

# 1 JOHN—WEEK 2

## STAYING TRUE



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is by Jan van Eyck (1390–1441)*

*On display in Ghent at the St. Bavo Cathedral, it looks like a statue, but it's a painting.*

This week is a unit on staying true to the gospel. Christians should strive to love the Father, not the things of this world. Beware of false teaching; it is of the antichrist. Some have been deceived and have left.

You have been anointed by the Holy One and are sealed to Him. Stick to what you've been taught.

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1 John, Week 2 — Staying True  
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1 1 John 2:12–14

*I write to you, little children,  
Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.  
I write to you, fathers,  
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.  
I write to you, young men,  
Because you have overcome the wicked one.  
I write to you, little children,  
Because you have known the Father.  
I have written to you, fathers,  
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.  
I have written to you, young men,  
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,  
And you have overcome the wicked one.*

This week's five DEEPs form a unit on staying true to the gospel. This is John's salutation.

But who is he addressing by *little children, fathers, and young men*? Two facts drive the answer.

First, every reason John gives for writing only applies to believers. Only believers are *forgiven*. Only believers have *known Him*. Only believers *have overcome the wicked one*.

Second, every reason also applies to every believer. All believers are *forgiven*, have *known Him*, and *have overcome the wicked one*.

So, all of this is addressed to all believers. That means it's for us.

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So, what's the point? Why does John begin this unit by telling us all these reasons for writing?

John is setting up the context for what he's going to say next. He's stating his assumptions about the audience. This will affect our interpretation of what he says in important ways.

For example, if John were to say that we need to resist temptation, this context tells us that he's not talking about what we need to do to become Christians; we're already Christians. And we've also already overcome the wicked one. He's not telling us how to do that either.

We're going to need this because John is about to lay out some pretty blunt commands. This context assures us that John knows our spiritual condition, so many misunderstandings are precluded.

Unfortunately, this also means that for any modern readers who aren't believers, the following lessons are for information only.

2 1 John 2:15–17 (ESV)

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

The preceding lesson helps here; this is not addressed to non-believers. But that immediately raises a tough question. How can John say, of a believer, “*the love of the Father is not in him.*”?

To answer that, we must first figure out exactly what John means by “*the love of the Father.*” Specifically, is *love of the Father* love to the Father or love from the Father?

It’s “to.” Father (πατρός “patros”) is in the genitive case as an objective genitive. Okay, so how can someone be a Christian yet not love the Father?

It happens all the time. That’s why this passage begins, in the imperative, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world.*” It’s also why Jesus said, “*You cannot serve God and money.*” (Matthew 6:24b ESV)

This is important teaching about the battle with our sinful nature. Being born into Christ does not immediately rid us of sin. Loving *the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life*—is completely normal. It’s our pre-Christian state.

No one just throws that off instantly.

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Sanctification is a painfully slow process, which we never complete this side of eternity. But take heart, the pain is a sign that it’s working.

The problem is that our behavior doesn’t change as quickly as our standards. This is a natural consequence of how growth in Christ works.

When we’re born again the Holy Spirit illuminates us—opens our eyes. We learn what sin is and can see it. Seeing our sin is essential to ridding ourselves of it. But the old habits are still there. The Holy Spirit leads us on the road to righteousness, while our newborn eyesight helps keep us on the path.

But this means our growth in behavior lags behind our improving vision. We have to first see the sin, then be horrified (if not depressed) by it, then start to eliminate it.

The result is incredibly frustrating. Growth in Christ feels like going backwards.

When I became a Christian, I was aware of dozens of my sins. Now I can see hundreds.

3 1 John 2:18–19

*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*

In John's writings, "the last hour" does not mean the last 60 minutes. Jesus told His disciples that they wouldn't know when the end would be.

*Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." — Acts 1:6–7*

Rather, John is referring to the last times—the era preceding Christ's return. We're in that era until He shows up. With that, let's move on to analyze John's point.

This passage follows up on the preceding one about not loving this world, nor the things of this world. John is pointing out how bad love for this world can get.

Some church members had recently walked away from the church, and people were shaken by this. John seeks to reassure them and answer the questions they might be thinking. How is this even possible? Can God lose someone? Where's the Holy Spirit in all this?

John's answer is that the members who left weren't Christians in the first place. In fact, they're antichrists.

And hallelujah that they left. In a single step the traitors in our midst are made manifest and removed.

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The passage addresses a doctrine known as Perseverance of the Saints.

*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us;*

Perseverance of the Saints says that truly regenerate people cannot fall away. Jesus introduces this concept in His response to the Jews asking Him if He's the Christ.

*Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." ... "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." — John 10: 24, 27–29*

When God starts a work in us, He finishes it.

4 1 John 2:20–23 (ESV)

*But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.*

This passage completes the unit with two exclamation points. You are sealed to Christ by an anointing, and belief in Christ is inseparable from belief in the Father.

In the Jewish culture of the day, the Hebrew word translated as anoint (מָשַׁח “ma-shakh”) had special significance. While mashakh literally means to apply or pour, it can have special meaning. If a prophet anoints someone (pours oil on them), it seals them for an office. It’s how Samuel marked Saul as the next king. Later he did the same to David, while he was still a shepherd boy. Those anointings weren’t merely symbolic gestures; they were certifications.

The meaning for the Greek word translated as “anoint” (χρίσμα “chrisma”) is similarly special. It’s the root word for Christ. Jesus is the anointed one. This is born of the Hebrew meaning. Anoint in this context means to set apart or mark someone.

Our anointing, while not equal to Jesus’s, is still important. Our anointing from the Holy One marks us as belonging to Him. We are sealed to Him. It’s permanent.

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. — Ephesians 1:13–14 (ESV)*

John wraps things up with an explanation of the equivalence between belief in the Son and belief in the Father. John is saying that they’re inseparable. Denying the Son means denying the Father, and acknowledging the Son means acknowledging the Father. You can’t have one without the other.

John states this equivalence in the strongest possible terms. The denier is the liar and the antichrist.

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John’s alarming words here are intended to put his readers on high alert. False teachers are not merely people who need to be reasoned with; they are of the father of lies and quite dangerous.

John is telling his readers that they know the truth already. *I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it.*

This is to combat a common way that people are led astray—being convinced to reconsider things that should be settled in their minds. His readers should stick to what they know is true and see the enemies of Christ for what they are.

*so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. — Ephesians 4:14 (ESV)*

5 1 John 2:24–29

*Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.*

*These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*

*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

Here John reviews this whole unit, which is all about preventing his readers from being led astray by false teachers.

*These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. Watch out; don't be deceived.*

*Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning.* Abide means dwell. You have the truth dwelling in you. Remember your original instruction, so that you're not led astray by “new” ideas.

*If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.* What you heard from the beginning are the words of life. Hang on to that.

*But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you;* The anointing you received is sufficient; don't let anyone tell you that you need anything else.

*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*

Just stick to Jesus.

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I often wonder how some of these nutty heresies got started. The gospel is simple; why would people want to make it complicated?

But I can see the roots of their errant ways in my own heart. I'm always trying to puzzle through the mysteries. This can lead to some pretty creative “solutions.” The potential for error is huge.

But thanks to Gutenberg, and the internet, I can tap into the collective wisdom of centuries of saints—often to discover that I've gotten way off track. Thus, almost half of what I write gets tossed.

But back then, folks didn't have that blessing, which made them easy targets for the Antichrist.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

Note: some of these questions may seem to have obvious answers. That's by design. Those answers should be a good springboard for follow-up questions and discussion.

1. Which of these three classes of Christians do you most identify with?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is the most frustrating aspect of your battle with sin?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Do you know people who've left the church?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Have you experienced false teaching that alarmed you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What heresies are prevalent today?

*Items for prayer:*