

LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY ONE

Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John

When you have a vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the result is a joyful life, a clean life, a discerning life, and a confident life. When you have a relationship with Christ that is meaningful and deep, the result is a joy that's overflowing. When you do not, you do not. John's letter is about having an overflowing abundance of joy.

—Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT has gone wrong with our world? Violence fills our television screens as we watch the nightly news. People we once admired plead guilty for crimes committed under the cloak of secrecy. The moral fabric of our society has frayed, and behaviors once frowned upon now receive applause. It seems as if people today don't even know the meaning of "right" and "wrong" anymore!

Anger, lawlessness, deception, and confusion—such signs show how our world has tilted off its spiritual axis and how it desperately needs to rediscover its moral center. God did not make His creation this way. He does not delight in the corruption and destruction of His handiwork. He fashioned the earth to bless it and fill it with life and light and all that aligns with His good will.

By turning from God, humanity brought all kinds of disorder into this world. Yet, God has not sat idle and aloof. He sent His Son into this world gone wrong to bear sin's curse. Peter summed up what Jesus accomplished for us:

*He personally carried our sins
in his body on the cross
so that we can be dead to sin
and live for what is right. (1 Peter 2:24)*



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Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John

Christians don't have to settle with the chaos of wrong living. What's the key to overcoming the chaos? *Fellowship with Christ!* The closer our fellowship with Him, the more we enjoy His benefits.

Right living through fellowship with Christ is John's central theme in his first epistle. Not much has changed since John penned his letter. People have always struggled with anger, lawlessness, deception, and confusion, but our struggle isn't hopeless. Fellowship with our Savior produces the fruit of right living. John shows us how!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Think over what you hope to gain from this *Searching the Scriptures* study of Chuck Swindoll's series on 1 John. Make Chuck's opening prayer below your own and record a simple mission statement for why you are doing this study.

Father, help us live right in a wrong world, a world that's lost its way, a world that listens to the wrong voices; a world where the majority is rarely, if ever, right; a world that's impressed with all the wrong things and ignores most, if not all, the righteous things. Help us to live graciously and winsomely, rather than obnoxiously. Deliver us, our Father, from first impressions, judgmental attitudes, prejudices formed by previous years of wrong teaching and wrong opinions. Show us that living right in this wrong world can be done through the power of Christ. —Chuck Swindoll



Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Early church tradition tells us John outlived all the other apostles. He spent decades ministering in and around Jerusalem, and then the first Jewish-Roman war (c. AD 66–73) likely caused him to make his way to Ephesus to finish his course of ministry.

Most think the veteran apostle wrote 1 John while in his nineties, living under Roman emperor Domitian who reigned AD 81–96. John may have penned the letter on the island of Patmos, where Rome had exiled him, or in Ephesus just before or after his exile.

Regardless when and where he wrote, John made his purpose for writing clear. As we will observe, John's purpose soars above the walls of time and flies to all Christians to help them live right no matter where history has them.



Observation: Grasping the Whole

Spotting repetition helps us observe John's intention, earmark his emphases, and feel the emotional force with which he writes.¹ Now, we'll look at four passages. In each, John makes explicit his right-living goals for each believer.

Repetition is one of the helpful things to observe. And that's all I did when I read through 1 John. I noticed how he repeated his purpose for writing. —Chuck Swindoll

Supernatural Joy—1 John 1:3–4

Read *1 John 1:3–4*. Note John's purpose for writing and jot down an expanded paraphrase of these verses. Putting verses in your own words requires you to better observe what the author wrote. It's a great exercise.



Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John

Supernatural Purity—1 John 2:1–2

Read [1 John 2:1–2](#). Why did John write according to this passage? How did John tie his purpose for writing to Jesus Christ?

Supernatural Discernment—1 John 2:26–27

Mark John's goal for writing according to [1 John 2:26–27](#). Who helps Christians fulfill John's warning?

Supernatural Assurance—1 John 5:13

How did John describe Christians in [1 John 5:13](#)? Why did John write his letter according to this verse?

Our vibrant fellowship with Christ sprouts complete joy, victory in our battles with sin, discernment to know truth from error, and assurance of eternal life. John listed these benefits to light a spiritual fire in us.



Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John

In his commentary on 1 John, Chuck wrote of John's purpose:

"The aging apostle hoped to ignite the zeal of these believers so that they might follow the Lord more closely and stand firm against those who meant to sow discord among the churches. In doing so, they would solidify their relationship with God and gain confidence in His work in their lives."²



Interpretation: Fellowship with God

John's supernatural benefits—joy, purity, discernment, assurance—all flow from our spiritual union with God, which is expressed in the word *fellowship*.

In the New Living Translation, "fellowship" occurs eleven times. Most occurrences refer to our relationship with God. Read [1 John 2:23–28](#). How do Christians maintain and foster fellowship with God? What benefits do Christians gain from this fellowship, and how are those benefits important in day-to-day living?



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Fellowship

Too often "fellowship" means "coffee time" or "gabbing in the hall" or "going out with friends." None of those things come even close to the kind of relationship John had in mind. The word *koinōnia* [2842], as used by first-century Christians, conveys an intimate, mutual participation in a life shared with one another. Let's call it communion. It's the outworking of a deep, spiritual union between God and the believer as well as between brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3). As believers have this intimate communion "with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ," they will have the same kind of deep communion with one another through the work of the Holy Spirit.³



Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John

Before moving to correlation, review Chuck's overview chart of 1 John. Notice the key words, *light*, *love*, *truth*, and *knowledge*. These concepts are rich with meaning and weave through John's epistle like melodic themes through a symphonic masterpiece. Be sure to "listen" for their inspiring refrains as you read the book.

FIRST JOHN

Fellowship with God Produces a . . .	Prologue (1:1-4)	Walking with the God of Light		Responding to the God of Love					
		Living in the Light	Staying in the Light	Practicing the Righteousness and Love of God	Testing the Spirits	Loving Others as God Loved Us	Believing in Jesus		
		CHAPTERS 1:5-2:11	CHAPTER 2:12-27	CHAPTERS 2:28-3:23	CHAPTERS 3:24-4:6	CHAPTER 4:7-21	CHAPTER 5		
		Clean life	Discerning life	Loving life			Confident life		
		Emphasis	Light	Truth	Love			Knowledge	
		Means	Obedying	Perceiving	Sacrificing			Believing	
		Christ	Advocate (2:1)	Holy One (2:20)	Son of God (3:8)		Savior of the world (4:14)		
		Purposes	That we may have fellowship and joy (1:3-4)		That we may not sin (2:1)		That we may not be deceived (2:26)		That we may know that we have eternal life (5:13)
		Theme	Living in fellowship with God, who is light and love						
		Key Verses	1:5-7		4:10-16		5:11-13		
Christ in 1 John	Jesus is the Word of Life, who is God come in the flesh to bring eternal life to those who believe (1:1; 4:2; 5:20).								

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Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John



Correlation: The Life of John

If you do not own a Bible dictionary, the start of a new study is a good time to add one to your bookshelf. Chuck prefers the *New Unger Bible Dictionary* which [you can order](#) from our website.

John, who became known as the Beloved Disciple, worked as a fisherman with his father Zebedee. Here are a few highlights of John's life:

- 1) Jesus nicknamed John and his brother James, "Sons of Thunder" ([Mark 3:13–19](#)) because of their tenacity—they sought to call fire upon a Samaritan village ([Luke 9:51–56](#)).
- 2) John, James, and Peter formed Jesus' inner circle because they accompanied Jesus at His transfiguration ([Mark 9:2–13](#)), the raising of Jairus' daughter ([5:21–43](#)), and His agony at Gethsemane ([Matthew 26:36–46](#)).
- 3) John accompanied Peter who healed the crippled man at the temple ([Acts 3:1–10](#)).
- 4) John and Peter exemplified boldness in their faith when they refused to be silent about Jesus before the Jewish authorities ([4:1–22](#)).
- 5) John gave Paul the right hand of fellowship after Paul confirmed his gospel with the leaders of the Jewish church ([Galatians 2:1–10](#)).

Peruse a Bible dictionary entry for John the Apostle if you wish to know more. Record your notes below.

Our overview of John's life and survey of his letter serves as a map to help us navigate 1 John. A thrilling journey awaits us as we grow closer to our Lord and experience in our lives and relationships the benefits of a close walk with Him. Take the first step this week by putting into action one insight you've gained from this study.



Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John



Application: Right Living in a Wrong World

We began our study with a list of wrongs in our world: anger, lawlessness, deception, and confusion. How can we counter these wrongs as we apply John's teaching?

- 1) *In an angry and dark world like ours, the joyful Christian is the bright light.* Hope, a sense of humor, laughter, positivity—how such traits shine!
- 2) *In a lawless society like ours, the clean Christian is a contagious witness.* Trust and attraction follow those who keep their promises and keep from debauchery.
- 3) *In a deceptive culture like ours, the discerning Christian is a convicting presence.* Often, a lonely “no” or a whispered “wrong” puts the sting of truth in a deceived conscience.
- 4) *In a confused age like ours, the confident Christian is a strong magnet.* Admirable goals and upright convictions prove rare these days. We turn heads and spark curiosity as we follow God's truth.

Choose from above one truth you find most pertinent to your season of life. Write why it's important to you and how you would like to uphold that truth in your walk with Christ.

According to John, right living . . . *real* living . . . comes down to fellowshiping with God in a vibrant, interactive, trusting relationship. This kind of connection with our Creator is the most fulfilling relationship anyone can hope to experience. And it's available to all through Christ, our Savior and Lord!



Living Right in a Wrong World

Selections from 1 John



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for time I can spend with You in Your Word. Thank You for 1 John. I anticipate studying it with a great deal of delight. Guide me into the truth in a world that has lost its way, where confusion has become the way of life. How precious is the light of Your Word to me! In the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org or grab a [copy](#) of the book for your library. Also, at the start of this study is a great time to [pick up](#) Chuck's commentary on 1 John.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 10.
3. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, 26–27.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY TWO

A Profound Preface

1 John 1:1–4

Eternal life is a life like no temporal life. This is a life like no romantic life. This is a life like no physician can talk about. This is a life even beyond our slang, “Get a life.” This is an eternal dimension of life that is known only by the Father and is transferred to us through His Son, Christ, who is the Word of Life. God is life.

—Charles R. Swindoll

NO hollow niceties. No beating around the bush. No majoring on the minors or getting lost in the weeds or dreaming among the clouds. With the urgency of an iron will and the focus of a hawk’s eye, the apostle John begins his letter on the most important matter: *eternal life*.

Every individual has an eternal soul, but our souls long for more than mere existence. We yearn for the kind of life that Jesus exemplified and He alone gives. In fact, that’s the reason God sent Jesus into the world, to give eternal life. According to John’s gospel:

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NASB)

With great passion, John declared this message not only in his gospel but also in the opening lines of his first epistle. Because sin’s curse shrouded humanity with death, everyone stands in need of eternal life. Our souls yearn for a new kind of life that flows from an eternal, intimate relationship with God. John directs us to the *only* one who can offer it.



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A Profound Preface

1 John 1:1–4

John enjoyed fellowship with his Lord for decades—in Jesus’ earthly ministry as well as after He ascended. That fellowship brought John a quality of joy that can come only from eternal life. He wanted others to have it. This study focuses on John’s profound preface, which centers on eternal life—where it is from, what it is, why John proclaimed it, and the blessing of possessing it.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Reflect on the Puritan prayer below to help you focus your heart and mind on Christ and His Word.

May my cry be always, Only Jesus! Only Jesus. In him is freedom from condemnation, fullness in his righteousness, eternal vitality in his given life, indissoluble union in fellowship with him. In him, I have all that I can hold; enlarge me to take in more.¹



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The first phase in Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study is observation. Observation involves nothing more than reading carefully and attending to detail.²

Every biblical author addresses one or more *subjects* in their writing. Sometimes they state their subject, sometimes not. Then, they write *about* the subject. Furthermore, they write because they want to produce in you a certain *response* to their writing.

John’s preface states the subject clearly: “eternal life.” Now let’s see what he says.



Observation: What We Have Seen

Because we address only four verses, [1 John 1:1–4](#), choose two Bible versions to use for observation. Read the passage repeatedly and thoroughly looking for what John says *about* eternal life.



A Profound Preface

1 John 1:1–4

How did John describe the “Word of life” in *1 John 1:1*.

Now list the statements about “life” John adds in *1 John 1:2*.

Where does eternal life come from? Notice the end of verse two. The life was “with the Father” (1 John 1:2). Because God is life, He is the *source* of life.³ He channels His life to us through Jesus. In Christ, God’s life dwelled among us tangibly as the “Word of life.” Because Jesus is God incarnate, He is eternal life and the *source* of eternal life.

What is eternal life? John’s adjective “eternal” gives us a clue. The adjective emphasizes kind, not duration. In Greek, John wrote that Jesus “is one who is the life, the eternal kind.” Eternal life is a whole new dimension of living that comes only from God through Christ to us.

This life was “revealed to us,” referring to the apostles (1:2). Through the proclamation of the apostles, we gain access to the same faith and eternal life they themselves tasted.

Eternal life is a life like no temporal life. This is a life like no romantic life. This is a life like no physician can talk about. This is a life even beyond our slang, “Get a life.” This is an eternal dimension of life that is known only by the Father and is transferred to us through His Son, Christ, who is the Word of Life. God is life. —Chuck Swindoll



A Profound Preface

1 John 1:1–4



Interpretation: That You May Have Fellowship

Discovering *why* an author wrote helps us interpret *what* he wrote. In this profound prologue, John recorded two purpose clauses to help us know why he crafted this majestic letter.

Look at [1 John 1:3](#). Why did he proclaim what he had seen to his readers? What do people gain when they receive eternal life?

What is significant about *fellowship* in 1 John 1:3?

In [1 John 1:4](#), John added another reason for writing. That reason lies in the outcome of divine fellowship. Explain that outcome and its significance below.

What a privilege we have as Christians! We have been given the keys to eternal life. We have been given entry into the throne room of heaven. We have been given a kind of joy greater than any other joy obtained in the cosmos.



A Profound Preface

1 John 1:1–4



Correlation: The Blessing of Joy Unspeakable

In his first letter, Peter unfolded the benefits that faith in Christ grants us. Joy is one of them. The early church cherished the joy Christ gives. They wrote of it often. Observe *1 Peter 1:3–9*. Summarize his main points. Note especially what he said about our joy in Christ.

In his commentary on 1 John, pastor and Bible-scholar Martyn Lloyd-Jones explained the necessary link between our experience of joy and our closeness with Christ:

Joy is something very deep and profound, something that affects the whole and entire personality . . . there is only one thing that can give true joy and that is a contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He satisfies my mind . . . my emotions . . . my every desire. He and His great salvation include the whole personality and nothing less, and in Him I am complete. Joy, in other words, is the response and the reaction of the soul to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴

Take a minute to sum up John's prologue. Answer the four questions: Where does eternal life come from? What is eternal life? Why did John write about eternal life? And what is the blessing of eternal life?



A Profound Preface

1 John 1:1–4



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Life

The life that was manifested wasn't the normal, everyday, earthbound life—what we may call “biological life.” . . . In John's usage, this life, *zōē* . . . refers to eternal, heavenly, divine life, literally embodied in Jesus Christ. He is “the bread of life” (John 6:48), “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), and “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). This is the life that was “with the Father and was manifested to us,” which is why He was able to be seen (1 Jn. 1:2). When a person has seen the Word of Life manifested in the flesh, the only reasonable response is to “testify and proclaim” this eternal life.⁵



Application: Eternal Life in and through You

Recall your first real awareness of eternal life—when God awakened your spirit and opened your eyes to His love for you through Jesus Christ. Reflect on that priceless moment. Relive it. Record what first entered your mind and how Jesus made you feel.

Did you notice the past-tense verbs John used? John *saw*, *heard*, and *felt* eternal life which was *revealed* to him in Christ. That new kind of life he proclaimed to his readers. Christ does not want us to keep our fellowship with Him a secret. We share it.



A Profound Preface

1 John 1:1–4

Choose one way you would like to share with a family member or friend your relationship with Christ. Think over how being a follower of Christ has benefited you and changed you. Consider the core truths you wish to talk about. Select a person. Decide a location. Make a plan. Act.

With such a weighty and electrifying subject like eternal life, who can blame John for his fervent, punchy prologue. He did not introduce it through a side door, or open with a story, or toss out a joke to get our attention. He told it straight. How grateful we are that he did!



A FINAL PRAYER

I love You, Father. As best I can, I would like to know a kind of life that's eternal, full of forgiveness and grace and acceptance—an enriching sense of purpose. Continue to help me, as I study Your Word and work my way through this love letter to better know Your Son. Thank You in advance for the truths in Your Word yet to be discovered. May these truths transform me and help me live on earth a heaven-driven life. In the name of King Jesus, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Adapted from Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975, reprint 2011), 54.
2. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at Insight for Living Ministries' web store.
3. As John develops his thoughts about God, he will add two more crucial revelations: "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and "God is love" (4:8).
4. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in Christ: Studies in 1 John*, one vol. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 30.
5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 25–26.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY THREE

God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10

John says, “God is light.” That single term captures the essence of God’s nature. It means God is all good. Nothing bad. God is all pure. Nothing impure. God is all clean. Nothing dirty. God is all right. Nothing wrong. God is all light. Nothing dark. Without God’s light, we would never find permanent release from our darkness.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE only way to master a skill is to practice it. You can know what a hammer does by observing how others wield it. But gripping it yourself, lifting your arm into the sky, and pounding in the nails demonstrates your knowledge *and* expertise.

Similarly, anyone can explain the power of a sports car after sitting on the front row of a race and watching it zoom by faster than you can twist your neck. But nestling in the driver’s seat and taking it for a cruise gives your spine a deeper experience of its power *and* shows your ability to control it.

Using knowledge demonstrates our real understanding of it.

This maxim also proves true regarding spiritual knowledge. Faith in Jesus shows its true colors through our changed lives—what we say and what we do with the faith we possess.

John emphasized this correlation when he wrapped up his preface and quickly began correcting mistaken views about sin. Knowing a holy God and fellowshiping with Him should translate into godly living. Some denied this truth in John’s day. Some deny it still in ours. In this study, we explore John’s clear connections between what we know of God and how we live our lives



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God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God extends His comforting hand and lends His listening ear to us as we seek Him with a humble heart. Follow this model prayer as you posture your heart in this way.

Thank You, Father, for the magnificence of Your presence. In Christ alone, we have a reason to go on. In Christ alone, there is hope. In Christ alone, there is forgiveness. Deliver us from the plurality of false gods amid this culture so we can decipher truth from error and remember our Savior's words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." Use this study to help me better appreciate Your truth. In Jesus' name, amen.¹



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As we learned in our first study, John longed for his readers to experience deep and authentic fellowship with God, to walk with Him in *an abiding and transformative relationship*. However, not all in the church who claimed to be walking with God were showing it with changed lives. After sharing in 1 John 1:1–4 his reason for writing—"that you may fully share our joy," John next explained how we can identify others who enjoy genuine fellowship with God.



Observation: Affirming That God Is Light

When reading the Scriptures, we must use good observation to achieve an accurate and correct understanding of God's Word. Good observation entails noting words and phrases that are repeated, alike, unlike, and contrasted.² In 1 John 1:5–10, John makes special use of contrasts to emphasize his key ideas on fellowship.

Read [1 John 1:5–10](#) in your two favorite translations. Do so repeatedly. Reading aloud often helps us catch what we miss when we read silently.



God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10

God's Character Is Holy

What is the gist of John's proclamation in 1 John 1:5? What contrast does John's proclamation have?

The term *light* captures the essence of God's character. He is all light and no darkness, which means that He is all goodness and no evil, all purity and no impurity. What other contrasts can you think of that describe the "all-and-no" nature of God?



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Light

False gods, past or present, pale in comparison to the one true God, who is light. This is vitally important because without His light of purity and holiness in our lives, we dwell in constant spiritual darkness. It is a simple fact that in the physical world, as well as in the spiritual world, darkness can't continue when it encounters light. Light always dispels darkness.³

Since God is all light, we can rest assured knowing that not even the slightest shadow of evil clouds His actions. We, on the other hand, have a sin nature that needs to be addressed.



God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10

Our Nature Is Sinful

According to the doctrine of depravity, all humanity is born with a sin nature. Jesus said that to enter God's kingdom, we "must be born again" (John 3:7), which occurs when we trust in Christ who atoned for our sin and arose to give us new life (Titus 3:4–7). Through Christ, we *can* fellowship with God who is light. And, as we draw closer to Him, He can help us deal with our sin.

Unfortunately, false teachers in the first-century church were misinforming believers about sin. In 1 John 1:6, 8, and 10, John pointed out three wrong perspectives toward sin through three "if we say" clauses. Describe the errors and John's reasons why these are errors.

Verse	Errors	Reasoning
1:6		
1:8		
1:10		

The tragic result of the false teaching was that believers were not taking seriously their sin. Some were *ignorant* because they thought they could have fellowship with God and still sin. Others were *self-deceived*, fooling themselves into thinking that they had no sin to deal with. Still others proudly claimed *perfection*, saying that they had no sin nature.

John points us to a better way to deal with our sin—cleansing confession. Let's find out more in the next section of our *Searching the Scriptures* study.

John's desire for his readers is not only that we take our God seriously, but that we take our sin seriously. A connection is missing if you grow up and grow older in the faith and in God's grace, and yet you begin to take sin lightly. Something is vitally wrong there.
—Chuck Swindoll



God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10



Interpretation: Our Hope Is Confession and Cleansing

Interpretation helps us discover in Scripture timeless truths about God and our world. These truths pave the path toward fellowship with Jesus.

John contrasted the errors of false teachers with two truths of authentic Christians in 1 John 1:7 and 1:9. We'll break down each verse into multiple components. In 1:7, how did John align true Christian character with God's character? What are the two outcomes if we live "in the light, as God is in the light"?

According to 1:9, what two aspects of God's character did John mention? What two outcomes occur when a Christian confesses his or her sins to God? Explain how those outcomes relate to God's character.

When we trust in Christ, the Spirit of God indwells us and gives us eternal life. As God's Word saturates our lives in the power of the Spirit, it aligns our heart and mind with Jesus' heart and mind. That process, in turn, shapes our lives. John underscored this truth throughout his ministry.

Listen to me. If you are follower of Christ, every waking moment of your life the blood of Jesus is cleaning you. It's the divine detergent. It keeps on cleaning you. Otherwise, at every fork in the road, you'd go the wrong direction. He's cleaning up your mind, He's cleaning up your motives, He's cleaning up your thoughts, He's cleaning up your actions, He's cleaning up your words. What's the result? We're able to enjoy a relationship and an intimacy and a oneness with Him. —Chuck Swindoll



God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10



Correlation: The Power of Confession

John emphasized the importance of acknowledging our sinful nature and the sins we commit after we place our faith in Christ. We don't naively claim to be sinless, nor do we arrogantly turn a blind eye to those times we do sin. We confess our sin before God.

James, the brother of Jesus, also emphasized the power of confession from a different angle—person to person. Read in [James 5:16–18](#) what James wrote about confession, especially as it relates to prayer. Summarize what James wrote and why he believes confession is important.

Doctors have proved time and again how our mental health and emotional health affect our physical health. Each person's being is fearfully and wonderfully and mysteriously united. Confessing sin and receiving forgiveness rejuvenate us like cool spiritual water hydrating a parched, weary soul.



Application: Walk in the Light

Intimacy takes root in the soil of honesty. John's message in this passage is simple and direct: be honest with God, honest with ourselves, and honest with others. When you stray, set it on fellowship's table. Don't deny it. Don't neglect it. Don't excuse it. Rather, own it, confess it, learn from it, and leave it behind as you walk in the light.

Chuck gives two application guidelines to help us in this effort.



God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10

Live Each Day Walking in the Light

Before your foot hits the floor in the morning, resolve to walk in the light. Pray for the Spirit's strength. Think over the area of life where you're tempted to neglect the light or take the reins rather than allow God's Spirit to have control. How can you better follow God's wisdom?

As You Continue Each Day, Remain Aware of Your Own Dark Nature

We don't live in fear's shadow or wear a constant grimace because of our dark nature. But neither do we act like our sinful nature doesn't exist. How can you remain aware of your own dark nature and maintain the humility that should accompany it?

John's proclamation floats gently like the tip of a theological iceberg—"God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all" (1 John 1:5). Now, after a little study and reflection, we better appreciate the power, the depth, the majesty of that simple truth. *How grateful we are to know it!*



God's Light and Our Blight

1 John 1:5–10



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You alone dwell in unapproachable light, but through Your Son, You have abolished death and brought life and immortality into the light. Thank You for giving me eyes to see that glorious light. Please give me the wisdom and strength to walk by that light in a world that so often encourages darkness. In the regal name of Jesus, I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. See John 14:6.
2. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have the Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at Insight for Living Ministries' web store.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 31.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY FOUR

Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6

I don't care how old you are chronologically. I don't care how mature you think you are psychologically or even spiritually. You need these simple rules for the family of God.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE apostle John walked this earth for nearly a century by the time he wrote 1 John. Nothing this world hurled at him surprised him. He knew persecution. It had sent him to jail, scarred his skin, and banished him away. He knew heartbreak. He wept over beloved brothers and sisters in the faith as they turned their backs on Christ to bow before other gods.

But through it all, John patiently disciplined hundreds of Jesus-followers, perhaps thousands, to help them press on in maturity and discernment. According to tradition, he had to be carried into the house of worship in his last years because he couldn't walk. Then, he repeated over and over, “Little children, love one another.”

All John's disciples dearly loved him for his godly leadership style. He led not as a CEO commanding his employees. He led not as a master ordering his servants. Nor did he lead as a politician who threatens and deceives the commoners.

Instead, John led as a beloved family patriarch teaching his grandchildren. In the passage of this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we explore how John passed on household rules for the family of God. You'll find no rebuke or mockery, chiding or sophistry. John's words flow, rather, from a heart of love and concern for the community of faith.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God’s Word always proves itself true. The psalmist wrote:

*As for God, His way is blameless;
The word of the LORD is tried;
He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.
For who is God, but the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God? (Psalm 18:30–31 NASB)*

We study God’s Word because it protects us and guides us. And it’s the Spirit who makes our study beneficial. We depend on Him to ignite spiritual understanding and fuel belief. Before you explore His truth, pray for the Spirit’s help as you seek the Rock of Ages.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Discerning an author’s tone assists our Bible study.¹ Authors not only wish to communicate ideas but also emotions attached to those ideas. Divine truth becomes personal as our feelings about God’s truth align with the feelings of the biblical authors. John’s emotional tone shifts from chapter one to chapter two. Examining the context reveals this shift.

In chapter one, John included the word *we* twenty-two times (NLT) to describe his membership among Jesus’ authoritative witnesses, which enables him to distinguish between true and false teaching about Christianity. Deceivers were assaulting his flock. John wrote with an exacting tone, forceful in clarity—highlighting his spiritual authority and the deceivers’ errors.

In chapter two, John began with *I* to emphasize the solid familial bridge between himself and his readers. He expressed a gentle tone of affection exemplified in his use of the term “dear children.”



Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6

Before beginning observation, think of yourself as a humble child on a cold night sitting by a warm fire before the feet of this grandfatherly apostle.



Observation: My Dear Children

Observe [1 John 2:1–6](#). Every passage contains a myriad of observations. Good Bible study begins by observing as much as we can see. You always want to leave time at the end, however, to prioritize the most significant observations pertinent to the author’s subject.

Boil down your observations to the five most important.

One	
Two	
Three	
Four	
Five	



Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6

We resonate with John’s simple rules because they make good sense and because we tend to forget them. I am convinced the sooner we return to them, the easier we will be to live with. When we were little kids, we didn’t take ourselves all that seriously, but we took God seriously. But as we grew up, there was a strange reversal of roles. We began to take ourselves far too seriously and we wouldn’t take God all that seriously. No! John wants us to get back to the simple rules of the faith. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Making John’s Elementary Rules Your Own

Like a protective guardian, John displays two key concerns in [1 John 2:1, 6](#). These concerns fit both sides of the same coin. What are those concerns, and why do they function as John’s primary household rules?

In the application phase, we will explore Chuck’s rendering of John’s household rules. For now, express in your own words John’s key concerns.

John wants Christians to guard against sin. He urged, “Don’t mess with stuff that gets you in trouble!” As Christians, we serve and represent God. Our obedience to Him shows our respect for Him and brings honor to Him.



Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6

Nevertheless, believers still fall into sin’s trap during this dark age because we still have a sin nature. But sin does not engulf God’s children. According to *1 John 2:1–2*, how is Jesus a help to believers who sin? Then translate this vital truth into a household reminder or principle for following Christ.



Chuck’s Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Advocate

Like a defense attorney, Christ constantly pleads our case before the heavenly court. But a couple of key differences distinguish our divine Advocate from an earthly attorney. An attorney tries to defend a client’s innocence. Our Savior comes to our aid as we acknowledge our guilt. An attorney works within the law, arguing the merits of our case and trying to persuade a judge or jury. Our Savior came to our aid by becoming “the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 2:2). He paid the penalty for the sins of humanity. As the one perfect God-man, He took the place of all humanity through His atoning sacrifice on the cross.²

The second half of 1 John 2:2 is notoriously difficult to interpret. But don’t avoid it. Wrestle with it. Use your Bible study resources in your own library, or you can consult NetBible.org and Constable’s Notes as online Bible study [resources](#). What did John emphasize by stating that Christ’s sacrifice atones for our sin—“and not only our sins but the sins of all the world”?



Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6

In chapter one, John wrote that true believers walk in the light as God is in the light. In chapter two, John got more specific as if he were writing a bullet-point list on a chalkboard hanging on a wall in a home. What household rules did John use in *1 John 2:3–6* to define “walk in the light”? What makes these rules important for the family of God?

We have in Jesus not only the once-for-all atoning sacrifice and forever-advocate with the Father, we also have in Jesus a model for how we are to live. John never tired of pointing people to Jesus. Our faith, our hope, our love, our life, our example—all depend upon Christ.



Correlation: The One-Time Sacrifice for All Sins

Two important passages offer us a firmer mental grip of Jesus’ advocacy on our behalf.

God the Just and the Justifier—Romans 3:21–26

What does *Romans 3:21–26* emphasize about Christ’s death? How did Jesus’ death both satisfy God’s justice as well as justify those who put their faith in Christ?



Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6

Our Mediator—1 Timothy 2:5–6

Read *1 Timothy 2:5–6*. How does Christ’s role as mediator bridge the gap between sinful humanity and our holy God?

Through Christ, God our Father proved He wants to meet with us regularly. In Christ, God Himself awaits us at our door wanting to come into our home. Our time with God and enjoyment of His presence depends not upon the time available in His schedule but upon our childlike humility and desire to seek our Father in heaven.



Application: Family Rules

We never want to end our study without applying what we learned. Through application, the Spirit conforms us more into the image of Christ. Application might change how we pray, what we think, how we act, or what we desire. We want the fire of the Holy Spirit to light every fiber of our being and burn away any impurities tarnishing our relationship with Christ.

For this reason, Chuck crafted John’s message in 1 John 2:1–6 into six household rules to help us integrate this biblical truth into our lives.

- 1) *Don’t mess with stuff that gets you into trouble.* John wrote to keep us away from sin’s doorstep. In fact, he wrote to keep us out of sin’s neighborhood!
- 2) *When you foul things up, remember you have Someone who’s always in your corner.* With Christ as your advocate, you can always return home and sit at God’s table.
- 3) *Behave yourself since you’re a member of the family.* Live in a way that brings honor to your heavenly family since you carry the name of the Divine King.



Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6

- 4) *No matter what you say, your actions reveal your true motives.* The deeds prove the Christian. John didn't hesitate to slap the label “phony” on a wrong-living, self-described Christian.
- 5) *Always remember your obedience reveals your respect for God the Father.* God made the universe and upholds it with power of His Word. What awe and respect this inspires! We demonstrate such feelings through humble obedience.
- 6) *When you're looking for a hero to follow, choose Jesus.* Jesus lived a perfect life. He exemplified walking in the light. He displayed perfect communion with the Father and joy in the Father.

Choose one rule above that's most germane to your situation. Why do you find it so relevant? How can you use it to help you walk in the light? Remember, *specificity produces quality application*.

John's simple yet rich teaching on faith serves as a reminder that we have not outgrown our spiritual trousers. No one graduates from the basics! Most of us do not need bigger brains. Rather, softer hearts.



Family Rules for “Little Children”

1 John 2:1–6



A FINAL PRAYER

End this study with one final reflection upon 1 John 2:1–6 and record your prayer below. Thank God the Father for sending His Son Jesus to be your righteous advocate. Ask Him to pour into your heart His truth as revealed in Scripture that you might walk as Jesus Himself walked.

ENDNOTES

1. If you already know Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org for a review. For the best explanation, [buy his book](#). If you do not have Chuck's commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 42.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY FIVE

The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11

How important to remember John's words that love for others is an old and ever-relevant message! It's also a new and Christ-related command, and it reveals the darkness of hidden hatred. This passage is all about how we treat our brothers and sisters.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THREE simple words form one of the most important and most beloved phrases in our language: *I love you*. According to Chuck Swindoll, we thrive on expressions of love:

The truth is, we never outgrow these words, never get tired of them, never find a substitute for them. We say, “I love you,” and demonstrate our love in many different ways. Expressions of love are the lifeblood of relationships. Without love, a marriage or a family will shrivel and die.¹

In fact, without love, no one can live an authentically Christian life. John initially focused his short letter on walking in the light “as God is in the light” (1 John 1:7). Then, he sharpened his focus on obedience, saying, “those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love him” (2:5). In the passage for this study, John described the practical outcome of those who walk in the light and obey God’s Word: loving one another.

Love is the mark of the true follower of Christ—the badge of the believer. In Jesus’ day, the disciples of the Pharisees were identified by their religious garb and doctrine. But Jesus said to His followers, “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (John 13:35). And, as we’ll discover, the love we share is not just human love but the love of Christ.



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The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Consider how Christ's love heals downtrodden spirits, amends erroneous thinking, and corrects unloving actions. Now, think over the ways Christ shines His love on you.

We *follow* Christ by reflecting His love to others. Give thanks for His love toward you. Invite His Spirit to guide your study of His Word and help you imitate His love for others.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We begin this study with two events that John had in mind when he wrote 1 John 2:7–11.² The first occurred when Moses delivered instruction at the foot of Mount Sinai. The second occurred when Jesus uttered a new command while washing the feet of His disciples.

Based on these two events, John claimed that the command to love one another (1 John 2:10) was both old and new. However, as you will see, Jesus's new command reveals a change—not in the essential nature of love but in the degree. Let's take a closer look.

Moses at the Foot of Mount Sinai

We find the old command in the often-dusty book of Leviticus. Brush it off and read [Leviticus 19:17–18](#). Summarize the main point. What measurement is used to determine the extent of love?



The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11

The old one is the old Mosaic commandment, which is a duty, and you do this as you love yourself. Your love for others is about how much you love yourself. So yourself becomes the standard. —Chuck Swindoll

Jesus at the Feet of His Disciples

We find the new command when Jesus girded himself with a towel to wipe the dust off the feet of the disciples. Read [John 13:1–17, 31–38](#). Jesus said the new command is that we are to “love one another.” What is now the new measurement for this ancient command? How is this new standard different and why is it important?

This is a Christ-like love, agape love, that doesn't wait for the response of another. It doesn't need another's response. This is a one-directional love, doing what is best for the other person. It's a sacrificial love. It is a love that has no limits and no selfishness. Self is out of the picture, and your focus is on what is best for the other person. The standard in this case is Christ Himself. —Chuck Swindoll

Taken at face value, John 13 depicts a man wiping off the feet of other men—such a common event that is easy for us to forget. But not for John. After six decades he never forgot how that servantly act portrayed such cosmic meaning. Christ the Lord proved the extent of His love by not only serving His disciples but also by dying for the sins of the world.

Always remember the *extent* and *proof* of Christ's love for you. Regarding extent, it is impossible for God to love you more than He already does. He loves you to the uttermost. Regarding proof, God proved His love at Calvary. “God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). There's no greater proof than Christ's death on the cross.



The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11



Observation: The True Light Is Already Shining

Now we turn to our primary passage, *1 John 2:7–11*. Read through it now. Use at least two translations. Chuck likes the New Living Translation (which adds explanatory phrasing for clarity) and the New American Standard Bible (which stays closer to the word order and exact wording of the original languages for accuracy).

In *1 John 2:1*, John wrote “my children” as a diminutive in Greek—like we might call a cat, “kitty.” He did so to express affection, not condescension. How did John reemphasize his warm affection for his readers in 2:7?

Now observe *1 John 2:7–8*. What characteristics did John ascribe to the “old” aspect of the commandment?

What characteristics did John ascribe to the “new” aspect of the command? What imagery did he associate with this command?



The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11

In 1 John 2:7–8, we see how John drew from two events to emphasize the dual nature of the command to love one another. The command, though old, always proves to be ever relevant. We rarely *don't* have an opportunity to love others.

Christ, however, makes the command new—*kainos*, in Greek, which means “fresh.” Christ’s new command has a fresh quality because it centers on His person and the love He demonstrates toward us. *How deep it is!*



Interpretation: Love One Another

John wrote that this new command is “true in Him and in you” (1 John 2:8 NASB). What did he mean? (For help with the answer to this question and the questions to follow, you can consult Chuck’s [commentary on 1 John](#), if you own a copy. For an online resource, [Constable’s Notes](#) at NetBible.org can also guide your answers.)

Also, what did John mean when he wrote, “The true Light is already shining” (1 John 2:8 NASB)? Where do we see this light today, and how do we know it to be the true light?



The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11

In 1 John 2:9–10, John gave positive traits about those who follow the command. What are these traits?

Christian love is all about how we treat our brothers and sisters. Nothing else communicates that a person is an authentic Christian like when he or she loves others. Nothing else shines a light brighter in this dark world and communicates the truth of Christ like when we love one another as He loved us.



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Darkness

Because of the dawning of this new light, the life of the genuine Christ-follower should reveal and drive out the darkness of hatred (2:9). Something's wrong when a person claims to be in the Light, having become a true child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus, but then they still seethe with enmity, hostility, bitterness, and prejudice against fellow believers in the body of Christ. That person still lives in the realm of darkness. John seems to leave no room for "neutral ground" or a "gray area." It's either light or dark . . . love or hate.³

In 1 John 2:11, John gave negative traits about those who do not follow the command. What are those traits?



The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11

How remarkable to think of the way Jesus transforms the way we love others. His Spirit drives out the hidden darkness of hatred and gives us new light to live by. A deeper sense of compassion and empathy just overwhelms our minds and hearts in ways we never thought possible until we came to Christ. This perspective and these feelings give us only a foretaste of our Savior's love for us.



Correlation: Brotherly Love

Paul, too, wrote often of love. [Romans 12:9–21](#) masterfully encapsulates Christ's teaching on loving one another. Read these verses. What did Paul emphasize, and how does this passage complement what you learned about love in 1 John 2:7–11?

God did not give us a manual for achieving a great name in the eyes of the world. We possess no instructions for building revered kingdoms or towering fortunes or walls of accolades. Instead, God gave us the way of achieving a great name in the eyes of heaven. Such a way is not only more excellent and gratifying, it is also the way that will abide.



Application: Abide in the Light

Sometimes, the best application comes by way of meditation. Not emptying the mind but filling it. Let the truth of God's Word stir your imagination and attract your heart.



The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11

Craft a simple picture of your life as if you were walking in darkness, without the light of truth or the love of Christ. Then contrast it with a picture as if you were walking in the light. List the consequences of walking in the darkness as well as the benefits of walking in the light?

Next, think of one person you know who once walked in the light but now chooses to live in darkness. Pray for that person. Know that God—according to His will—can inspire that person to do an about-face back toward the light. Never give up knocking on your Heavenly Father's door, entreating Him in prayer.

After Jesus dipped His disciples' feet in water and dried them with a towel, He did not command them to wear a gold cross around their necks, or print their baptismal certificates, or join four church committees. He told them simply to follow His example and love as He loved. Love lets the world know we belong to Jesus. Love is the believer's badge.



The Believer's Badge

1 John 2:7–11



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how deep is Your love for us. I open my heart to let Your love do its healing and purifying work in me. I don't want to harbor any secrets. I don't want to act in hatred. I don't want to cause any stumbling. I want my every move to come from Your impulse of love so that Your Son, love incarnate, might be honored in my life and cherished through my life. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 45.
2. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
3. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, 46.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY SIX

Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17

May the Lord help us understand these few verses tucked away in the middle of an ancient letter written on an isolated island in the Aegean Sea. May we realize that those words, though written centuries ago, are ever relevant, and they speak to twenty-first century people as if written yesterday. May we all take them to heart. May we remember these are warnings to be taken seriously.

—Charles R. Swindoll

CLEAR-EYED and resolute, John’s wrinkled skin and frail bones bore a heart as young and vigorous and fiery as it was when Jesus named him and his brother, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).

In this study, we explore an earnest passage in John’s letter and observe how it paints a portrait of this elderly apostle’s dogged determination to teach the young church what it means to live in the “world.”

John’s nearly ten decades of life taught him to take seriously the threats of Satan, who has made the cosmos his playground of darkness. So, like a wartime colonel, John issues us strong warnings and direction mingled with hope and assurance.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask your Father to bless your time in His Word.

Father, please use this quiet time in a special way to draw me closer to You. Help me to see as John saw. Help me to have the assurance as John had. Increase my love for You and my love for others so I can shine brightly in a world so in love with the dark. In the name of Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After years on the spiritual battlefield, John knew the enemy's tactic to infiltrate the church. He warned about those who say they have “fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness” (1 John 1:6). According to John, someone who claims to know God but “doesn't obey God's commands . . . is a liar” (2:4).

John exposed false teachers and their false teaching. He also distinguished between authentic and phony Christianity. Now John directs our gaze to our wider environment, so we might see how rebellion against God and self-love characterize so much of our culture. He calls all the “troops” to attention and issues a winning battle plan on how to live godly in an ungodly world.



Observation: You Have Overcome the Evil One

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by observing the flow of the passage, how the streams of thought develop.¹ Observe [1 John 2:12–17](#). First notice how the text divides into two sections of three verses each: verses 12–14 and verses 15–17. Give each section a summary title.

Section Verses	Section Titles
2:12–14	
2:15–17	



Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17

John's Audience—1 John 2:12–14

Whom did John address in [1 John 2:12–14](#)? Why do you think John addressed three different age groups?

So I'm talking not just to the adolescents, not just to the teenagers, not to the young women and men who are present, but to all of us—the spiritually mature as well as the new Christians. Remember, you are susceptible. You can fall into the system of this world. So take heed: this is no time for arrogance. —Chuck Swindoll

Along with stages of maturity, John listed specific benefits for believing in Christ, which apply to all Jesus-followers (1 John 2:12–14). How many benefits did John name? What were these benefits?

A Cosmic Warning—1 John 2:15–17

How did John describe the world in [2:15–16](#)?



Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17

Looking for contrasts helps us carefully observe a passage. For example, notice the contrasts between “love the world” and “love of the Father” in 2:15 and between “from this world” and “from the Father” in 1 John 2:16. John used a contrast of time in [2:17](#). What did he contrast, and how did he do so?

Having observed all six verses, let’s dig a little deeper into the meaning of John’s warnings and commands.



Interpretation: Do Not Love the World

Don’t forget to use your resources during this step of your Bible study. Helpful references include [Chuck’s commentary](#) and the online commentary, [Constable’s Notes](#), at NetBible.org.

Begin interpretation by considering the connection between John’s two sections and their key points. How do the benefits of believing in Jesus listed in [1 John 2:12–14](#), such as sins forgiven and knowing the Father, help us live in such a hostile spiritual environment ([1 John 2:15–17](#))?



Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: World

What does John mean by “the world”? In his usage here, the Greek term *kosmos* [2889] refers to the system of this present age before the return of Christ. This world is led by Satan, who works against Christ and His people. It's therefore hostile to righteousness. The world magnifies humanity, celebrates depravity, and rejects God's word. In this negative sense, the world's values, pleasures, pastimes, aspirations, and even attitudes have no room for God, no respect for Christ, and no regard for His followers. John uses the term *kosmos* in this sense throughout the letter, but in 2:15–17 alone, he uses the term six times as part of his strong warning.²

In 1 John 2:16, John described the world in three ways—none of which flow from the heart of God or align with the will of God. Using your study resources, explain each of those ways and where you see them operating in people in your circle of life.

In 2:17, John said the world is “passing” (or “fading”) away using a present-tense verb describing a gradual, ongoing occurrence. What did he emphasize by saying it this way? Why is his subsequent contrast on the one who does the will of God important? How is this relevant today?



Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17

The world's system opposes God and His truth. Those who love God do not love the world's system in the same way that those who love life do not love cancer. The world's cancer—it's love for darkness and hostility against God—causes it to embrace what cannot give true life. When we draw near to Christ, the world's alluring and destructive power is broken.

John emphasized that sin is very real. Everyone reaps the moral and spiritual consequences of the deeds they morally and spiritually sow. As the old saying puts it, “if you pick up one end of the stick, you also pick up the other.”

But we have hope! God promised He would wipe out evil and remake the world so that its future goodness would shine brighter than its former goodness (*Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 65:17–18; 66:22–23*). John encouraged his readers, including us, “All that's bad will be passing away. The dawn of the new age has broken forth!”



Correlation: Do Not Go Out of the World

With such intense language against our world, one might feel a pull to flee human interaction altogether. But that is not what God wants. Jesus does not call us to monkish separation. The following passages illustrate this truth.

Read the apostle Paul's words in *1 Corinthians 5:9–13*. How did the Corinthian church misunderstand Paul's instructions about church discipline? How does this passage complement the truth about the world as portrayed in *1 John 2:12–17*?



Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17

Read Jesus' prayer for the church in [John 17:13–21](#). How did He pray for His followers' relationship with the world? What safeguards strengthen believers while they live in the world?

Just as Jesus entered this present darkness and shined the light of love and truth through living a pure and Godward life, we are to do the same. Christians should uphold a glistening, attractive purity; speak a divine, flickering truth; and live with a glowing, selfless love.



Application: Insulation and Proclamation

Christians commonly feel two temptations after reading a passage like 1 John 2:12–17. The first is *isolation*. Some might take John to mean we should disentangle ourselves from every aspect of living in the world's system (buying, selling, culture, government, and so forth).

On the other hand, some might take John to mean we should fix the world—correct every wrong, spotlight every ill deed, and show our displeasure over every sin. We might call this temptation, *over-assertion*.

Chuck gives two guiding correctives to these temptations:

- 1) *Insulate, don't isolate*. Christians live disciplined lives, full of conviction and supernatural contentment. We neither isolate nor embrace. We live in, not of, the world.
- 2) *Proclaim, don't assert*. Christians share the gospel with a magnetic kindness that displays dignity and charity, not condescension. We open our mouths at the right time.



Strong Talk on the Cosmos

1 John 2:12–17

Which of the two guiding correctives do you most need growth in? Why? More specifically, in which area of life? How would that area of life look differently as you grow?

Peter captures the life balance we want as Christians living in a depraved world:

Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. (1 Peter 3:15–16)



A FINAL PRAYER

As we end our study of John's warning not to love the world, take a few minutes to draw near to the Lord in fellowship with Him through prayer. Express your dependence on Him and reaffirm your love for Him over anything this world offers. Thank God for His Word. And ask Him to help you resist the enticement of the world and keep your eyes on Him alone.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, *grab a copy* at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 54.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY SEVEN

The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18

Well-informed believers certainly should not be surprised that our times have turned in such a dreadfully wrong direction.

—Charles R. Swindoll

OVER his more than fifty years of ministry, Chuck Swindoll has watched our society embrace some not-so-good changes. And these changes weren't annoying, namby-pamby ones. *They were lethal!* Our great enemy Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

It seems that Satan's prey includes not only individuals but entire elements of our culture. Humanism, skepticism, and postmodernism have put air under the wings of these troubling changes.

Humanism champions creature over Creator. Skepticism chips away at God's truth. And postmodernism welcomes all kinds of mental, moral, and societal chaos. One philosopher lamented the insecurity of our times, saying that in our postmodern world "everything is possible and almost nothing is certain."¹

To better understand the consequences of these changes, we need to extend our exposition of the previous study's passage. In this study, we'll dig deeper into John's warning, "do not love this world" (1 John 2:15), by analyzing the disturbing realities of our times.

We'll expose the false ideas that fuel the world's corrupt system and then get our first glimpse of the "anti-Christ" (2:18)—the enemies of Christ about whom John warns. Only when we know what we're up against can we make the difference in our world that Jesus calls us to make.



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The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ever since the serpent's lie to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, humans have been victims of deception. Thankfully, God's Word teaches us how to guard against deception. That's one of the many benefits of studying it. Before you embark on this study, pray God would give you a firmer grip on truth and a keener mind to spot spiritual lies.

Every time we open the Scriptures, we seek the voice of God. We want Him to use it to speak to us personally and address us in our unique circumstances. —Chuck Swindoll



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After nearly six decades, John could still remember seeing Jesus on the Mount of Olives and hearing Jesus' words from His Olivet Discourse: "many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people" (Matthew 24:10–11).

Jesus unmasked the author of deception, Satan "the father of lies" (John 8:44). His lies persuade people to magnify themselves and dismiss God from their thinking and values. Satan opposes Christ and wants others to do the same.

John knew better than most the hostility of this world. That's why he wrote, "do not love the world" (1 John 2:15). Before we can make a positive difference, Chuck wants us to understand it. And to this task we now turn.



The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18



Observation: Analyzing the World

Review what John wrote about the world and deception in [1 John 2:15–17](#). Observe how many times John uses the word, *world*, in this passage.² In what ways did John say the world appeals to our cravings (1 John 2:16)?

Love for the world leads people down a primrose path—a way that looks good, feels good, and promises power . . . but fades away in the end. What are the characteristics of the world?

Characteristics of the World

By “world,” John meant the organized system and culture of fallen humanity. This system is headed by Satan as “the commander of the powers in the unseen world” (Ephesians 2:2). The world:

- Leaves God out
- Is hostile toward Christ and Scripture
- Magnifies humanity as the supreme measure of all things
- Models depravity

Have you witnessed these characteristics of your world? In what ways?



The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18

Understanding Our Times

In John's day, Gnosticism undermined apostolic teaching about God and His Son. Today's postmodern attitude also rejects established biblical truths. It has led to an assault upon the Christian's spiritual life and has shredded Western society's moral fabric.

By embracing postmodernism, our society has blurred the sharp line between right and wrong. Biblical knowledge has fizzled. And our nation is now a *post-Christian* society. What are the results?

In his message, Chuck logged ten disturbing consequences that flow from postmodernism's poisoned spring:

- 1) *No authority is valid.* All opinions are *right* even if they contradict each other.
- 2) *No rules are valid.* Make up your own rules. Do what works for you.
- 3) *Style is more important than substance.* Appearance confirms truth. No need to test authenticity.
- 4) *Morality is a matter of choice.* Do what's right for you. Right and wrong are relative to person, circumstance, and culture.
- 5) *Tolerance is the cardinal virtue.* You should be open to and accepting of everyone's opinions or practices.
- 6) *Words have no inherent meaning.* Words mean what you want them to mean. Truth has no influence on the terms we use.
- 7) *Western culture is oppressive.* Objective truth, logic, democracy, inalienable rights—all should be tossed out of our vocabulary and practice.
- 8) *The line between truth and entertainment is removed.* Movies and media offer truth as valid as the Bible.
- 9) *Images and fantasy reflect reality.* What you find in video games and novels is just as real as the world we live in. Go ahead and take counsel from them.
- 10) *What you believe is right.* Ground your convictions in what you feel and imagine to be right.³



The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18

Awareness of the world's ways shouldn't alarm us as much as remind us that, as John taught, we're living in the last days in which those who oppose Christ will have great influence. Who are these powerful people and what is the role they play in the end times?



Interpretation: Defining “Many Such Antichrists”

In the observation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible Study, we focus only on the scriptural text. In the interpretation phase when we're searching for the author's intended meaning for his original audience, we can consult commentaries by Bible scholars.

To help with the answers in this section, feel free to consult [Chuck's commentary](#), the online commentary, [Constable's Notes](#), at [NetBible.org](#), or other reliable Bible study resources you may own.

Read [1 John 2:18](#) and write down what you conclude about the relationship between the Antichrist and “many such antichrists.”

Because of the “antichrists” in his day, John claimed the last hour had come (1 John 2:18). Author and pastor Warren Wiersbe elucidates this claim:

All of Old Testament history prepared the way for the work of Christ on the Cross. All history since that time is merely preparation for “the end,” when Jesus will come and establish His kingdom. . . . “The last hour” began back in John's day *and has been growing in intensity ever since*. There were ungodly false teachers in John's day and during the intervening centuries they have increased both in number and in influence. “The last hour” or “the last times” are phrases that describe a *kind* of time, not a *duration* of time. . . . In other words, Christians have *always* been living in “the last time”—in crisis days.⁴



The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18

Think over your Christian journey. Do you remember occasions when spidery false teaching tried to lure you into its web? What falsehoods were proclaimed? How did you know they were false? What negative outcome would they have created in your life?



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Antichrist

According to John, this “last hour” between Christ’s first and second comings is like an inky predawn inhabited by shadowy agents of evil. He calls these figures “antichrists” (2:18). The Greek term *antichristos* [500], used here for the first time in Christian literature, is a compound of two words: *anti* [473], meaning “in place of” or “against,” and *christos* [5547], “Messiah” or “Christ.” The ambiguity may be purposeful. While all “antichrists” are opposed to Christ and His teachings, some antichrists go so far as to claim to be a messiah, thus opposing the true Christ by seeking to replace Him.⁵

According to 1 John 4:1–3, how did John instruct Christians to test Christian teaching?

I am not a witch hunter. I don't see the devil behind every bush. But you need to know there is a conspiracy going on. There is an invisible war being waged. If you don't see that, you will be hopelessly confused. —Chuck Swindoll



The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18

Though the serpent that tempted Adam and Eve died and degenerated, its spirit lives on. That's why Paul told us to keep a white-knuckle hold on the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

Have you felt any of the “disturbing realities of our times” above pulling you away from Christ and Christ's truth? Pick one or two and explain how their presence can splinter a society, diminish one's spiritual life, and frustrate the church's mission.

I remind you that deception is on the loose. Unless you're aware of it, you'll be led right down that primrose path. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Difficult Times Ahead

John's voice accompanied the other apostles' voices which cautioned Christians about the difficulties of living in the “last hour.” Paul gave an earnest warning to Timothy in 2 Timothy. Paul fired off the letter because he would soon pay the ultimate price for following Christ: a blade to the neck.

Eugene Peterson painted a vivid word-portrait of Paul's warning in his Bible paraphrase.

Don't be naive. There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They'll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they're animals. Stay clear of these people. (2 Timothy 3:1–5 The Message)



The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18

How does 2 Timothy 3:1–5 complement John’s teaching about the world and the antichrists in the end times?

The sons of Issachar understood their times (1 Chronicles 12:32). They knew how to spot the difficulties, make wise decisions, and honor God. Through the Word of Truth, we have access to a better understanding of our times than did the sons of Issachar. Furthermore, the Spirit of Truth grants us access to an increased level of spiritual power to make wise decisions and honor God.



Application: Surviving These Troubled Times

Based on John’s warnings, Chuck wants you to keep two truths with you:

- 1) *Biblical discernment will keep you from being disillusioned, deceived, and duped.* Study your times. Know your Bible. Think deeply. Don’t fret.
- 2) *Biblical direction will enable you to make hard decisions. Stand on your biblical convictions.* Don’t swerve. Lead your family. Speak your mind. Model truth. Live righteously.

By doing these studies, you already seek God’s heart and truth. Do you need to develop a better knowledge of your times? Or is the Spirit leading you to make an inconvenient decision? Write down below your plan for applying what you learned in this study.



The Disturbing Realities of Our Times

1 John 2:15–18

It's no accident Jesus has placed us where we are. Every single Christian has a unique, God-given purpose for their lives on this earth. God can take us anytime He wants. But now we are here. He's with you. Be strong and courageous.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, no matter how outnumbered or intimidated I am, may I discern, speak, and act for Your glory. Christ has won the war. My hope rests secure. Your church marches forward. Your Spirit is in me. May I do what You have called me to do. In the strong name of Jesus, I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Vaclav Havel as quoted by Woodrow Kroll, *Back to the Bible* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 80.
2. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
3. Adapted from Woodrow Kroll, *Back to the Bible* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 85–91.
4. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Real* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1972), 84–85.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 62.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY EIGHT

Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27

You have the capacity to know what it is that will hold you close to Christ, that will keep you strong in the storm, that will help you discern truth from error. Genuine believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and they understand the truth.

—Charles R. Swindoll

WHETHER we are asleep or awake, whether we know it or ignore it or forget it—an invisible war wages around us every second of every day.

While we don't see this war, we can't miss its effects. Ever since Satan deceived Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, Satan has led a charge against humanity, arming himself and his soldiers with weapons of deception.

To Eve, his trickery first appeared as a seemingly harmless question, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). Then his assault advanced to a bald-faced lie—“You won't die!” (3:4). The devil and his agents will use any ruse, whether veiled or direct, to attack our faith.

All deception brings with it harm, pain, and humiliation, but nothing comes close to the damage caused by spiritual deception. Spiritual falsehoods promote confusion, incite fear, obstruct wise decisions, and undermine our trust in our heavenly Father. *Tragic!*

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we explore how to win the battle against deception. And it is a battle. No believer stands shielded from Satan's attack. But God has armed us with truth! We need only use it.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27



PREPARE YOUR HEART

First, take a moment to talk with God. Express your devotion to Him. Share your gratitude to Him for giving you His truth to guard you. Acknowledge your dependence on Him for keeping you in the truth. Ask Him to bless your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the early church, the apostle John held a reputation for upholding truth and spotting heretics. One such heretic was Cerinthus. Cerinthus denied Jesus' eternal divinity and trumpeted a host of doctrinal errors. In his commentary, Chuck Swindoll described John's no-compromise approach to dealing with this deceiver:

The apostle John knew Cerinthus and his false teachings well and reacted to them boldly and decisively. In fact, Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, who had himself been a disciple of John, relayed this account from his former teacher: "John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, 'Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.'"¹

In 1 John 2:18–27, John gave characteristics most deceivers have in common to help us deal with deception as he did.



Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27



Observation: Exposing Heresy

Read [1 John 2:18–27](#). First, make your own observations using Chuck’s method.² Note John’s imperatives and his logical flow of thought as he connects each topic.

The Deceiver’s Works—1 John 2:18–19

[First John 2:19](#) shows how the acts of deceivers reveal their true identity. What did these deceivers do? What did their actions reveal about them?

According to [1 John 2:18](#), how many deceivers are there?



Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27

There isn't just one deceiver or two. There are many. They come in all cultures. They come in all languages. They come in all colors. They come in all kinds of garb and in all settings. Some with a pulpit, some without a pulpit. Some on popular television stages, some behind the scenes working with small groups. Some come and they're known halfway around the world. Others are not that well-known. Just know there are many of them.

—Chuck Swindoll

The Deceiver's Words—1 John 2:22–23

First [John 2:22–23](#) states we can know a deceiver by his or her claims. According to this passage, what false claims did the heretics in John's day herald?

John made an eye-opening claim. Deceivers who once walked in church halls and formerly professed biblical truth ended their fellowship because they had never trusted Christ in the first place.

These deceivers proclaimed falsities regarding the person of Jesus. They depicted a non-anointed, non-human Jesus. Their testimony offered a Jesus who is not truly God and not truly man. That kind of Jesus is not the real Jesus. He cannot truly save. That kind of Jesus we can't know or enjoy—because that figment of the imagination is not the real Jesus.



Interpretation: The Christian's Resources

False preachers like to prey on unsuspecting Christians, those new and those naïve. John did not sit idly by while these corrupters assaulted the church. “I am writing these things to warn you about those who want to lead you astray” (1 John 2:26).



Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27

Genuine Believers—1 John 2:21–22, 27

According to [1 John 2:21–22, 27](#), what resources do Christians possess that keep them from falling into deception?

God gives people His Spirit when they become Christians. John called this gift God’s “anointing.” What did John mean when he said the Spirit teaches Christians all they need to know (1 John 2:27)? How does the Spirit do so? Why is this important for Christians no matter when or where they live?

John said genuine believers have the Spirit of God because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Truth. John emphasized how Christians have the capacity to know the truth. That truth is what holds you to Christ. As a genuine Christian, God enables you to discern lies.
—Chuck Swindoll



Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: *Meno*—Abide, Remain, Stay, Live

In its normal, everyday use, this verb means to “remain” in one place for a period of time—settling down in the same city, residing in the same home, or staying married to the same person. John uses the term frequently in his Gospel to refer to the permanent, life-giving relationship disciples are to have with their Lord (John 15:4, 7, 10). In 1 John the same meaning is employed. As believers abide in God’s word, they will “abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 Jn. 2:24). And they will live by the power of the Holy Spirit, who abides in them (2:27).³

Spiritual Safeguards—1 John 2:24–25, 27

Study [1 John 2:24–25, 27](#). Don’t forget to use your Bible study resources. Notice what John emphasizes. Develop a few theological truths about God and our world based on these verses.

We can’t win the battle with deception with our own cunning or fortitude. Just as a soldier shouldn’t take on a powerful army singlehandedly, we shouldn’t attempt to battle Satan without help. Jesus has given Himself to us that we may enjoy continual fellowship with Him and rely on Him for strength in the spiritual battle.



Correlation: The Chief Spiritual Con Artist

Like the letters of John, Paul’s letters consistently warn of the dangers of deception. Greek culture highly revered spectacular rhetoricians. Greeks did so even to the point of disregarding the content of what was spoken. Satan used this cultural tendency to bait the church at Corinth to believe false teaching.

The Corinthian church “Amen-ed” flashy orators while neglecting the spiritual authenticity of their speech. Paul alerted them time after time to the very real presence of deceptive teachers.



Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27

Read one of Paul's rebukes in [2 Corinthians 11:1–4](#). What do we learn about deception from this passage, and how does Paul's teaching correlate with John's teaching in [1 John 2:18–27](#)?

In the latter part of 2 Corinthians 11, Paul wrote that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and camouflages himself with empty righteousness. Satan not only pioneered the deception industry, he still leads it. He aims to capture our minds and emotions as well as our bodies and will. We do well to stay vigilant. Jesus promises the victory



Application: Walking in Triumph

Application is the final step in our study of God's Word. God's truth makes God's servant whole—enlightening the mind, satisfying the soul, directing the hands, and governing the tongue. To help you apply this passage of Scripture, Chuck crafted three excellent principles:

- 1) *Renew your commitment to God's Word.* Deceivers want you to feel like you no longer need God's Word, that you've advanced beyond needing its teachings. Staying faithful to God's Word keeps our minds sharp to spot deception.
- 2) *Stand firm in your convictions.* Deceivers want you to question the undeniable facts about Jesus, to doubt the reliability of His promises, and to belittle His lordship.
- 3) *Stay focused on Christ.* Worst of all, deceivers want you look elsewhere for truth. A primary strategy of Satan is to divert your attention away from Jesus.



Dealing with Deceivers

1 John 2:18–27

Which principle above do you need the most in your season of life? Do you need to simply sit and pray and focus on God's promises in His Word. Think over the biblical truth you've learned and how the Spirit is leading you to apply it. Specify what He would have you do and how He would have you act.

Many live unconcerned about Satan's invisible war and, in ignorance, are trapped in darkness. But God has shined in your heart the light of truth so that you see in Jesus Christ the glory of God. Christ is the conqueror. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him (Psalm 2).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father of lights, thank You for opening my eyes to see the truth and guarding me from Satan's deception. I find comfort in the rod and staff of Jesus, who is my Great Shepherd. Help me to walk in the light and help me to point others to the light so they might enjoy Your goodness as I enjoy it. In Jesus' strong name, I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 64. See also Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3.3.4.
2. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
3. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, 60.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY NINE

Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

You and I have been in the presence of great people, but we have never been in the presence like that of our glorified Lord. This will be a presence that will leave you stunned and silent. You will be lost in wonder and love and praise. When He appears, we will be caught up with Him. John wants us to prepare ourselves for that moment with confidence and anticipation, knowing Christ's return is sure to occur.

—Charles R. Swindoll

NEARLY two millennia have passed since our resurrected Lord's ascension. Two white-robed heavenly messengers assured those who witnessed Christ leaving, "Someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (Acts 1:11). That "someday" may be soon! We might be mere days or even hours from His return.

Christ's imminent coming evokes fear and dread for some. But for us, the firm promise, "He will return," inspires a whole different feeling. Jesus-followers view the climactic day of Christ's appearing with the eyes of delight and a heart of excitement. That day glimmers with glory because, on that day, we will be taken up in a flash into eternal bliss, united with our Savior and living unhindered by the pain and curse of sin in our world.

Even into his nineties, the thought of Christ's return transported the aged apostle John into a state of rapturous wonder. He saw Jesus taken up into heaven. We can easily imagine how the thought of Him coming from heaven might strike John speechless. If there ever were such an occasion for awe, it certainly would have been when he wrote 1 John 2:28–3:3, our passage for this study.



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Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Unshakable joy filled John's days because of the immoveable hope he held. He knew the secret of maintaining it and wanted believers like us to carry with us day-and-night the same excitement about our Lord's return.

Think of a spiritual song you have memorized that expresses hope for the day of Christ's return—perhaps the hymn by John W. Peterson, "Jesus Is Coming Again." Make a melody to Jesus in your heart. Then invite His presence and assistance as you read His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The subject of the "end times"—or the "end of the age" or the "last days"—fascinates many Christians. It also confuses them. It has done so from the beginning. After Jesus resurrected, His disciples asked Him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They didn't understand what He taught when He said He must go away and then return (John 14:1–4).

Theologians call this doctrine of the "end times" *eschatology*. Learning eschatology requires patient reflection. Furthermore, when learning these vital truths, we must remember that God didn't tell us the future so that we could merely solve a theological jigsaw puzzle. Knowing our future helps us make wise choices today.

Believing right helps you think right. Thinking right helps you live right. Living right helps you worry less. And worrying less helps you anticipate the greatest event just over the horizon, our Lord's return. —Chuck Swindoll

The *Searching the Scriptures* method of correlation proves vital for the study of eschatology.¹ Comparing how multiple biblical authors addressed the subject of the end times expands our understanding. So, for this study, we'll begin with a look at John's statements in 1 John 2:28–3:3 and then we'll turn to some of Paul's.



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3



Observation: Assurance from Abiding

Observe [1 John 2:28–3:3](#). Read it slowly. Hover over key words and let their meaning spark new connections in your understanding. Take your preliminary notes below.

An Important Command—Remain in Fellowship

Note John's command, "remain in fellowship with Christ" (1 John 2:28) or, in the New American Standard Bible, "abide in Him." How does John's command connect to Christ's return? Hint: he gave one positive reason and one negative reason.

A Reassuring Reminder—Confidence

What reassuring reminder did John give in 1 John 2:29? What is John's logical connection between 2:28 and 2:29?



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

Obedience to Christ fosters intimate fellowship with Him. The closer our fellowship, the stronger our assurance. Our awareness of God's love deepens, confidence in God's power increases, and longing for God's person intensifies. As a result, our enjoyment of God's company heightens.

Biblical authors repeat words and phrases to emphasize their points. John used the word translated “children” in two ways (*1 John 2:28; 3:1–3*). What were those ways? What did John emphasize in each way?

An Outburst of Wonder—Love

In which verse do we find John marveling at our identity in Christ and Christ's return? Why was he marveling?

John wrote our eyes will behold Jesus in all His splendor at His return. John himself beheld the glorified Christ on the sandy shores of Patmos. A gold sash draped Jesus' white robe. His face shined like the sun while His eyes flamed like fire. Astonished, John could only fall on his face before Jesus' feet, which glistened like bronze (*Revelation 1:12–16*). *What a moment!*



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

A Glorious Promise—Likeness

What transformation did John say would accompany our seeing Christ at His return (1 John 3:2)?

The Lord will have no trouble bringing a dead person's body back together when He returns. He created you from nothing to start with. And He will have no trouble recreating you from the dust as He brings you back. You will possess an imperishable body, radiant in glory.
—Chuck Swindoll

John's command in 2:28, “abide” or “remain,” is in present tense. Just as a wedding does not guarantee decades of marital bliss, neither does the moment of our new birth guarantee a life of sweet communion with the Lord. A banquet of fellowship with Christ awaits the new Christian. John encourages us to sit at His table daily through prayer and enjoy the presence of the risen Jesus.



Interpretation: A Fixed Hope That Results in Purity

The elderly apostle made a remarkable statement in 1 John 3:3:

And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:3)

The New American Standard Bible renders 1 John 3:3 this way:

And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (3:3 NASB)

Use your interpretation skills to research what John meant in this verse. Consult your trusted commentaries.² Netbible.org provides helpful study tools as well.



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

In what way does hoping in Christ's return purify Christians? What kind of purity did John mean?

Consider the opposite of John's claim. What did John imply for those who do not hope in Christ's return? Summarize what the two opposing lifestyles might look like for those who do and do not hope in Christ. What weight of relevance does John's statement carry today?



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Christ's Return

The doctrine of the return of Christ is no fairy tale to get children to behave, no soothsaying fantasy to get people through a dismal world, and no fad invented to sell books to people worried about the future. On the contrary, the second coming of Christ is part of the body of truth taught not only by Jesus Himself but also by His apostles, the early church, and every generation of true believers throughout the last two millennia. In 1 John 2:28–3:3, John refers twice to the moment “when He appears” (2:28; 3:2). It's clear that he's urging all of us, his readers, to think and plan ahead, to realize that the Lord's return is an inescapable reality which we can face with assurance, not shame. In light of Christ's coming, we're to be filled with hopeful anticipation, knowing that “we will see Him just as He is” (3:2).³



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

John tells us to keep a fixed hope. This hope results in an ethical and moral purity as you set your eyes and heart on the Savior's return. This isn't just a theological truth to agree with. We stand on it and live by it. John gives us ethical, practical, personal counsel. Anticipating Christ's return will purify you. Just imagine seeing Him face to face, knowing you'll be changed inside out, and you'll spend eternity with Him. As you focus on that, you will receive an internal cleansing. Sin will not seem that attractive. Temptation will not seem nearly as alluring when you have focused on your Savior's return at any moment.
—Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul's Explanation of What's Ahead

Paul gave more details about Christ's return than John did. Both brought up eschatology to add life instruction because what we believe about the future affects how we live today.

Order of Events—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Observe [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#). List the order of events that will occur at Christ's return.

What did Paul emphasize regarding Christ's return?



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

At Christ's return, nothing else will matter. All your cares and worries and struggles and problems will melt away. Deterioration, disabilities, distress—all will be gone. How great this will be! The blind will see. The lame will walk. The deaf will hear. We shall be like Him because we will see Him as He is. —Chuck Swindoll

What exhortations did Paul attach to Jesus' second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18)?

Actual Reality—1 Corinthians 15:50–58

Observe [1 Corinthians 15:50–58](#). What did Paul emphasize in this passage regarding what will happen to believers at Christ's return?

What exhortation did Paul connect with Christ's return? (1 Corinthians 15:58)



Our Lord's Return: Then What?

1 John 2:28–3:3

Purity. Comfort. Diligence. Hope. Christ's impending arrival inspires all four traits in Christians. If we believe right—that Christ can appear in the sky before our eyes at any moment—then we will get our priorities right. If we get our priorities right—fellowshipping with Jesus and walking in the light—then we will live right. Those who live such lives wait confidently for Jesus.



Application: Anticipate in Wonder

For this study, use application to practice anticipation. Consider how the white-robed messengers reassured the disciples saying, “Someday he will return” (Acts 1:11). Take time to get alone in the quiet. Get lost in thoughts of Christ's return. Simply sit in wonder. Meditate upon what you'll experience at Christ's coming. Hear the trumpet. Watch the clouds split. Feel your new skin. Behold His shining face.

Let's close this time in private worship. Pray to your Comforter. Sing to your Deliverer. Adore your Lord, Jesus Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I wait for Your Son with eager expectation. How I long to behold Him face to face, when my perishable body shall be made imperishable, and my eyes shall see Him as He is! Glorious. Thank You for giving me this hope. Thank You for sending Jesus to take on flesh and absorb sin's curse on a criminal's cross where I belong. But by grace, You have redeemed me from sin and Satan. I praise You in Christ's name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
2. Grab a copy of Chuck's [commentary](#) on 1 John if you don't own it already. Chuck also recommends the [Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament](#) as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 73–74.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY TEN

That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10

The person who continually sins, who practices sin, who carries on a life of sinfulness, has not seen or known Jesus according to John. In fact, for that person God is a distant, peeved deity, walking around heaven with a big club, looking for somebody having fun so He can club 'em because they're enjoying life. The person without Christ will lead you to believe that's the kind of God you serve. But we, who have come to see and know Jesus as He is in truth, think otherwise.

—Charles R. Swindoll

OUR society has given the boot to the word *sin* because it offends. It shines like a spotlight on the wrongdoing in our world, revealing the ugliness we prefer to hide. To shield the harsh glare, we've replaced *sin* with cloudy euphemisms, such as, *error, mistake, bad habit, misdeed, sickness, failure, weakness, fault* . . . to name a few!

But the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, doesn't shrink from clearly naming our ever-present problem with that "nasty" three-letter word, *sin*. The Bible speaks so forcefully on our problem because we must first acknowledge the sickness in our soul before we will seek the cure. Paul explained the origin and deadly consequences of *sin* in his letter to the Romans:

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Sin's disease has infected every single human . . . except Jesus, the "One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15 NASB). Only He, the One who never sinned, presents the answer to our problem.



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That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He reversed the effects of sin and gave those who belong to Him the life-giving Spirit to free us from the power of sin that leads to death (Romans 8:2). Without the Spirit's strength, sin dominates. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we explore 1 John 3:4–10. The apostle John picks up Paul's banner of truth about sin along with its origin and shows us how we can win the fight.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your inner self and ask God to bless your time in this study.

Father, how grateful I am that You are no distant deity. You have sent Your Son—my friend who is nearer than any brother or sister can be. Thank You for the warmth of Your Spirit. Thank You for the spiritual sight He has given the eyes of my heart. And thank You for His convicting presence which leads me out of darkness and onto the path of light for Your name's sake. I pray in the glorious name of Christ Your Son, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

According to Romans 5:21, God brandished a scepter called grace to deal a deathblow to the dominion of sin:

So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Romans 5:21)

As Paul declared, we have a “right standing with God”—a new position in Christ, in which we possess the same blameless, guiltless, righteous verdict of God which Christ Himself received. However, while Christians are in Christ positionally, we still have a craving for sin, which Paul called “the desire of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16 NASB).

So, sometimes, we fall to temptation and sin. Through Jesus, thankfully, we have access to forgiveness and restoration (1 John 1:9). The false teachers in John's day, however, tried to convince Christians to unleash their sinful desires and ignore their sinful acts. *What heresy!* Let's learn how John responded.



That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10



Observation: Analyzing Our Sinfulness

Begin by reading [1 John 3:4–10](#). Carefully note the angles from which John spoke of sin. Write below your initial observations.¹

The Practice of Sin

In [1 John 3:4](#), [8](#), and [9](#), John repeatedly used the verb *sin* in the same verb tense. Remember the importance of repetition? It reveals an author's emphasis. What did John emphasize with his repeated use of the verb tense he chose? (Hint: you can see the repetition more clearly in the New American Standard Bible translation.)

The practice of sin is the continual, persistent, habitual, sinful lifestyle. Every lost person habitually, persistently, continually practicing a lifestyle of sin practices lawlessness, because sin is lawlessness. The believer on the other hand battles the old sin nature with the Spirit of God who wants to produce righteousness. This battle causes us to go back and forth. Walking with God; walking away from God. Struggling with the Lord's will; cooperating with the Lord's will. It doesn't mean you're lost; it means you have an old sin nature.

—Chuck Swindoll



That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10

The Nature and Origin of Sin

Looking for alike concepts helps us make great observations. John constructed two paragraphs (1 John 3:4–7 and 3:8–9) that follow a four-part parallel structure: subject, theme, solution, conclusion. These parallel ideas underscore and elucidate John's message.

Subject

Look at the first half of verses 4 and 8. With what key subject did John begin both verses?

Theme

Look at the second half of verses 4 and 8. How did John describe his key subject?

John described the nature of sin: lawlessness. Lawlessness signifies the ongoing, active rebellion against the will of God. Lawlessness not only shakes its fist at God's rule and tramples its feet on God's name, it also turns it back on God's face.

John described the origin of sin: the devil, who first instituted lawless living. He labors to inspire it in others. Despite how he's often portrayed, Satan is not a hideous being with protruding horns and fangs; rather, he's the most beautiful of all angels . . . and he uses his charm for the purpose of advancing his sinister plan of rebellion against God.



That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10

Solution

Read 1 John 3:5 and 3:8. Both verses present reasons why Jesus came. What are those reasons?

Conclusion

John made parallel, concluding statements about the believer's habitual practice of sin (1 John 3:6 and 3:9). What are those statements?

Jesus came to annihilate the works of the devil. And not only to annihilate but also to reverse the effects of the devil's works. Jesus forgives our sin *and* gives us a new nature with new power to control our fleshly desires. The secret and mystery to our new nature and new power is credited to God's "life" (NLT) or "seed" (NASB) within us.



That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10



Interpretation: God's Seed

In [1 John 3:9](#), John made the startling statement that Christians have within them God's seed. John might be referring to God's Word, the Holy Spirit, or the kernel-like beginnings of eternal life.

Consult your [resources](#) to study the meaning of John's phrase.² Which of those interpretations do you believe he meant? Explain why you chose that interpretation and its significance for believers today.



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Regeneration

The New American Standard Bible properly translates the first part of 3:9 as “No one who is born of God practices sin.” And the inability to continually practice sin is a direct result of being “born of God” (3:9). This expression is a reference to the new birth of regeneration resulting in the abiding presence and internal working of the Holy Spirit. The “seed” that abides in the one who has been born again is a reference to the Spirit, though the work of the Spirit is always connected to the planting and sprouting of the Word of God (Matt. 13:1–23).³

After John explained how believers have God's seed in them, he drew a practical conclusion in [1 John 3:10](#). What is this conclusion, and why is it important for us to remember today?



That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10

First John 3:4–10 reveals how John combated the teachings of false teachers. Christians need to always hold together both doctrine and duty, love of God and love of neighbor. Steer clear of any ministry that neglects one or the other.



Correlation: The Christian's Struggle

In his letter to the Christian assembly in Rome, Paul wrote of the Christian's constant battle with sin. Read how he described this battle in [Romans 7:18–21](#).

What does this passage teach about a Christian's ongoing battle with sin, and how does this passage correlate with 1 John 3:4–10?

According to Romans 8:1–11, Christians possess the Spirit of God because we have been born of God. *How remarkable!* Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ because we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loves us and gave Himself for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. What grace, what compassion!



Application: Three Statements Worth Remembering

Chuck Swindoll ended his study of this passage with three statements worth remembering.

- 1) *We are all sinners.* “Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). We were all in the same sinking ship before Christ rescued us. As Christians, we shouldn't get a big head for being saved. Rather, in the power of the Spirit, we learn to despise our sin and align our lives with Christ.
- 2) *God loves sinners.* God extends patience and grace to both saved and lost sinners. God does not want anyone to eternally perish. He wants all to come to the Son and find eternal life in Him.
- 3) *The devil confuses sinners.* The devil wants saved sinners to think they're lost and lost sinners to think they're saved. But God's Word gives us the light of truth to combat Satan's lies.



That Nasty Three-Letter Word

1 John 3:4–10

Pick one truth from this study that made you stop and think differently or one that really touched you in your season of life. Record that truth below and develop how you wish to apply it practically in your fellowship with Jesus.

We would be powerless against sin were it not for Christ's sacrificial death for our guilt, His resurrection from the dead for our eternal life, and His sending of the Spirit for our regeneration and perfection.

But thanks be to God that Christ paid the price for our sin, released us from our eternal prison, and healed us. One day we will be like Him because we will be with Him and away from the presence of sin.



A FINAL PRAYER

Now take just a few moments to reflect on what you learned in this study. Consider how you can pray according to what you learned. End this study by translating what you learned into a prayer to God.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org.
2. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store. Chuck also recommends the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 85.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY ELEVEN

Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18

John doesn't write about something that will give us theories to work on and to talk about with our friends and fellow Christians. I just love that about John's message. It's not about having the best notes or fostering a deep theological discussion. In this passage, John writes about loving people in "deed and truth."

—Charles R. Swindoll

IN the quaint old English nursery rhyme, *Pussycat, Pussycat, Where Have You Been?* a cat goes to London to look at the Queen. But what catches the cat's eye? The palace halls gilded in gold? The ornate throne in the royal room? The bejeweled Queen in her fine gown and ruby-studded crown?

Nope! The cat who went to see royalty saw only a mouse under the Queen's chair! Cats are cats, after all, and chasing mice is what they do! This children's story about "cat nature" also reflects a truth about human nature:

What we are determines what we see, and what we see determines what we do.

In the gilded palace of creation, God He has made His glory known to all people. According to Paul, "Through everything God made, [people] can see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20).

Sin diverts people's attention, however, just as the little mouse caught the eye of the cat. People chase after vanities because they let sin, not the wonders of God, direct their sight. But we aren't hopeless. Only the power of God can give us a new, Godward nature that produces a supernatural change in perspective and action.



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Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18

In the passage of this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, John continued his contrast of those who truly follow Christ with those who don't. Those who don't follow Christ operate in their old, fallen nature which tempts them toward anger and hate. Jesus-followers, however, operate in their new, Christ-like nature, which produces generous, practical, contagious love.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Begin with a prayer of gratitude to God for giving you a new nature. Ask the Spirit to bless your study so that you can yield all the more to the power of the Spirit and not to the old, fleshly desires that reject God's good ways.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The aged apostle opened our passage of Scripture with a reminder of what he'd previously written:

This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. (1 John 3:11)

He then approached the meaning of this command from an angle different from the one he took earlier in the letter. *First John 2:7–11* reveals how the command to *love one another* is based on what God accomplished through Moses (*Leviticus 19:17–18*) and on the teaching and death of Jesus (*John 13:1–17, 31–38*).

Next, John aligned this old, yet new command with the new nature God gives believers. In doing so, John taught how this command practically expresses itself. Using the power of contrasts, John showed the difference between our old-nature-works and our new-nature-works.

To begin the contrast, John referenced an example from the biblical story of Cain and Abel.



Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18



Correlation: The Tragic Story

Read the story of Cain and Abel in [Genesis 4:1–12](#). Put yourself in their sandals. Feel the fur of Abel's lamb. Stand beside guilty Cain before God.

How did Cain respond to God's rejection of his offering (Genesis 4:5), and what warnings did God give Cain regarding Cain's feelings (4:6–7)?

How did Cain respond to God's warning? What does Cain's behavior demonstrate about his nature (4:8)?

What you are determines what you do. Cain was an evil man, and when you combine that evil spirit—that evil nature—with a mixture of envy and resentment . . . it will equal murder. —Chuck Swindoll

Bible interpreters have noted at least three reasons God rejected Cain:

- 1) *Cain performed evil deeds before his sacrifice.* That's why God told him, "You will be accepted if you do what is right" (Genesis 4:7; see also [1 John 3:12](#)).



Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18

- 2) *Cain didn't offer blood with his sacrifice.* God's killing of animals to provide Adam and Eve with clothing should have served as Cain's example to follow ([Genesis 3:21](#)), but he refused God's prescribed method of sacrifice to worship God his *own way*. Therefore, God rejected him.
- 3) *Cain didn't offer his sacrifice in faith.* Cain ho-hummed his way through worship without seeing any real benefit in pleasing or obeying God. Abel trusted God as a God who rewards those who seek Him ([Hebrews 11:1–6](#)).

How are these reasons instructive for us today? Which one do you find most illuminating?

Now we turn to John's summary of the Cain and Abel story and the practical teaching he draws from it.



Observation: John's Shocking Contrasts

Observe [1 John 3:11–15](#). In verses 11 and 13, what two instructive connections did John draw from the Cain and Abel story?

The world will hate you, Christian. Why? Because you do righteously, and the world doesn't. Cain hated Abel for doing what was righteous. That hate showed Cain to be unrighteous. Cain is the prototype of this world. And the world, as we read, "hates you." We must not be surprised. —Chuck Swindoll



Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18

Look at [1 John 3:14–15](#) which mentions the principle referenced above: what you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do. How did John explain this principle? How did he distinguish humanity into two kinds of people?

John taught that conversion occurred in a moment (see John 3:1–15). At that moment, the Spirit, like a divine defibrillator, jolts us with divine electricity into new life. During a Christian's lifetime, this same current of life passes through us to others via our love for them. Some reject that current or even hate it. But others will be drawn to it and find life in the Son.



Interpretation: Genuine Examples from Genuine Followers

Now, John gets practical. He refused to let love remain only an idea. In [1 John 3:16–18](#), John gave us an application principle and then exhorts us to apply that principle. First, read the passage a couple of times.

In [3:16](#), what principle did John draw from Jesus' example?



Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18

According to 1 John 3:17, how did John add flesh to the principle? List five concrete expressions of this principle in your life.



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Love

Unlike those who hate other believers and lack salvation, “we know that we have passed out of death into life” (1 Jn. 3:14). How do we know this? Because we love the brothers and sisters. John’s intention is that, as his readers consider the disposition and murderous actions of Cain, they will not see themselves as being like him. Just the opposite. Instead of behaving like Cain, who slew his brother to satiate his own anger, children of God ought to follow Christ’s extreme example of self-sacrificial love (3:16). Just as Christ laid down His life for us because of His love, we should love the brethren by laying down our lives for them.¹

How did John summarize the main point of 1 John 3:11–18 in 3:18?

John concerned himself with the proof of love in 1 John 3:16–18. Christ’s self-sacrificial death on a Roman cross proved His love for us. When our compassion for others translates into concrete acts of sacrificial giving, the world receives proof of our genuine love.



Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18



Application: Live It Out

During application, we translate into action the new perspective we gained from God's Word.² Sometimes, this action develops new habits of thinking or speaking or acting. For this study, we focus on just one action to implement. Chuck Swindoll suggests you perform three steps over the course of the next week to help you incorporate this action.

One Person

Ask God to help you pick one person to whom you would like to demonstrate an act of love. You may choose one whom you think of often but don't have many opportunities to see. Or you might choose one you see often but neglect to show the love you have for him or her.

Name that person: _____

One Need

Pray for guidance and wisdom to discern a need that person has. Really think through the person's rhythm of life and what would make him or her feel loved.

Describe that need: _____

One Act

Determine one act of sacrificial giving you can perform to meet that need. Don't take the cheap and quick route. Surprise him or her with quality and sacrifice.

Select that act: _____

Choose when you want to act: _____

What a blessing you will be to that person! A simple act of love can create such a spiritual impact in a person's life. You may even wish to make it an anonymous surprise. If you do, have confidence that your Father who sees in secret will also reward in secret (Matthew 6:4).



Love and Hate: Where Are You?

1 John 3:11–18



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I stand in complete gratitude for the acts of love You display toward me. Thank You for my new nature, for giving me spiritual breath to breathe, and for animating me with a vibrant love that wells up into a spring of eternal life. Help me to live new. I want others to see Your power in me. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 93–94.
2. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have the Swindoll's Living Insights commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY TWELVE

You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24

We need a little break where we can take a deep breath and understand that the conscience, while it is often speaking to us, may be incriminating us when it should not. Or it may be convicting us when it should. That's what these verses are about.

—Charles R. Swindoll

OUR conscience holds immense power over our lives because it looks both behind and ahead. It legislates what should be done *and* judges the validity of what was done. It directs which way to go *and* evaluates the way already taken. It can be an uplifting coach or a hammering dictator, a gentle comforter or a biting critic.

What rest accompanies an assuring conscience. Likewise, what anxious turmoil comes with the condemning conscience. And no matter what, the inner talk of our conscience just never stops.

The confused world, void of God's truth, tells you to treat this ever-present voice in two different ways. First, the world will encourage you to ignore your conscience. *Do what you like! Get that millstone off your neck!* Or, second, the world might press or cajole you to conform your conscience to its own image. *Be as I am! Do as I do!*

Considering the conscience's great influence, its pervading presence, and the world's distorted view of it, how vital, then, that we treat our conscience as it should be treated. God designed our conscience to harness His truth as both the light that points the way and the rod that measures our ways.



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You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24

Yet, even a mature Christian may possess areas in his or her conscience not molded by God's Word. A conscience may condemn when no condemnation is required, or it may withhold affirmation when affirmation is needed. In the passage of this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, John the apostle addressed cases like these to help us better understand our conscience.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

A soft heart forms the bridge for God's truth to cross over into our lives and shape our conscience. So, before we study the Living Word, we pray for the Spirit to open our hearts to receive it. Pause now and pray for His help. Write your prayer below if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Effective Bible study always includes studying the context. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck Swindoll wrote:

We understand a verse of Scripture better when we grasp its context—when we acquaint ourselves with the surrounding verses. Every verse sits within a larger context. . . . Let me remind you: never isolate a verse from its context. When we seize isolated verses without having a bigger view of how they fit in with the rest of the passage, it leads to error, especially when verses are pulled out of context.¹

Repetition of key words often clues us in to determining the context. This study's passage, *1 John 3:19–24*, opens with a repetition of a key word from 3:18.



You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24

What key word did John repeat in *1 John 3:18–19*? How does this repetition give us the context of 3:19–24, and how does the context help us understand John's intention for the statements he made in 3:19–24?

In the second half of 3:19, John makes a logical inference based on his first statement in 3:19. How does that inference naturally follow his first statement in 3:19?

An assured heart before God and confidence in our prayers come to us when our conscience has been formed by divine truth and when our actions align with that truth. Jesus does not speak as a heavenly joker, or comedian, or riddler. He doesn't want us to strain over or guess at His intentions. He wants us to know. And, by knowing, do His will and enjoy His company.



You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24



Observation: When Our Conscience Condemns Us

If you haven't already, read [1 John 3:19–24](#). First, make a few observations below regarding how this passage contributes to our understanding of a larger theme in 1 John: *fellowship*. Note that John uses the word *heart* to refer to our “conscience.”

In 3:19–24, John sets up two scenarios: 1) when we feel confident before God 2) when we feel guilty before God. Look at [3:19–20](#). How did John identify with his readers in these scenarios?

I always love that about a writer I'm reading when I don't feel like he's looking down on us, but he's identifying with us. —Chuck Swindoll

According to 3:19–20, in what way should we take comfort during those times when our heart condemns us even though it shouldn't? What two truths did John say should comfort us?



You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24

We know in part, but God knows in full. A weak conscience may overlook signs that should give courage. If we reflect on our lives and still feel condemned before Him, then we should take heart that the guilty feelings don't reflect God's feelings. God is greater than our feeble hearts.



Interpretation: When Our Heart Does Not Condemn Us

After addressing those times when our heart needles our minds, John then addressed the times when our heart claps and cheers us on.

Look at [1 John 3:21](#). According to this verse, what is the benefit of having a conscience that does not condemn us? How does that benefit fuel our fellowship with God, and why is it important in day-to-day Christian living?

Now focus on [3:22](#). John added another benefit. What is it? What additional support did John use to buttress our reason for having this benefit?



You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Spiritual Confidence

Because of this confidence brought on by a life of obedience, we don't shy away from prayer. We don't skulk in the margins while others go to God with their requests. Few things keep people from genuine prayer to their heavenly Father more than unconfessed sin and a resulting guilty conscience. Shame is a barrier to fellowship with God. But when we confess our sins, clear the air, and walk in the light, we find ourselves going to God constantly and confidently, thanking Him, sharing with Him, worshiping and praising Him, and letting our requests be known.²

Let's look at the last verses of our passage, [1 John 3:23–24](#). List the two parts to the commandment mentioned at the beginning of 3:23. What does our response to this command reflect about our relationship with God?

How do we know the Spirit abides in us (1 John 3:24)? What does the last statement in this verse mean? How would not having the Spirit hinder our assurance?

How refreshing to have confidence before God, to know that He hears our prayers, and to receive the sustaining assurance of the Holy Spirit. Such benefits we find nowhere else and in no one else. These benefits can quiet anxious tension, lift the weight of depression, and help you sleep at night. They can strengthen you through difficulties and give you a foretaste of glory divine.



You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24



Correlation: A Purified Conscience

The author of Hebrews wrote of the importance of having a clear conscience and how it fosters a thriving relationship with God. Below, we will explore how Hebrews complements what we learned in 1 John 3:19–24.

First, read [Hebrews 9:9; 9:14](#); and [10:2](#). How did the author of Hebrews relate the sacrifice of Christ with the Christian's conscience? How do these verses complement 1 John 3:19–24?

There is nothing like knowing the truth. O, how it empowers us to live at peace with yourself. Those who do not know the truth live their lives constantly unsure, lacking in confidence, lacking in assurance, fearful of sickness, scared to death of death. They don't know the truth. But if you know the truth, it's amazing how that will assure your heart.
—Chuck Swindoll

Now, read [Hebrews 10:22](#) and [13:18](#). What benefit accompanies a clear conscience? How does a clear conscience connect with how we conduct our lives? How do these verses complement 1 John 3:19–24?

Possessing a clear conscience creates ripple upon ripple of benefits in our life. We enjoy a greater sense of God's presence, act with a clearer mind, live an honorable life, and hold the deep conviction that death will only take us straight to the presence of the Almighty. "No guilt in life, no fear in death, / This is the power of Christ in me."³



You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24



Application: Three Thoughts

Begin application by summarizing what you learned about the role of your conscience in your spiritual life and how trusting Christ benefits our conscience.

After serious reflection on 1 John 3:19–24, Chuck Swindoll noted three thoughts he would like you to consider and practice:

- 1) *When your conscience accuses you, look back and ask why.* Did you act with an ill motive? Did you speak from a heart of pride? Did you react in anger?
- 2) *When your heart affirms you, look around and see why.* Consider the gifts God has given you, the people He has placed in your life, and the benefits of knowing Him. Let your heart swell with gratitude and thanksgiving.
- 3) *When the Spirit assures you, look within and know why.* He will never leave you. He will channel to you all the divine riches from heaven's storehouse so that you enjoy life with God.

Which of the three thoughts do you find most useful in this season of your walk with Christ? Why? Also, note any other application you would like to take away from your time of study.



You and Your Conscience

1 John 3:19–24

The pure truth of God's Word provides us with a far better response than what the world will tell us. We have access to God's forgiveness so we don't have to hide or dismiss our wrongs. We have access to kingdom living and the King Himself, so there's no need to follow our feelings or conform to the destructive ways of the world. *Hallelujah!*



A FINAL PRAYER

Take a few more moments to meditate upon the truth you learned from this study. Then end with a fitting prayer that aligns with those truths.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 85, 86. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 93–94.
3. Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, "In Christ Alone," <https://www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/in-christ-alone/>.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY THIRTEEN

Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

The passage we're looking at tells it like it is. John has no interest in winning friends and influencing people. He has no concern for making you feel good. Thank God! Because John is concerned about communicating the truth. If the truth helps you feel great, wonderful. But if it doesn't and then you decide to listen to only what you want to hear with no spiritual discernment, then, trust me, you're moving in the wrong direction.

—Charles R. Swindoll

EARLER in his letter, John spotlighted the lie-touting false teachers who had slithered into the church. He wrote “I am writing these things to warn you about those who want to lead you astray” (1 John 2:26) and he encouraged his readers by affirming “we are already God’s children” (3:2). John also focused his readers on Jesus’ command to love (3:11).

False teachers had questioned the spiritual authority of John’s apostolic testimony, the physical nature of Jesus Christ, the superiority of love, and the need to refrain from sin. These deceivers didn’t question just one or two pillars of God’s truth . . . *they challenged many!*

So John balanced the command to love with the practice of spiritual discernment. We can’t blindly open our arms to *everything*. Those who love truth cannot also embrace falsehood. For that reason, we must be discerning. John would urge us in our day with the same directives he gave in his day: uphold both love and discernment.

In this *Searching the Scripture* Bible study of 1 John 4:1–6, we explore John’s direction for how to distinguish between truth and error. We also uncover the cause for the proliferation of false teaching that has always assaulted the flourishing of God’s people.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6



PREPARE YOUR HEART

On the eve of His betrayal, Jesus uttered what may be the most important prayer for His followers. Theologians call it Jesus' high priestly prayer because He interceded for all Christians who would face difficulties and hostilities after His death. Jesus prayed:

I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. (John 17:14–17)

Take a few minutes to reflect on Jesus' prayer. Consider the wonderful reality that He had you in mind when He prayed. Think over how that prayer has proved true in your life. After your time of reflection, pray for the Spirit's presence and guidance in your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

John opened the passage of our study with two urgent commands regarding the topic of spiritual discernment. Read [1 John 4:1](#) and summarize those commands.



Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

Think of it this way. Everyone who is teaching is a mouthpiece for either truth or error. Every individual represents the spirit of truth or the spirit of error. When you speak for the spirit of truth, you are representing the living God. When you speak error, you are representing the adversary himself. Everyone who teaches is either representing truth or error, so “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.” —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: The Why and How of Our Obedience

Begin observation by reflectively reading through our entire passage, [1 John 4:1–6](#).¹ Jot down any thoughts you wish to preserve below.

The “Why” behind John’s Commands

Did you catch the logical connective in [1 John 4:1](#) after he stated his commands? Reread the verse and note John’s reason for such commands.



Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

The “How” for Practicing John’s Commands

Next, John provides the method for testing the spirits. Look at [1 John 4:2–3](#). What test did John give for distinguishing between true and false spirits?

False teachers in John’s day so misrepresented Jesus that their portrayal of Him contrasted radically with the Jesus John had seen, heard, known, and loved. Whether its downplaying the importance of Jesus or recasting the image of Jesus or garbling the teaching of Jesus, all false teachers distort key truths connected with Christ, our Savior and Lord.



Interpretation: True and False Followers

John argued that we can discern the spirit of the teaching we follow by the practical life-outcomes that teaching produces. Such life-outcomes are revealed by our words and deeds—what we say about Jesus and how we follow His teaching. Therein lies the test.



Chuck’s Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Testing

These two tests—faithfulness in word and deed to the person of Jesus Christ and faithfulness and obedience to God’s word—are sure, reliable guides for discerning between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.²



Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

Notice how John spoke of two categories of followers of Jesus in 1 John 4:4–6. Some follow Jesus in truth. Others profess a false Christ and, therefore, follow Jesus in falsehood. Use the chart below to list the characteristics of each group.

Followers from God 1 John 4:4, 6	Followers from the World 1 John 4:5–6

First John 4:4 states that Christians have overcome those who aren't from God and that "greater is He who is in you [Christians] than he who is in the world" (NASB). Why are these two claims important for Christians today? Consult your personal Bible study library or Netbible.org for resources to help you interpret these statements.

Jesus-followers possess the indwelling Holy Spirit of God who provides divine power that exceeds all other spiritual forces. He gives us the strength to withstand spiritual attacks, the discernment to spot deceptive words, and the posture of heart to love others as Jesus loves us.



Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

Here is the principle that is essential to remember: When you are searching for truth, listen carefully to the one who is teaching and look closely at those who are following. Listen to what is said and what is not said. Listen to what is conveniently left out. Listen to the wording, listen to the subtle phrases, listen to the implications. Listen. And then look at those who are following. Do they have their Bibles? Are they serious about their faith? Are they sharing Christ? Are they in the battle? You'll be able to tell whether they are from God or from the world. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Watch Out for False Prophets

Warnings of false teaching reverberated from every spiritual pillar in the early church. Jesus Himself began the tradition. Then warnings came from Paul, Peter, Jude, and John. Let's look at a few of these statements. Summarize the gist of each of the following passages and note how it correlates with the main passage of our study.

John 16:1–4, 13–15

1 Timothy 4:1–5



Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

2 Peter 2:1–3

Jude 3–4

Nearly every book in the New Testament contains at least some emphasis on abiding in the truth or avoiding spiritual deception. Some books were written for that very reason! In short, Christians, no matter their age or location or maturity, should guard against false teaching.



Application: Six Reminders for Believers Today

After prayerful study and reflection on 1 John 4:1–6, Chuck Swindoll developed six key truths all Christians in our day should remember. Here they are:

- 1) *We live in treacherous times.* We can't expect our spiritual growth to occur in an easy, convenient, or smooth environment.
- 2) *Discernment plays a vital role in our spiritual health.* We can't kick our brains into autopilot or merely float along in the culture's stream. We must keep our eyes open, chest out, and head up. Be vigilant.
- 3) *We must continue embracing our historical roots and doctrinal truth.* No swerving. No reimaging. No fancy new doctrines. We must uphold the doctrines and practices of traditional Christianity. Only this truth can make a legitimate difference in the world.



Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

- 4) *Each generation of believers has a serious responsibility.* God has no grandchildren. All Christians must persevere in spiritual growth and evangelism. All Christians must persevere in faith, hope, and love.
- 5) *It is the job of church leaders to guide and guard the ministry of their church.* Church leaders point the way and flag the dangers. Church leaders receive a ministry by the mercy of God as a stewardship from God.
- 6) *A strong and healthy church today is no guarantee of a strong and healthy church tomorrow.* Churches must take nothing for granted. They must abide in faithful practices—grand or minute, seen or unseen—to ensure today's strength continues.

Think over those statements. Reflect on them. What impression do they give you? What feelings do they create in you? In what ways do they inspire you to cling to Christ and guard against falsities?

Now, reflect on the truth you learned in this study. How should you apply this truth to your life?



Distinguishing Truth from Error

1 John 4:1–6

Lastly, in what ways can you take what you've learned and share it with your Christian brothers and sisters in your circle? Do any take their spiritual health for granted? Do any appear tempted to believe a false teacher? If so, pray for wisdom for a way to lovingly approach that person and to share the truth you learned in this study. If a plan readily comes to mind, write it below.

By now, we can heartily agree that God's church must stand against any distortion of spiritual truth or any tasteless reimagining of authentic, biblical worship. Anything that strays might give immediate gratification but will eventually leave us empty—like chewing gum. Instead, we must stand with Christ and, by His grace, enjoy the nourishing, spiritual meat of God's Word.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your Word contains truth I find nowhere else. How satisfying it truly is! Thank You for leading me to that well of nourishment. Thank You for leading me to that rock foundation to stand upon. Thank You for leading me to Your Son, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I pray in awe and gratitude for who You are and what You do. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 107.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY FOURTEEN

The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21

God is love. That's His nature. That's the essence of His person. That's one of His attributes, His characteristics. When you are in God and God is in you, then the same life in God pours out through you. You're like a string on His instrument, a sound from His trumpet, a photograph from His camera. His love flows out through you and that love of God is revealed.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE seasoned apostle John energetically repeated the truth with plain and simple terms. He never shrank from categorizing life in basic, unmistakable language like right and wrong, light and dark, good and evil, Christ and antichrist, love and hate.

John witnessed time and again how deceptive teachers had sneaked into the church as wolves in sheep's clothing. He warned how "there are many false prophets in the world" (1 John 4:1). These wolves cater to the depraved *I-ME-MINE* nature of humanity. If unbroken by the Spirit of God, that nature can spiral people into a self-absorbed, spiritual blindness.

Because John had a clear-eyed view of the practical outcome of those false doctrines, he gave one last address on the supreme significance of love. In doing so, he dealt a deadly blow to the beasts who stood poised to devour.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study on 1 John 4:7–21, we read John's exalted reminder how our identity as a child of God frees us from endless self-grasping, self-exalting, and self-preserving, so that, instead, we can be self-giving people . . . just as God is a self-giving God.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Consider how no other religion or worldview teaches God's love for you in the way Jesus Christ teaches God's love for you. Think of the immense privilege and grace God has shown us by opening our hearts to that truth, wooing us to receive His Son. Let that reality simmer in you. Then ask for the Spirit's blessing on your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Meditate on John's prior statements on love:

- 1) "Those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him" (1 John 2:5).
- 2) "Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light" (2:10).
- 3) "Do not love this world nor the things it offers you" (2:15).
- 4) "See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children" (3:1).
- 5) "Let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions" (3:18).

Then write a personal reflection on love as you have come to understand it through this study.



The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21

When the message of the cross finally comes through, you realize you are not important—Christ is. Then love just flows freely. Love doesn't flow freely when we're self-important. Self-importance brings the spirit of entitlement, "I deserve this. I've earned this. This is mine. It's only right." But at the foot of the cross, we say, "I see Jesus who died and paid the supreme price for my sins. I'm reduced to nothing. May I love others as He loved me."
—Chuck Swindoll

Now we'll turn to a passage on love that just might soar above all other passages on this lofty subject.



Observation: Love Comes from God

Begin your study by observing [1 John 4:7–21](#).¹ Notice how often John repeats “love” and “God.” Take summary notes below.

A Repeated Command—1 John 4:7–12

Review [1 John 4:7–12](#). What does loving others demonstrate in a Christian's life (1 John 4:7–8, 12)?



The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21

How did John define the nature of God's love (1 John 4:9–10)?

John gave three reasons for the supreme significance of love. First, love comes from God. Second, the love of God binds the people of God. Third, as the love of God pours through the people of God, non-believers see a divine and supernatural light at work in the world. When they ask about that light, Christians can then share the good news of Christ's love for a lost world.

Divine Enablement—1 John 4:13–16

Turn to *1 John 4:13–16*. How did John describe the divine enablement we receive when we love like God loves?



The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: The Holy Spirit

On our own, we are completely unable to manifest this kind of love. But God hasn't left us on our own. When we trusted Christ, God gave us the third member of the Trinity to indwell us and empower us. The Holy Spirit enlightens our minds to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ; He also opens our hearts and empowers our wills to accept it. . . . But the Spirit doesn't stop there. The permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, who unites us to the life of God, continues to enable us to confess Jesus as the Son of God (4:15). This same Spirit who unites us to the life of God also unites us to the love of God, so that we're not only recipients of His love but also conduits of His love (4:16).²

Only the Spirit of God can generate the love of God in a believer. When the Spirit comes to dwell in us, we never have to pray for God to keep His Spirit in us. God dwells in us *forever!* Nor do believers have to fear God's abandonment because He has promised He'll never forsake us or fail us (Hebrews 13:5).

A Love Perfected—1 John 4:17–21

Look at [1 John 4:17–21](#). Pay attention to John's contrast between perfect love and imperfect love. Write that contrast below. Then specify the benefits and results of having God's love perfected in us.

God perfects His love in us through His relationship with us. We don't have to fear divine shaming on the day of judgment—as Paul reassures, “There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Jesus can care for us far better than we can care for ourselves! Knowing this truth frees us to love others.



The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21



Interpretation: Real Love

During interpretation, we ask higher level questions like, “What does this mean?” “Why did the author write this?” and “What truth carries over from the text into our day?”

Remember to consult your extra-biblical resources. Netbible.org, Biblegateway.com, and Biblestudytools.com offer useful Bible study tools. Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with one of these sites if you haven't before.³

In [1 John 4:10](#), John gets into cosmic theological meaning. What is the significance of God's love in this verse? How did John connect the first idea on God's love with his second idea on Jesus' sacrifice?

Now look at [1 John 4:14](#). What emphasis did John place on Jesus' saving activity in this verse that expands on what he said in 4:10? Based on John's statement about Jesus' saving activity in 4:10 and 4:14, what can we reasonably assume the false teachers propagated about Jesus? (Hint: think of spiritual teaching that is opposite to the teaching in these verses.)

If we fail to understand God's love for us, as demonstrated by Jesus' sacrificial death, our love for God and others will fail to reach its full God-ordained potential. If our love for God and others fails to reach its full potential, then we will fail to fully reflect the image of God, and we will miss out on the full joy of God. Love and joy build on each other.



The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21



Correlation: The Holy Spirit

John wrote his gospel to spark belief in his readers and he wrote the letter of 1 John to foster spiritual assurance in believers. Although the purposes differed, the same theology threads both works. John simply applied them to different situations. That's the treasure of knowing God: He's with us and helps us no matter the situation.

Like 1 John 4:7–21, the encouragement of Jesus in John 14:15–30 contains complementary thoughts on God, love, and the Holy Spirit. Read [John 14:15–30](#). Summarize overlapping truths in this passage with the one we just studied. Then note a few distinctions between John 14:15–30 and 1 John 4:7–21.

No matter how low you sink as a child of God, He'll never write you off. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Loving When It's Difficult

Application installs handles on God's Truth to help you pick it up and take it with you no matter where you go. If anyone is in Christ, God reckons that person a new creation by virtue of his or her relationship to Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). But fully expressing our new nature takes a lifetime. Through that journey, we must always remember the supreme significance of love.

First, consider your relationship habits in the home. Pick just one way you think you can do better in your love for others in your home or in your daily routine of life.



The Supreme Significance of Love

1 John 4:7–21

Next, think of those times when you feel most crippled by fear instead of confidence. Describe how your connection to Jesus through the Spirit can help you in those situations. Then note what you can do to foster confidence in those situations to help you weaken the grip of fear.

After our deep dive into the pool of God's love, we can easily see and feel the superiority of His way of life over the *I-ME-MINE* way of life. We give and love selflessly because Christ provides us all we need.



A FINAL PRAYER

Take a few more moments to meditate on what you learned about God's love as He reveals it to you and pours it through you. Lastly, write a fitting prayer to end your time in God's Word.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 115.
3. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store. Chuck also recommends the [Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament](#) as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD STUDY FIFTEEN

Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12

When you take the gift of eternal life, you commit yourself to Jesus Christ. When you receive Jesus, you rely on Him alone for forgiveness and eternal joy. Faith alone in Christ alone results in salvation—that's how God has provided it.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE apostle John, perhaps more than any other apostle, deserves our undistracted attention. Even as we inhabit a world filled with countless distractions, the significance of his words bids us to sit still and focus. Throughout his letter, we observe how he emphasizes his apostolic authority and the importance of listening to what he says:

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. (1 John 1:1)

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. (1:5)

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. (4:1)

John spent some of his most formative years with Jesus—day after day watching Jesus, conversing with Jesus, working alongside Jesus . . . just being with Jesus. Then he spent decades heralding the message of Jesus—through persecution, hardship, mistreatment, and pain. By the writing of the letter of 1 John, his years on this earth numbered nearly one hundred.



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Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12

If any Christian's words carry the weight of authority, they're John's. By now, we have come to appreciate the immense care John gave to his writing. He wrote with simplicity and clarity—words that, still today, apply to us directly.

Chapter five continues in the same vein. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study on 1 John 5:1–12, we explore the profound meaning of the simple statement:

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. (1 John 5:12)



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Faith begins only after we receive Jesus' testimony. Once we hear the gospel, the Spirit ignites faith in our hearts. But the Spirit doesn't then leave us. After giving us spiritual life, He then helps us *grow* as God's children. That process occurs as we “humbly accept the word God has planted in [our] hearts” (James 1:21). Ask God to help you do just that during your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

New Testament writers used a variety of images to describe a Christian's identity. Christians are “sheep,” (*John 10:2–12*), “children of God” (*Matthew 5:9*), and “temporary residents and foreigners” (*1 Peter 2:11*). These titles name only a few.

Titles like these are important because they translate that everyday image into a spiritual truth.¹ We study the Bible well when we let our minds reflect on those monikers. Deep reflection draws out deep meaning.

As he prepared to close his letter, John ascribed multiple titles to his Christian readers. We'll observe those now and discover their significance for us as we follow Jesus.



Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12



Observation: Believers and Overcomers

Begin by reading the entire passage, [1 John 5:1–12](#). Write down the key subjects and break down the passage into paragraphs. Also, jot down your top three observations from this passage.

Believers—1 John 5:1–3

Turn your attention to [1 John 5:1–3](#). How did John describe what it means to be a believer? (Note the additional title he associated with being a believer.)

Just as a bride and groom's wedding vows spring from their love for each other, so our love for God flows freely into our commitment to Christ. As believers, our vows to obey Jesus are no burden—no more of a burden than the wedding bands on newlyweds' fingers. Forged in love and displayed with delight is our belief in Christ!

We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Savior from God. That means we believe in His deity. Believing in Jesus' deity then turns into a love relationship with the Father. Whoever believes also loves the Father. That love for the Father prompts obedience to the Father which makes His commandments a joy instead of a burden. —Chuck Swindoll



Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12

Overcomers—1 John 5:4–5

Look at *1 John 5:4–5*. What did John emphasize about Christians in these verses?



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Overcomers

Notice it isn't any good work or personal perseverance that overcomes the world, but it's our faith. Faith in what? In the finished work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. John makes this abundantly clear, leaving no room for a misunderstanding that we overcome the world by even one ounce of our own exerted strength: "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (5:5).²

Assurance—1 John 5:11–12

Let's explore one last passage during observation. Read *1 John 5:11–12*. What assurance do Christians have when they believe in Jesus? What does "having the Son" give us?

In a world where all life eventually fades into death, Christ came to give eternal life. We need merely to bow before Him with open hands to receive all His gifts. He'll lift us up, adopt us into His family, and give us the death-defeating victory that His death and resurrection secured on our behalf.



Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12



Interpretation: Witnesses

For this section, we'll dive into the most difficult part of our passage, [1 John 5:6–10](#). Read it now. Then write down a few questions which you would like to answer during interpretation.

Who or what are the three witnesses in this passage? And to what do they witness?

Now consult your resources, like [Constable's Notes](#) as well as additional Bible translations.³ Research the significance of each witness: water, blood, and Spirit. Determine what John meant with each reference and how each testimony contributes to the identity of Jesus.

All divine truth culminates in the work of God through Jesus Christ. All divine truth points us to Jesus. He died on our behalf. He arose to give us life. He reigns at the right hand of the Father and will conquer all evil, perhaps one day soon. All of God's saving work leads us to Christ.



Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12

For this reason, Chuck Swindoll emphasizes two essentials all biblical teachers must hold. First, ensure they respect, believe, and obey the infallible, inerrant Word of God. Nothing can replace the Bible. Second, verify they uphold the biblical teaching about Jesus' person and work. All false teaching twists Jesus' message, downplays Jesus' identity, or distorts Jesus' work.



Correlation: More Than Conquerors

John devoted just two verses to the victory we enjoy in Jesus. The apostle Paul, too, wrote about the Christian's victory. He tied the surety of our victory to Christ's deep love for us.

Romans 8:35–39 correlates well with 1 John 5:1–12. Read what Paul said in that majestic passage. Describe how his statements complement what we learned from John.

God's love for us in Christ secures the gift He has given us: eternal life. Such a gift surpasses receiving the entire universe because eternal life bonds us to the living God. That bond works like a promissory note with immediate payouts in this life. Those payouts foretaste the sum of bliss promised to us in the next.



Application: Living Victorious

Application helps us live as victorious Christians by helping us embrace our identity in Jesus. We strive to become whom He has promised to make us. After death, we shall be perfect. Before then, we take steps to put on our new spiritual clothes in Christ. We do so by learning God's truth, believing Jesus' promises, obeying Jesus' commands, and heeding Jesus' warnings.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY FIFTEEN

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12

First, God's truth. Write down one truth from 1 John 5:1–12 which you found to be especially meaningful and encouraging.

Now consider a promise you would like to take from our passage. Once you've found it, record it below.

Lastly, think of a command or warning that popped out at you while you studied 1 John 5:1–12. Did you feel the Spirit's nudge to make a change in something you do or a way you think? If so, write what change you wish to make and your plan to implement that change.

What a privilege God has bestowed by preserving John's writings! Their simplicity and clarity create a window through which we can behold the face of God. John's words help us recognize Jesus' presence—that He's with us, looking at us, talking to us through His Word.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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7

Believers, Overcomers, Witnesses

1 John 5:1–12



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, with everything within me, I thank You for giving me Your Son. I know I have life because I have Him. What more could I want? Thank You for making me an overcomer. Please help me to walk victoriously in the truth I learned from this passage. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 122.
3. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store. Chuck also recommends the [Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament](#) as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY SIXTEEN

Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21

A letter of assurance is a lovely thing. There's something endearing and enduring about such letters. Endearing because the one who is writing such a letter is telling you how valuable you are to her or him. Enduring because you can turn to the letter over and over again. John has written what I like to call a "framable letter." It's a letter of assurance.

—Charles R. Swindoll

ISN'T it wonderful to read words of assurance? It's such a relief to receive an e-mail from a loved one in the military saying that he or she is safe. To open a report from the doctor's office that the biopsy results indicate no malignancy. Or get a letter from your college stating that you met your academic requirements and that you qualify to graduate. What joy!

On the other hand, it can be agonizing *not* to have assurance. Uncertainty keeps us up at night worrying if our loved ones are well or the surgery was successful or we passed the test. Not knowing is like crossing a crevasse on an old wooden bridge that might break. We would much rather walk on a well-engineered bridge made of steel and feel confident that the path ahead is safe.

Thankfully, in his first letter, John built a solid walkway of truth to give us confidence about the most important matters of life. With one final stroke from his pen, John ended his letter on the subject of assurance—assurance that is *absolute* without a hint of ambiguity. In this final *Searching the Scriptures* study on 1 John 5:13–21, we examine the place and power of spiritual assurance in our walk with Jesus.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let's take a moment to review what John has taught us about our identity as God's children.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.
(1 John 3:1–2)

Can you feel John's conviction? Can you sense his intent to inspire assurance in his readers? In light of the truth of John's statements, invite Jesus into your time in His Word and request His aid as you pursue spiritual growth from what you learn.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Any time we crack open the pages of Scripture, an author's purpose for writing must remain at the forefront of our mind.¹ Knowing an author's purpose helps us correctly interpret his writing.

While John wrote five works in our New Testament, three of them play an especially prominent role: the gospel of John, 1 John (our letter), and Revelation. He wrote each one with a different purpose. John, unlike some biblical authors, explicitly stated his purpose for each. Let's look at those statements.



Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21

For the Time Is Near

Read [Revelation 1:1–3](#) and [22:7–15](#). Why did John write Revelation according to these verses? What response did he hope to produce in his readers?

Jesus, the Son of God

Read [John 20:30–31](#) and [21:24–25](#). Why did John write his gospel according to these verses, and how did he want his readers to respond?

The Treasure of Possessing Eternal Life

Now read the opening verse of this study's passage: [1 John 5:13](#). To whom did John write and for what purpose did he write? What response did he hope to produce in his readers?



Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21

John has written what I like to call a “framable letter.” It’s a letter of assurance. This letter is not written to those who are lost, but to those who have already believed in Christ. John wrote to Christians that you may know where you stand in your eternal life relationship with God. And the desire of the writer, John, is that you not only believe it but you live it, and, as a result, you have confidence in it. —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: Things We Can Know with Certainty

John did not conclude his theme of “knowing” in chapter five, verse thirteen. He referred to it over and over until the end of the letter. Take a few moments to read [1 John 5:13–21](#) and jot down a few observations that strike you as important or unexpected or previously overlooked.

Praying and Receiving

Read [1 John 5:14–17](#). How did John connect the assurance of “knowing” with prayer in these verses?

First John 5:16–17 has troubled readers for centuries. The difficulty of this passage brings up a vital lesson for successful Bible study: use what’s clear to understand what’s obscure. From 5:14–17, we can *know* with certainty that God hears us and gives us our requests when we ask according to His will. Note John’s emphasis on aligning our will with God’s.



Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21



Chuck's Commentary Insight

First John Theme: Prayer

In all cases, God holds the outcome of the prayer in His hands and answers it according to His plan and purpose—always for His glory and our good. Remember Hebrews 4:16: “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.” We don’t come groveling, pleading, begging, or bargaining. Entering His presence boldly, but with proper humility, we acknowledge that He has the power to give us what we ask . . . but also the right to answer however He pleases. And we know that however He answers—“Yes,” “No,” “Wait,” or “Here’s something better”—He’s going to work everything out for our good, not for our harm (Rom. 8:28).²

Our Spiritual Life

Read [1 John 5:18–21](#). What did John say we can “know” according to these verses? How does this knowing affect our spiritual lives?

Only the true God can give us true power to overcome the evil one. Only the true God can give us true life that culminates in eternal joy. The One at the Father’s side, Jesus Christ the Son of God, has given us understanding so we can know the true God (John 1:18; 1 John 5:20). John wrote to assure us of that fact.



Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21



Interpretation: Sin That Leads to Death and a Final Warning

Now we'll explore two subjects John mentioned: first, the sin that leads to death (1 John 5:16–17) and, second, guarding ourselves from idols (5:21). You'll want to consult your online resources and the 1 John commentaries in your personal Bible study library.³

The Sin That Leads to Death

Review *1 John 5:16–17*. Determine what John referred to by “sin that leads to death” and then summarize his instruction to us about this sin. Scholars have proposed referents such as:

- 1) Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (*Mark 3:20–30*)
- 2) Apostasy from unbelief (*Hebrews 5:11–6:8*)
- 3) A lifestyle that leads to physical death by God's judgment (*Acts 5:1–11*)
- 4) Heresy that denies or distorts Christ (*1 John 2:3–6, 22–23; 3:6; 4:1–6, 20–21*)

Guard Yourself from Idols

Review *1 John 5:21*. Consider how this verse relates to the whole message of 1 John. Why did John choose to end his letter with this statement. How is this warning relevant to us today even though our culture does not bow to idol figurines or pray to Zeus and Apollo?



Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21

All idolatry lures people away from life-giving truth to ensnare them in life-destroying lies. Just as John's original readers did well to stay alert and guard against any form of idolatry, we do well in our day to continue with the same vigilance.



Correlation: The Folly of Idolatry Compared to God's Greatness

Isaiah crafted some of the most eloquent lines of poetic theology. Many of those verses deal with the subject of idolatry. Isaiah 40 offers an excellent comparison between the folly of idolatry and the greatness of the true God. Read [Isaiah 40:12–31](#) and summarize its key points below. Then note how it correlates with John's warning in 1 John 5:21.

Only the true God can give power to the weak and strength to the powerless. What a promise He gives us! Those who wait on the Lord will not be put to shame, but they will gain new strength and soar high like eagles. Idolatry, on the other hand, imparts nothing but shaky knees, fearful hearts, and broken wings. Idolatry robs us of our assurance, but we can be confident in Christ.



Application: The Severity of Idols, the Blessing of Assurance

John ended his letter with two emphases: the severity of idolatry and the blessing of assurance. We must get rid of and guard ourselves from idols if we are to stand on the solid rock of spiritual assurance.

Chuck Swindoll said that idolatry occurs in our hearts anytime we devote ourselves to an object more than we devote ourselves to Christ. Idolatry takes Christ off the pedestal in our hearts and puts something else on it. That something else might be our family or job, or it might be our reputation or material pleasures.



Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21

What idols tug at your heart, and how can you heed John's warning against them? Clarifying our thoughts on paper helps us journey toward spiritual maturity.

Now consider the spiritual assurance John left you with in 1 John 5:13–21. Which of these truths especially comforted your heart? How can you better practice clinging to those truths as you seek to live a life of confident spiritual assurance?

In his commentary on 1 John, Chuck Swindoll wrote a superb summary of 1 John 5:13–21:

For those of us who have absolute assurance of our salvation, Christ and Christ alone should be the object of our priorities, passions, and pursuits. All other things must take second place to an intimate, obedient, and loving communion with Him. Such fellowship with the Father, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit, will result in a confident life.⁴



Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in this world I know so much temptation and tribulation, but in You I know pure light and peace and hope and assurance. Thank You for sending Your Son into this dark world that we might know You and possess the gift of eternal life. What a gift! In the majestic name of Christ, I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To review Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 131.
3. If you do not have Chuck's *Living Insights* commentary on 1 John in your library, [grab a copy](#) at the Insight for Living Ministries web store. Chuck also recommends the [Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament](#) as a good single-volume reference for studying the New Testament.
4. Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, 134.



LIVING RIGHT IN A WRONG WORLD

STUDY SIXTEEN

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

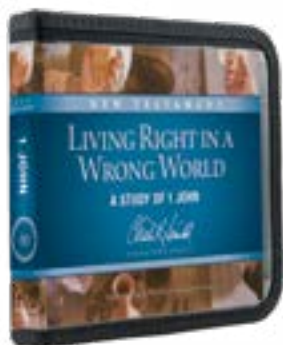
STUDY

Absolute Assurance

1 John 5:13–21



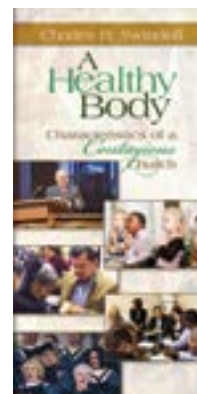
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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