plaguing the brotherhood and to warn against aiding and abetting them. The now-aged apostle, perhaps the only one left alive, introduces himself impersonally as “*the elder*” (2 Jn 1). This is consistent with John’s other writings in which he does not name himself as the author. He addresses “*the elect lady and her children,*” a designation which leaves open the question of whether this is an individual or a congregation. “Truth” is in the forefront of John’s thinking, for it appears four times in these three verses. John, of course, knew the truth as one who experienced direct fellowship with the Lord. But now that his generation is fading away, the one replacing it is taking liberties with the truth and straying into unauthorized areas. This disturbs John greatly, and he speaks harshly about those who would corrupt the truth.

1. What abides in the believer and will remain forever?
2. Who loves the elect lady and her children?

**Day 2: Walking in Truth (2 Jn 4-6)**

John is happy to see “*some of your children walking in truth*” (2 Jn 4). He urges upon them mutual love according to the commandment from the beginning (2 Jn 5; comp. 1 Jn 2:7-8). It is obvious that John saw the “truth” as an objective body to be understood, practiced and defended. His conception is far afield from those today who see the Bible as a subjective smorgasbord to be sampled according to one’s own palate. Loving in the proper way is a commandment. Faithfulness to God reaches its highest form when we love God and His other children as He commanded.

3. Finish this phrase: “This is love, \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Day 3: Going Beyond the Doctrine of Christ (2 Jn 7-9)**

The reason for John’s great rejoicing in finding faith among the lady’s children is that “*many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh*” (2 Jn 7). Historical evidence places John’s epistles later in the first century. This being the case, the apostasy which both Paul and Peter warned about (1 Tim 4:1ff; 2 Pet 2:1) is in full bloom as Christianity passes to the second generation. The word “transgresses” (2 Jn 9 – “to go before”), is descriptive of Gnostic thinking. “These Gnostics claimed to be the progressives, the advanced thinkers, and were anxious to relegate Christ to the past in their onward march. This struggle goes on always among those who approach the study of Christ. Is he a ‘landmark’ merely or is he our goal and pattern? Progress we all desire, but progress toward Christ, not away from him” (**Word Pic-**

**tures**, A.T. Robertson, Vol. 6, p. 254). There are those who sin by outright contempt for and rejection of the Scriptures. They couldn't care less what the Bible says. Then there are those who acknowledge the Scriptures but fancy themselves too advanced or sophisticated for its simplicity. These people are arrogant; they creatively circumvent plain truth for speculative and sensational conclusions that pander to their pride. Their faith is a sham; their religious talk is hollow; their motivations are selfish. Anyone who so runs on ahead of Christ and acts without authority "*does not have God.*"

4. What does John call those who deny that Jesus has come in the flesh?

5. Why does John want his readers to "look to yourselves"?

#### **Day 4: Fellowship with False Teachers (2 Jn 10-11)**

John warns his readers not to receive into their house anyone who denies the true nature of Jesus. "Receive" is to accept with full approval, assistance and sympathy (comp. Jn 1:12; 13:20). He further says do not "greet" such a one, for in so doing the faithful becomes a partner with the false teacher. Two points are noteworthy. First, to so reject a false teacher is not inconsistent with the love Christians are to have for others. Love first and foremost seeks the eternal welfare of others, and to harbor a false teacher violates that objective. Second, these instructions do not address hospitality to heathens or the misguided but a known "antichrist" seeking to further his corrosive influence among the brethren. The NT makes other distinctions between those of the world and one "named a brother" who has become corrupt (1 Cor 5:9-11). Practically applied, having atheistic friends over for supper or housing denominational relatives for a few days is not within the scope of John's prohibition. On the other hand, a brother traveling the circuit of faithful churches and plowing up strife and discord must not be offered moral or material support.

6. How does John characterize the activities of the deceiver and antichrist (2 John 11)?

7. **Discuss:** Suppose a long-time gospel preacher friend began teaching that Jesus was something less than a fully divine Being while in the flesh (not hypothetical: brethren have in recent years argued over this point). He calls and asks for a place to stay while traveling to Tampa for a public debate on the subject. What would you do?

#### **Day 5: Conclusion (2 Jn 12-13)**

John, like many of us, would rather communicate face to face than in writing. But a short epistle was necessary in order to inoculate the brethren against the spreading disease of the antichrists. John concludes with greetings from "*the children of your elect sister,*" likely indicating that the "elect lady" addressed by John was, in fact, a congregation.

8. What results when those of common faith and love share time together?

9. Research: Consult W.E. Vine on the word "paper" (2 Jn 12). What kind was it?

**Day 1: Salutation and Prayer (3 John 1-4)**

As in 2 John, this epistle begins with heavy emphasis upon “truth.” This is of paramount importance to John as respect for the truth is eroding toward the close of the first century. A brother named Gaius is the recipient of the book. John likely had converted Gaius (3 Jn 4), and he rejoices to learn that Gaius remains faithful to the present. Many Christians have experienced the disappointment of beloved brethren who have abandoned their faith. In these times of hostility toward the Lord’s church, John is especially gratified by Gaius’ steadfastness.

1. How had John learned of Gaius’ continuing faith?
2. For what does John pray in regard to Gaius?

**Day 2: Gaius’ Ministry to Evangelists (3 John 5-8)**

Gaius has gained a notable reputation among brethren for rendering assistance to preachers and others encountering traveling needs. The late twentieth century is not the only age of travel. As Roman rule and engineering fostered commerce across the Mediterranean basin, Christian evangelists took advantage of the same routes and technology to spread the gospel. Travel was still dangerous and inconvenient, but the borders of the kingdom were enlarged by dedicated and courageous men and women taking truth from place to place. Thus a premium was placed upon fostering these travels. Gaius is further urged to “*send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God*” (3 Jn 6). Just as receiving false teachers establishes fellowship with them (2 Jn 11), ministering to faithful teachers establishes a partnership in the cause of truth (3 Jn 8).

3. What was “borne witness” before the church?
4. Upon whom did preachers not depend as they went forth for the kingdom’s sake?

**Day 3: Rebuke of Diotrephes (3 Jn 9-10)**

The scenario suggested by John is that Gaius and Diotrephes belong to the same congregation. An earlier epistle written by John was rejected by Diotrephes; thus, John appeals directly to Gaius to minister as he is able to the preachers of truth. What kind of man is Diotrephes? 1) He “*loves to have the preeminence among them*” (3 Jn 9). “Preeminence” is from *philoprotos*, “to love to be first.” Diotrephes is domineering, controlling and sectarian. He resents John’s authority and thus “*does not receive us.*” 2) He also exercises malicious speech against John. Prating “signifies to talk nonsense ... to raise false accusations” (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 199). One can picture this rabble-rousing Diotrephes making exaggerated and baseless charges against John in an effort to destroy the grand old apos-

tle's influence. *"And not content with that" 3) "he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church" (3 Jn 10).* Whether Diotrephes is sympathetic to Gnostic teachings, or whether he simply craves control of the church for his ego's sake, is not clear. At any rate, Diotrephes sees the church as **his**, not the Lord's, and he is intent on defending his turf at all costs. How much damage is done by such men, usually under the guise of "defending the truth."

The use of the term "church" in 3 Jn 10 is noteworthy. It does not refer to the body proper but the local assembly and participation in its activities. No man can expel a true believer from the body of Christ, though he may successfully excommunicate him from the local church. If one is so unjustly treated, God still recognizes him as faithful and His wrath will rest upon those who have judged him without cause.

5. What does John intend to do when he comes?

6. How can any man such as Diotrephes hold power over a local church?

#### **Day 4: Praise of Demetrius (3 Jn 11-12)**

Nothing further is known of this man whom John commends. The tone seems to suggest that there had been some question or doubt about Demetrius' reputation. Perhaps he had been slandered by the self-promoting Diotrephes. His character is substantiated by brethren in general, by the truth, and by John himself (3 Jn 12). Two observations are relevant: 1) Where there is a Diotrephes, there is usually a Demetrius and a Gaius. Good men must press on and do what is right even as others knuckle under to the intimidation of the ungodly; 2) While some may slander the good names of faithful brethren, their true character will be recognized by the observant and discriminating. How both Gaius and Demetrius must have been encouraged when praised by the venerable apostle!

7. What is the test of one who is of God? The one who has not seen God?

8. John affirms that his testimony is \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **Day 5: Conclusion (3 Jn 13-14)**

The similar beginning and ending of this epistle to that of 2 John, along with other shared terminology and writing style, confirms a common human author. He wishes to see Gaius and others face to face in the near future and sends greetings from the brethren where he presently resides. Such greetings are not trivialities, God's people have an intense interest in each other's welfare.

9. What can you observe about the nature of inspired writings from 3 John 13-14?