

TEACHER'S GUIDE

That You May Know

A verse-by-verse adult Bible study of 1–3 John · ten sessions

SESSION 1	The Word of Life	1 John 1:1-2:2
SESSION 2	Knowing Him by Keeping His Commandments	1 John 2:3-17
SESSION 3	Antichrists and the Anointing	1 John 2:18-27
SESSION 4	Children of God	1 John 2:28-3:10
SESSION 5	Love One Another	1 John 3:11-24
SESSION 6	Testing the Spirits	1 John 4:1-6
SESSION 7	God Is Love	1 John 4:7-21
SESSION 8	Faith That Overcomes	1 John 5:1-12
SESSION 9	Confidence and Closing	1 John 5:13-21
SESSION 10	The Elder Writes	2 John and 3 John

That You May Know — Teacher's Guide, Session One

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session One

The Word of Life

1 John 1:1-2:2

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session One of a new study. You are opening a ten-week journey through the Johannine epistles, with the guiding question of assurance — John's stated purpose in 1 John 5:13, 'that you may know that you have eternal life.' Everything we will teach across this study will connect, in one way or another, to this pastoral heart. Assurance of salvation is the letter's theme, and your students will carry it with them through every session.

The opening session has three jobs. First, it introduces the letter — John as the aged apostle, the eyewitness claim, the tender pastoral voice, the fellowship that is the letter's purpose. Second, it introduces the major themes — light and darkness, walking and fellowship, sin and forgiveness, Advocate and propitiation. Third, it sets the pastoral tone that will run through the whole study. John writes like a grandfather, circling back to the same truths with patience and warmth. If you catch that tone in Session One, the rest of the study rides easier.

The pastoral opportunity this week is substantial. Many Christians have absorbed a performance-oriented view of the Christian life — a sense that God's favor is contingent on their current spiritual state, that ongoing sin is a sign of real trouble with their salvation, that the Christian life is a precarious thing that requires constant effort to maintain. John's opening directly addresses this. Walking in the light is not the claim of moral perfection; it is transparent life under the ongoing cleansing of Christ's blood. Confession is not a dramatic last-ditch measure; it is the normal shape of Christian life. And when we fail, we have an Advocate. If students leave this session with a changed sense of how sin and forgiveness work in the Christian life, you have served them well.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The eternal Word of life, heard and seen and touched by eyewitnesses, has been proclaimed so that we may enter fellowship with the Father and the Son — walking in the light not as sinless people but as those whose sins are

ongoinly cleansed by the blood of the Advocate who is the propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world.

Introducing the Series

Since this is your first session, take a few minutes at the start to introduce the whole study, the Johannine epistles, and what your class can expect over the next ten weeks.

Authorship and Setting

The Church has traditionally attributed these letters to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, the beloved disciple of the Gospel that bears his name. External evidence from the second century (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian) is strong, and the internal evidence — the language, themes, and imagery shared with John's Gospel — points the same direction. John appears to have lived into old age in Ephesus, in Asia Minor, where he exercised pastoral oversight of the churches of the region until near the end of the first century.

The letters date from roughly AD 85-95, near the end of John's life and the apostolic era. By this time, the churches John oversaw had faced real threats from within — false teachers who had arisen out of the community itself, had begun teaching distorted views of Christ (particularly denying that the divine Son had truly come in the flesh), had split off from the churches, and were continuing to try to draw members after them. Much of 1 John addresses this situation. Second and Third John address related pastoral situations in specific congregations.

The Character of the Letters

These are pastoral letters in the deepest sense. John writes not primarily to argue (though he does some of that), not primarily to teach new doctrine (though he does clarify doctrine under pressure), but to assure. His readers are Christians he has known for years. He wants them to know what they have. He wants them secure in the fellowship. He wants them to understand that the false teachers who have left them were never really of them. His voice is tender, repetitive, circling. Let this tone shape your teaching.

The Study Arc Across Ten Sessions

Give your class a brief preview of what lies ahead:

- Sessions 1-2: Foundations — the Word of life, walking in the light, knowing Christ by keeping His word.
- Session 3: The antichrists and the anointing — John's response to the false teachers.
- Sessions 4-5: Children of God and love for one another — the family identity of Christians.
- Sessions 6-7: Testing the spirits and God is love — discernment and the great love chapter.
- Session 8: Faith that overcomes — water and blood, the witness, eternal life.
- Session 9: Confidence and assurance — the thesis verse (5:13) and its implications.
- Session 10: The Elder writes — 2 and 3 John as capstone on truth and hospitality.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session One of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 1:1-2:2 multiple times, slowly.
- Read John 1:1-18 (the Gospel prologue). The echoes in 1 John 1:1-4 are deliberate and deepen your teaching of both passages.
- Read Luther's preface to the New Testament, or at least the portion on the Johannine writings. Luther called 1 John a 'truly apostolic epistle' and placed it in the highest tier of New Testament books. Contrast with his famous hesitations about James.
- Review Small Catechism, Part Five on Confession. Luther's teaching here will inform your handling of 1 John 1:8-10.
- Review Augsburg Confession Article III on the Son of God and Article IV on Justification. Both bear on the propitiation and Advocate material at 1 John 2:1-2.
- Pray — especially for students who may be uncertain of their salvation, haunted by specific sins, or wrestling with perfectionist teaching from elsewhere.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Five theological points come into view in this passage:

- **The incarnation as eyewitnessed historical event.** John's insistence on what was heard, seen, and touched grounds Christianity in events, not speculation. This is the first line of defense against every Gnostic or spiritualizing distortion.
- **Fellowship as the purpose of the Gospel.** The Gospel is preached so that hearers may enter *koinonia* — with the apostolic community and, through them, with the Father and the Son. Horizontal and vertical fellowship are one fellowship.
- **Walking in light as transparent life under cleansing.** Not sinlessness. Not moral perfection. Transparency under the ongoing cleansing of Christ's blood. This reframes how Christians understand their own lives.

- **Simul iustus et peccator.** The Lutheran conviction that the Christian is simultaneously justified and still a sinner finds direct biblical support in 1 John's handling of sin — especially the avoidance of both 'no sin' claims and despair.
- **Substitutionary atonement as propitiation.** Christ as the Advocate pleading on the basis of His righteousness, and as the propitiation who has satisfied divine wrath against sin. This is classical Lutheran atonement teaching in one of its clearest biblical expressions.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Help your students see that walking in the light and confessing sin are the same Christian life, not two separate stages. Many students implicitly assume that walking in the light means having gotten past the need for confession. John says the opposite — we walk in the light, AND the blood cleanses us, AND we confess, AND the forgiveness is received. These happen together, continuously, across the whole of Christian life. If students can hold this unity, the passage will transform how they think about their own walk with Christ.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; brief intro to 1 John and the whole study
0:05–0:17	The Word of Life — the prologue (1:1-4)
0:17–0:28	God is light; walking in the light (1:5-7)
0:28–0:42	If we say we have no sin; confession (1:8-10)
0:42–0:55	The Advocate and the propitiation (2:1-2)
0:55–0:58	Discussion (1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 2 assignment



Where to Slow Down

The confession material (1:8-10) and the Advocate/propitiation material (2:1-2) are the pastoral heart of the session. Many students carry heavy baggage around these topics — perfectionist teaching, guilt, uncertainty about forgiveness. Give these sections their full time. If the clock presses, shorten the prologue treatment rather than these.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 1-4: The Word of Life

The Density of the Opening

Read the opening sentence aloud first. Let students feel its density. John is packing the Christological prologue of his Gospel into a single compound sentence. That which was from the beginning (eternal pre-existence), which we have heard / seen / looked upon / touched (eyewitness testimony in the flesh), concerning the Word of life (the title that holds it all together).

The Eyewitness Claim

Four physical-sense verbs stack up: heard, seen, looked upon, touched. This is deliberate. The false teachers John will soon address were denying the reality of Christ's incarnation — claiming the divine Son only appeared to have a body, did not really suffer physically, was not really touchable flesh. John's opening answers this at the root. The Word of life is not abstract; He was touched. This grounds Christianity in events that actually happened in history, not in private spiritual experience or speculative philosophy.

The Word of Life Title

Not 'word about life' but 'the Word of life' — the Word who IS life. Christ does not merely give eternal life; He is eternal life, made manifest. This is crucial for understanding what 'eternal life' means throughout the letter. It is not primarily a future possession but present participation in the life that Christ is. When John says later that we may know we have eternal life, he means we may know we have Christ.

Koinonia — Fellowship

The Greek word is rich. Participation, sharing, communion, partnership. The Gospel is preached so that hearers may enter this fellowship. Note the dual structure — fellowship 'with us' (the apostolic community) and fellowship 'with the Father and His Son.' These are one fellowship, not two. You cannot have God

while refusing His people. You cannot have the Father and the Son while refusing the apostolic community through which they are known.

An Ecclesiological Note

This dual fellowship is important in an age of religious individualism. Many contemporary Christians imagine they can have a private relationship with God that bypasses the Church. John explicitly rules this out. The way into fellowship with the Father and the Son is through the apostolic fellowship — the Church gathered around Word and Sacrament. This is not bureaucracy; it is theology. The Triune God has chosen to give Himself through the community He has created. Make this move explicitly for your class.

Verses 5-7: God Is Light

The Central Claim

This is the first of three great 'God is' statements in 1 John (God is light here; God is love at 4:8; God is life is implicit throughout). Note the exact wording — 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' The double affirmation matters. Not only is God light; there is no darkness in Him whatsoever. The purity is absolute.

The Moral Weight of the Metaphor

Light reveals. Light exposes. Darkness hides. To say God is light is to say that everything about Him is open, uncorrupted, without hidden shadow. And this has implications for those who claim to be in fellowship with Him. You cannot be in fellowship with pure light while living in hidden moral darkness. The claim contradicts itself.

Walking in the Light

This is where many Christians misread the passage. 'If we walk in the light, as He is in the light' is often heard as 'if we are sinless.' But the very next clause — 'and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin' — presupposes ongoing sin in those who walk in the light. Walking in the light is not sinlessness; it is transparent life under Christ's ongoing cleansing. The distinction is critical.

Fellowship with One Another

Note that verse 7 says walking in the light produces fellowship 'with one another' (horizontal), not first 'with Him' (vertical). This is a subtle but important point. John is saying that Christians who walk transparently under the light can have real fellowship among themselves — not hiding things, not wearing masks, not maintaining surface respectability over hidden corruption. Authentic Christian community requires authentic Christians in the light together.

Verses 8-10: If We Say We Have No Sin

The Three If-Clauses

Walk through them carefully. Verse 8 rules out one perfectionist claim (no indwelling sin). Verse 10 rules out another (no actual committed sins). Verse 9 gives the middle path (confession). The structure surrounds the true practice with the false claims on either side.

Simul iustus et Peccator

This is the Lutheran home ground. The baptized Christian is fully justified — declared righteous before God on the basis of Christ's righteousness received by faith. And simultaneously, in this life, still a sinner — the indwelling corruption is not eliminated, the struggle with particular sins continues, daily drowning of the old Adam is necessary. Any theology that denies one of these produces distortion. Lose the justified side, produce despair. Lose the sinner side, produce the perfectionist error John is addressing here.

Connecting to Lutheran Confessions

Article II of the Augsburg Confession teaches that original sin remains in the baptized even after Baptism, though not imputed to those who are in Christ. Article IV teaches justification by faith alone. Together these Confessions articulate the simul that 1 John 1 assumes. If your class has time for a side note, this connection between Confessional Lutheran teaching and 1 John's handling of sin is worth making explicit — it shows that Luther's reading was not a distortion but a faithful reception of what the apostle himself taught.

Confession

Note the present tense — 'if we confess' as ongoing practice, not as a one-time dramatic event. Confession is not a moment of emotional catharsis; it is a pattern of Christian life. This is why Confession and Absolution has always been part of Lutheran liturgy. The Sunday morning Confession, private confession with the pastor, daily confession in prayer — all of these instantiate what John describes. A life of ongoing confession is the normal Christian life, not an exception.

Faithful and Just

Two adjectives worth unpacking. God is 'faithful' — He keeps His promise to forgive. God is 'just' — the forgiveness is righteous, not arbitrary, because it rests on Christ's atoning work. This is crucial pastoral comfort. The forgiveness is not contingent on God's mood or on our worthiness; it rests on God's own fidelity to His promise and on the justice already served at the cross.

Verses 2:1-2: Advocate and Propitiation

The Purpose Clause

Note the opening — 'I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.' Confession is not a license for continued sin. John is not softening the moral demand; he is pairing it with pastoral assurance. The goal remains holy living. But when we fail — as everyone does — there is a provision.

Jesus Christ Our Advocate

The Greek word *parakletos* (advocate, helper, one called alongside) is the same word used in John's Gospel for the Holy Spirit. Here it is used for Christ Himself, in legal sense — the one who pleads our case in the courtroom of heaven. When the Christian sins, he is not left alone before the Judge. He has an Advocate. And the Advocate is pleading not on the basis of our righteousness (inadequate) but on the basis of His own (complete).

Propitiation — Hilasmos

This is one of the most important theological terms in the New Testament. The word means 'that which turns away wrath.' In the ancient world, propitiation was what a sacrifice accomplished when it satisfied what the offended deity required.

John applies this to Christ. He is the propitiation — the one whose sacrifice has satisfied what the Father's righteousness required against our sin, turning aside the wrath that our sin had rightly provoked.

Handling the Propitiation Language

Modern readers sometimes find this language uncomfortable. Some translations soften it to 'atoning sacrifice' or 'expiation' (which deals with sin but not with wrath). But the Greek *hilasmos* includes the wrath-turning-aside dimension. Do not soften this for your class. Real divine wrath against sin is a biblical reality, and the good news is that Christ has borne that wrath in our place. This is not 'cosmic child abuse' as some critics caricature; it is the Triune God, in the Son, bearing what the Triune God's own righteousness required. The Father is not opposed to the Son in this work; the Son is fulfilling the Father's own saving purpose, willingly, in love.

Not for Ours Only

The universal note. Christ is the propitiation 'not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.' In the Lutheran understanding, this does not mean universal salvation apart from faith — John himself will make clear that faith appropriates the salvation Christ has accomplished. But it does mean the atonement is sufficient for all, offered to all, addressed to all. The Church can preach the Gospel to every human being without equivocation: Christ died for you. The propitiation has been made. What remains is for the sinner to receive by faith what Christ has accomplished.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

How can we have fellowship with God if we're still sinning?

Because fellowship with God is not based on our moral perfection but on Christ's. The Christian who walks in the light is not the one who has stopped sinning but the one who lives transparently under the ongoing cleansing of Christ's blood. The fellowship is real because the cleansing is real, and the cleansing is real because Christ's atoning work is real. Fellowship does not require that we first become worthy of it; it requires that we receive what Christ has accomplished and live in its ongoing benefit. This is why walking in the light and confessing sin go together — they are not two different things but the same Christian life seen from two angles.

What's the difference between confession and just feeling guilty?

Confession is the specific acknowledgment of specific sin to God (and sometimes to other people we have wronged), with the receiving of forgiveness that follows. It is an act, not a feeling. Guilt without confession is just guilt; it does not produce the cleansing John describes. Confession, by contrast, is met with God's faithful and just forgiveness — the objective reality of being cleansed, whatever we feel in the moment. Some Christians confess and feel immediate relief; others confess and still carry the emotional residue for a while. Both have received the same forgiveness. The forgiveness rests on God's promise, not on our feelings. This is why Lutheran practice has always emphasized objective absolution — the declaration of forgiveness spoken by the pastor on the authority of Christ's promise, so that the Christian can hear with his ears what has been done by God.

If Christ is the propitiation for the whole world, is everyone saved?

No — John himself will rule this out later in the letter. Christ's atoning work is sufficient for all and offered to all, but it is received by faith. Those who reject the Gospel are not forgiven by the atonement's sufficiency; they refuse the gift that was offered to them. The Lutheran Confessions teach what is sometimes called

'universal objective atonement' combined with 'subjective appropriation by faith.' The atonement is objectively for all; its saving benefit is received subjectively by those who trust in Christ. This preserves both the universal invitation (the Church can say to every person, 'Christ died for you') and the seriousness of faith (rejection of the Gospel is real rejection, with real consequences).

What if I've confessed the same sin a hundred times and keep doing it?

You are a normal Christian. The Lutheran tradition has never taught that confession eliminates all future struggle with particular sins. Luther himself wrote extensively about the daily drowning of the old Adam — that is, the ongoing need, every day, for confession and the reception of forgiveness. The same sin may need to be confessed many times across a lifetime, and each confession receives the same faithful forgiveness. This is not a sign of failed Christianity; it is the normal Christian life that John and Luther and all the faithful pastors across the centuries have known. What matters is that you continue to walk in the light rather than giving up, that you continue to confess rather than hide, that you continue to receive the forgiveness that is given rather than despair of it.

The 'walking in darkness' warning in verse 6 — how seriously should I take it?

Very seriously, but with careful discernment about what it means. John is addressing those who claim fellowship with God while living in sustained, deliberate, unrepented moral darkness — a pattern of life that contradicts the light of God while claiming Him anyway. This is different from the ordinary Christian's struggle with particular sins. The struggling Christian confesses, receives forgiveness, and continues to walk. The one John warns against is not struggling; he is claiming fellowship while walking in darkness with no confession and no change. If you are wrestling with sin, confessing it, and seeking to live under the light, John's warning is not primarily addressed to you. If you have given up the struggle entirely and are claiming God's fellowship while living deliberately in contradiction to His will, the warning is urgent and you should listen to it carefully.

How do I know I'm in 'the apostolic fellowship'?

You are in the apostolic fellowship when you are part of a church that holds to the apostolic Gospel — the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen, received by faith, preserved through the apostolic writings that are our New Testament. Lutherans have traditionally located this in congregations that confess the apostolic faith as summarized in the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions, that administer the sacraments Christ instituted, and that preach the Gospel clearly. You do not need to be in a direct succession of hands-laid-on-hands going back to John; you need to be in a community that holds the faith John held. Wherever the pure Gospel is preached and the sacraments administered rightly, the apostolic fellowship exists.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question for this session. Notes:

Question 1 — Eyewitness testimony

A thoughtful question about the nature of Christian faith. Good for classes that include students shaped by more subjective spiritual traditions — it reframes Christianity around events rather than experience.

Question 2 — Horizontal and vertical fellowship

Personal and searching. Often surfaces real insights about where students have been tempted to separate these — 'I love God but not His people' or vice versa.

Question 3 — Walking in the light vs. being sinless

The most important pastoral question for this session. Many students carry perfectionist baggage that this reframe addresses directly. Strongly recommended for new classes.

Question 4 — Perfectionist errors you see

Practical and diagnostic. Good for theologically mature classes that can identify the errors in their own backgrounds without defensiveness.

Question 5 — Living with awareness of the Advocate

Deeply pastoral. Can produce significant reflection for students who have been carrying guilt or accusation.

Question 6 — The universal scope of the propitiation

Evangelistic and missional. Good for classes focused on witness to unbelievers. Frames the Gospel in its proper confidence — Christ has died for them, and we can say so.

A Recommendation

For the opening session of a new study, Question 3 is often the most pastorally fruitful. It reframes the Christian life in a way many students urgently need, and it sets the tone for the whole study. For more mature classes, Question 5 goes deeper into the Advocate material. Either works well; save Questions 1 and 2 for later if your class needs to develop more fluency first.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- Brief introduction to the study and 1 John.
- The eyewitness claim (vv. 1-2) briefly, without full unpacking.
- The purpose of fellowship (vv. 3-4).
- God is light and walking in the light as transparent-not-sinless (vv. 5-7). Non-negotiable.
- Confession and simul iustus et peccator (vv. 8-10). Non-negotiable.
- The Advocate and the propitiation (2:1-2). Non-negotiable.
- One discussion question — Question 3 recommended.
- Closing prayer and Session 2 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- Extended unpacking of the four eyewitness verbs. Name them, move on.
- Full development of the Word of Life title. One sentence of connection to John's Gospel prologue is enough.
- Detailed treatment of the dual horizontal/vertical fellowship. The student book covers it.
- Extended propitiation word-study. Give the definition, make the theological point, move on.

The Single Non-Negotiable

The confession section (1:8-10) and the Advocate/propitiation section (2:1-2) together form the pastoral heart of this session. These verses address the specific spiritual wounds many students carry — perfectionist pressure, unresolved guilt, uncertainty about forgiveness. Protect them. If you have to cut everything else, keep these.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **John 1:1-18.** The Gospel prologue that 1 John 1:1-4 deliberately echoes. Read the two together to see how they illuminate each other.
- **John 20:24-29.** Thomas's hand in the wounds. The eyewitness claim made personal.
- **Romans 3:21-26.** Paul's parallel treatment of propitiation, with the same Greek root (*hilasterion*).
- **Hebrews 2:17.** Christ as merciful and faithful high priest making propitiation for the sins of the people.
- **Psalms 32.** The Old Testament's great confession psalm — 'I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity.'

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Part Five on Confession.** Luther's brief but rich teaching on confession as ongoing Christian practice.
- **Augsburg Confession, Article II on Original Sin.** The Confessional ground for *simul iustus et peccator*.
- **Augsburg Confession, Article IV on Justification.** The other side of the *simul* — full justification by faith in Christ.
- **Luther, 'The Freedom of a Christian' (1520).** Luther's classical treatment of Christian freedom, grounded in what John describes here.

Commentaries

- **Concordia Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John (Bruce Schuchard).** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment.
- **D.A. Carson, The Gospel According to John.** Not on 1 John directly, but indispensable for understanding the Johannine thought-world that shapes the letter.

A Final Word

You have opened a study that will, over the next ten weeks, bring your students into some of the most tender pastoral territory in the New Testament. John's letters are assurance letters. They exist to establish Christians in what they have, to protect them from both perfectionist pressure and destabilizing doubt, to give them language for the ongoing life of confession and cleansing that is the normal Christian walk.

Pay particular attention, this week, to students who may carry heavy baggage around sin and forgiveness. For them, the teaching that walking in the light is transparent life under ongoing cleansing — not sinlessness — may be significantly liberating. Follow up individually if you notice a student particularly affected. The first session often surfaces pastoral needs that will benefit from continued conversation across the weeks ahead.

Next week we move into the first of John's 'tests of life' — the obedience test. The Christian who truly knows Christ keeps His commandments. We will examine this carefully, taking care to understand it in the context of John's overall assurance-teaching rather than as a self-examination tool that produces anxiety. Begin preparing now; the next session builds directly on what you have taught this week.

May the God who is light, in whom is no darkness at all, bless your teaching this week, and may the Advocate plead for you as you speak His Word to His people.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know — Teacher's Guide, Session Two

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Two

Knowing Him by Keeping His Commandments

1 John 2:3-17

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Two. You are teaching the first of the three tests of life that will run through John's letter, plus his pastoral address to three groups in the congregation, plus his sharp warning against loving the world. The material is rich and practical, and it also carries real pastoral risk. The risk is that the tests can sound like new demands — new standards the Christian must meet to prove she belongs. Everything you do this week should work against that misreading and toward John's actual intent, which is assurance.

Here is the core pedagogical move. The tests of life are descriptive, not prescriptive. They describe what the Spirit is already producing in the baptized, so that we can recognize His work and take confidence from it. They do not prescribe new performances we must achieve before we can know we belong. The Christian who finds some real (though imperfect) keeping of Christ's commandments has evidence that she knows Him. The one who finds some real (though imperfect) love for the brothers has evidence that she abides in the light. These are markers, not manufactured proofs. If you teach it this way, students will leave the session more assured than they came. If you miss this, you will have taught a kind of legalism that contradicts John's own pastoral aim.

The other major pastoral opportunity is the three addresses in verses 12-14. Students often feel overlooked in Bible studies — the material aimed at some abstract average Christian who is not quite them. John does the opposite. He addresses distinct groups in the congregation and gives each the specific word they need. In your class, this is a moment to honor the diversity of your own students. Some are newer in the faith; some are longtime Christians; some are in the active middle years. Name this. Let each group hear that John's word is for them, specifically.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The Christian who keeps Christ's commandments, walks as Christ walked,

loves his brother, and does not love the world — even imperfectly — has real evidence that he knows Christ, abides in the light, and has the love of the Father in him; not because these behaviors earn salvation, but because they are the Spirit's work in those already saved, given by John as markers of assurance.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Two of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 2:3-17 multiple times. Notice the structure: obedience test (vv. 3-6), love test (vv. 7-11), three addresses (vv. 12-14), warning against loving the world (vv. 15-17).
- Read John 13:34-35 and 15:9-17, Jesus' new commandment of love. Essential background for John's 'old and new' commandment teaching.
- Review the three tests of life framework — obedience, love, belief — which will reappear throughout the letter. A good commentary on 1 John will outline this structure.
- Review Augsburg Confession Article VI on the New Obedience. The Lutheran framing of how good works relate to faith — essential for this session.
- Review the Formula of Concord, Article IV on Good Works. Addresses directly the question of how works function in the Christian life without being the ground of salvation.
- Review the Third Use of the Law in FC VI. Relevant for how the commandments function for the regenerate.
- Pray — for students who struggle with legalistic assurance, for students who may feel called out by the love-for-the-world warning, for your own clarity in holding Law and Gospel rightly.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Five theological points come into view in this session:

- **The tests of life are descriptive of the Spirit's work.** Not prescriptive demands for earning salvation. They describe what the Spirit is producing in the baptized, so we can recognize His work and be assured by it.
- **Keeping commandments is about direction, not perfection.** The Greek verb means to guard, carry out, observe. The Christian who keeps Christ's commandments is the one whose life is shaped by them, even as she continues to need ongoing cleansing.

- **Love for the brother as a mark of abiding in the light.** The specific relational pattern within the Christian community is a truthful measure of whether we are being shaped by the light. Hate for a brother cannot coexist with walking in the light.
- **Realized eschatology: the light is already shining.** John's 'darkness is passing, true light already shining' grounds Christian hope in what God has already accomplished. The outcome is not in doubt; the victory has begun.
- **Love for the world is incompatible with love for the Father.** The world here means the fallen human order in rebellion against God, not the created order. The three desires (flesh, eyes, pride of life) map the heart-pulls of that world.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Frame the tests of life correctly from the opening minute. Tests do not establish the relationship; they confirm it. The Christian who finds the Spirit producing obedience and love in her can take this as evidence that she knows Christ. The Christian who finds her life utterly untouched by Christ's commandments or by love for the brothers has honest cause for self-examination — not to despair, but to return to the Word, to confession, to Baptism-remembrance, to the means of grace where faith is given and renewed. This framing turns the tests from threat into comfort.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review of Session 1
0:05–0:20	The obedience test — keeping Christ's commandments (vv. 3-6)
0:20–0:32	The love test — old and new commandment (vv. 7-11)
0:32–0:42	Three addresses — children, fathers, young men (vv. 12-14)
0:42–0:55	Do not love the world — the three desires (vv. 15-17)
0:55–0:58	Discussion (1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 3 assignment



Where to Slow Down

The opening obedience test (vv. 3-6) and the world-warning section (vv. 15-17) are the theological anchors. Give both their full time. The three addresses are easy to rush — slow down enough to let each group hear the word that is for them. If the clock presses, compress the love test material since the student book handles it well.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 3-6: The Obedience Test

By This We Know

Point out the construction. 'By this we know' (en touto ginokomen) is one of John's favorite phrases and will recur throughout the letter. Each time, he is giving his readers a way to evaluate their standing in Christ. This is not accidental; it is the letter's pastoral heart at work. John wants his readers to know, not to guess.

Two Words for Know

Briefly note the two Greek verbs. Ginosko emphasizes relational, experiential knowing. Oida emphasizes settled factual knowledge. John uses both throughout the letter. The knowing he describes is not merely intellectual assent; it is the deep knowing that comes from sustained acquaintance with Christ over time.

Keep His Commandments

The verb tereo means observe, guard, watch over, carry out. Not keeping in storage but keeping in practice. The Christian who keeps Christ's commandments is the one whose life is actively shaped by them.

Not About Perfection

This is the critical move. John has just said (1:8) that the claim to be without sin is self-deception. He is not now contradicting himself. Keeping is about direction and orientation, not about achieved perfection. The one who keeps is the one whose life is oriented toward obedience, who returns to the commandments after wandering, who confesses when he fails. Spend real time making this clear; it will prevent the legalistic misreading.

Connecting to AC VI on New Obedience

The Lutheran Confession teaches that 'this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God,

because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God.' This is exactly what John is doing. The keeping of commandments is the necessary fruit of genuine faith, offered to God as the shape of the life He is creating in us — not the ground on which we stand before Him. If a student asks how this differs from works-righteousness, point here. The keeping is evidence of justification already received, not a means of earning justification.

The One Who Says and the One Who Does

The contrast in verse 4 is sharp. Claiming knowledge of Christ without the corresponding life is 'a lie.' Note that this is not cruel; it is clarifying. Empty profession is a contradiction. The positive side (v. 5) is rich — 'in him truly the love of God is perfected.' Unpack the word perfected (teleioo) — it means brought to its goal, reaching what it was aimed at, not sinless completion. The love of God given to the Christian reaches its intended end when it produces obedience.

Walking as He Walked

Verse 6 raises the calling even higher. The one who abides in Christ walks as Christ walked. This is not imitation of the historical particulars (we are not all called to be itinerant rabbis) but conformity of shape, pattern, and direction. Love for the Father, mercy toward sinners, self-giving, truthfulness, prayer, compassion — the contours of Christ's walking become the contours of ours.

Verses 7-11: The Love Test

Old and New

The commandment is old — not new in the sense of previously unknown. Jesus gave the commandment to love on the night He was betrayed (John 13:34). It has been the Church's from the beginning. But it is also new — because in Christ it has taken on a new depth, a new form, a new power. Love shaped by the cross, love that lays down life, love that reaches enemies. This is not a refinement of old ethics; it is something genuinely new in redemptive history.

The Darkness Is Passing

Spend a moment on the tenses. Present, active. The darkness is passing — not yet fully passed but in process. The true light is already shining — right now, in this age. This is realized eschatology at its most concrete. The victory of light has begun. The Christian is living in what is coming, not in what is going. This is pastorally significant for Christians who feel the darkness is winning — in the culture, in their churches, in their own hearts. John insists otherwise. The light has prevailed. Its shining is already visible in faithful lives.

Brother, Not Broad Humanity

Clarify that 'brother' here refers specifically to fellow Christians — members of the family of faith. This is not John excluding love for enemies or for humanity at large (those are Christian callings too, taught elsewhere in the New Testament). It is the specific application of the love test to how Christians treat other Christians. The relational climate within the congregation is a truthful measure of whether it is being shaped by the light.

Hate as Deep Orientation

The word 'hate' in the biblical world is stronger than mere dislike. It means a settled orientation against someone's well-being — wishing harm, working against them, refusing to rejoice in their joy. The Christian who hates his brother in this sense walks in darkness. And John notes the tragic self-blinding: the one who hates cannot see clearly, stumbles without knowing where he is going, because his own hatred has dimmed his vision of everything.

A Congregational Pastoral Note

John's test applies directly to the life of the local congregation. Where grudges, resentments, and nursed offenses take root over time, the light does not shine clearly. This is worth naming without naming names. Students may recognize patterns in their own congregations — not necessarily their current one — where relational poison has dimmed the witness of the Gospel. The invitation is not to ruminate on failures but to return to the light: to lay down the hatred, to forgive, to let the love of God that has been given us reshape how we treat the family He has placed us in.

Verses 12-14: Three Addresses

The structure is unusually careful. Three groups. Three reasons each. The effect is to address the whole congregation through these specific addresses. Walk through each group.

Little Children

Not John's general affectionate address here but a specific group — the newest or youngest Christians. John addresses directly what new believers sometimes most doubt: that their sins are really forgiven, that they really know the Father. He tells them straight: your sins are forgiven for His name's sake. You know the Father. You belong.

Fathers

The most seasoned saints. John says he writes to them because they know Him who is from the beginning. The gift of long Christian life is not accumulated religious experience but settled acquaintance with the eternal Christ. The father in the faith has come to know Him over years, and this knowing is his possession. John confirms it.

Young Men

The active middle — spiritually mature, not yet fathers, bearing the weight of engagement in the congregation's life. John writes to them twice, with expanded reason. You have overcome the evil one. You are strong. The word of God abides in you. This is pastoral encouragement for those in the years of active spiritual warfare.

A Teaching Opportunity

Consider briefly polling your class. 'Who feels like a little child in the faith — newer, still finding their footing? Who feels like a young man or woman — in the active middle years, wrestling, growing, engaging? Who feels like a father or mother — in a settled, long-held season of Christian knowing?' Most classes will distribute across all three. Then read the words John gives to each group. Let each group hear, specifically, the word that is for them. This turns the passage from abstract to personal in a way your students will

remember.

Verses 15-17: Do Not Love the World

The Meaning of World

Critical distinction. The 'world' John warns against is not the created order. God made the world and called it good, and John elsewhere speaks of God loving the world (John 3:16). The 'world' here is the fallen human order organized in rebellion against God — the pattern of life shaped by values contrary to His, operating on assumptions incompatible with the Gospel. This is what the Christian is not to love.

The Incompatibility

Two loves, two orientations, cannot both be primary in the human heart. The heart that tries to love both worldly values and the Father will find that one eventually crowds out the other. Jesus said essentially the same thing about serving two masters. This is not about the Father being jealous in some petty sense; it is about the structure of the human heart, which is ordered toward one primary love.

The Three Desires

Walk through each briefly.

Desires of the flesh — the body's appetites become disordered. Not the body itself, which is created good. When food, drink, sexual pleasure, comfort become masters rather than servants, driving the life rather than being ordered by it.

Desires of the eyes — the cravings stirred by what is seen. Covetousness. The longing for what belongs to someone else, the pull toward images promising satisfaction. The engine of modern consumer culture, though as old as the human heart.

Pride of life — the subtlest. The craving to be recognized, to stand out, to have status in the world. Hunger to be seen. The good desire to contribute meaningfully becomes the need to be seen as contributing, which becomes the need to be seen, full stop.

The World Is Passing

The eschatological close. Same realized eschatology as earlier in the passage. The world is not merely going to pass; it is in the process of passing. What looks permanent is actually fading. What looks stable is actually temporary. The one who does the will of God abides — remains, continues — while everything else goes. This is liberating for Christians who feel the constant pressure of a world that seems overwhelmingly attractive and dominant. It is none of those things. The Christian's investment is in what remains.

A Pastoral Note for the Modern Moment

The three desires are alive and well in our day, though in updated forms. Desires of the flesh: entertainment-saturation, food culture, erotic imagery, perpetual comfort-seeking. Desires of the eyes: advertising, social media curation, retail therapy, the visual consumption that makes wanting-more a habit. Pride of life: LinkedIn self-promotion, credentialism, brand-building, the cultivation of public self. These are not unique evils of our age; they are the ancient patterns in contemporary clothes. Your students live in this. The warning is not to withdraw from ordinary life but to keep the heart anchored elsewhere.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

If keeping Christ's commandments is evidence I know Him, what if I find myself constantly failing? Does that mean I don't really know Him?

No. John has already said (in chapter 1) that the Christian who claims to have no sin is self-deceived. Failure is part of the Christian life; John assumes it and provides for it through ongoing confession and the Advocate. The test is about direction and orientation, not about achieved perfection. Ask yourself instead: is the shape of my life, over time, moving toward Christ's commandments? When I fail, do I confess and return? Is there any real, though imperfect, keeping happening in my life? If so — and if you are honest, the answer is almost certainly yes — you have the evidence John is describing. The test catches the person whose life bears no orientation toward Christ's commandments at all, not the person who struggles imperfectly to follow them. The latter is every Christian.

How is this different from works-righteousness?

Works-righteousness says our works are the ground of our standing before God — we earn His favor by our obedience. John rules this out elsewhere (and Paul and the Lutheran Confessions rule it out everywhere). What John teaches here is different. Our works are not the ground of our salvation but the evidence of it. The Christian is justified by grace through faith in Christ; the justified Christian then begins to produce the fruit of genuine obedience and love as the Spirit works in her. This fruit does not earn the salvation; it evidences the salvation already given. The difference is at the level of what the works do — ground vs. evidence. For Lutherans, this distinction is captured perfectly in Augsburg Confession VI on the New Obedience: works are necessary because God commands them and because faith naturally produces them, but they are not the basis of our justification before God.

John says 'whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness.' Does this mean if I have unresolved conflict with another Christian, I'm not really a Christian?

Not necessarily, but it is worth taking seriously. John's word 'hate' in the biblical sense means a settled orientation against someone's well-being — not mere irritation, offense, or unresolved awkwardness. Christians regularly have conflicts with other Christians that are hard to resolve, sometimes for years. These are grievous but they are not automatically the 'hate' John is describing. What John is addressing is the person whose settled stance toward a fellow Christian is against rather than for — wishing harm, working against, refusing reconciliation. If that pattern describes your relationship with a fellow Christian, take it seriously. Seek to lay it down. Return to the light. The Christian life cannot be sustained in a settled posture of hatred toward brothers. If the situation is difficult, involve a trusted pastor or spiritual friend; don't try to untangle it alone.

What should I do about specific 'desires of the flesh' or 'desires of the eyes' that keep pulling at me?

Name them specifically. Confess them regularly — in prayer to God, and if the burden is heavy, in private confession with a pastor. Look for specific structures that support faithful living: accountability relationships, restrictions on input (less screen time, fewer triggers), regular return to the means of grace (Word, Sacrament, corporate worship). Do not try to fight alone. Many of the patterns John is describing are reinforced by isolation; they are weakened by community. Also, extend yourself grace. The goal is not zero desire but disordered desire being progressively reordered by the Spirit. Many Christians live with recurring temptations their whole lives without being defeated by them. What matters is not the absence of temptation but the direction of the life — returning to Christ, refusing to let temptation become pattern, confessing when you fail.

How can 'the darkness be passing away' when the world looks so dark today?

Because John's claim is theological, not empirical. He is describing what has already happened in Christ's death and resurrection — the decisive defeat of the powers of darkness — and he is describing the trajectory that flows from that

victory. The darkness is in retreat even if it sometimes appears to advance. Individual moments can look dark while the long sweep is toward the light. This was true when John wrote, in a Roman Empire that would shortly begin persecuting Christians more severely. It remains true now. The Christian does not evaluate history by what is visible in the news cycle; he evaluates it by what Christ has accomplished and where history is going because of that accomplishment. The light is shining. The darkness is passing. This is a confession of faith, not a prediction of political trends.

Is it wrong to enjoy things of the world, like food, beauty, entertainment, achievement?

Not at all. God created the world good, and the ordinary enjoyment of its goods is part of being His creature. John is not warning against enjoyment; he is warning against love for the world in the sense of the fallen human order organized against God. The test is whether our enjoyment is ordered rightly — received as gift from the Father, held with gratitude, not allowed to become the primary love of the heart. A Christian can enjoy a good meal, a beautiful song, a satisfying accomplishment — all as expressions of gratitude to the Creator whose world this is. What the Christian cannot do is love the world in the sense John means — be shaped by its values, driven by its desires, anchored in its passing pleasures as if they were the main thing. The distinction is between enjoying the gift and worshiping the gift.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. Notes:

Question 1 — Hearing the commandment-keeping test

The most theologically important question of the set. Gets at the framing issue head-on. Best for classes ready to wrestle with how to hear John's tests without falling into legalism or complacency.

Question 2 — Walking as Christ walked in your life

Personal and specific. Good for classes that have built trust. Can produce honest reflection on current spiritual direction.

Question 3 — Climate of love in your congregation

Use with care. Can produce valuable reflection but can also turn into criticism of specific people if not handled well. Focus on patterns, not individuals.

Question 4 — Which of John's three addresses describes you

The most engaging question, and the one that most honors the specific personhood of students. Usually produces good conversation about the different seasons of Christian life. Recommended.

Question 5 — Which of the three desires is most tempting

Personal. Students sometimes answer honestly; sometimes they deflect. Either response can produce useful discussion.

Question 6 — Experiencing the contrast between passing and abiding

The deepest reflection question. Good for classes with mature Christians who can name specific experiences of this contrast.

A Recommendation

Question 4 is the most accessible and often the most engaging for mixed classes. It also reinforces the pastoral point about the three addresses — every student gets to locate herself in John's specific word. For theologically mature classes, Question 1 goes deepest. For contemplative classes, Question 6 lands well.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- The obedience test (vv. 3-6) with the critical framing: tests are descriptive, not prescriptive.
- Walking as Christ walked (v. 6) briefly.
- The love test (vv. 7-11) with the 'darkness passing, light already shining' note.
- The three addresses (vv. 12-14). Read each aloud slowly, even if you don't unpack them extensively.
- The entire world-warning section (vv. 15-17). Do not cut.
- One discussion question — Question 4 recommended.
- Closing prayer and Session 3 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- The two Greek words for 'know.' Skip unless a student asks.
- Extended treatment of 'perfected' (teleioo). One sentence is enough.
- Detailed unpacking of each of the three groups. Read them aloud, make the point, move on.
- Extended treatment of 'hate' as settled orientation. Compress if needed.

The Single Non-Negotiable

The framing — tests are descriptive, not prescriptive; markers of the Spirit's work, not prerequisites for salvation — must land clearly in the opening minutes. If this framing is absent, everything else in the session will be received as Law. If it is present, everything else can be received as Gospel. Do not cut this framing.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **John 13:34-35 and 15:9-17.** Jesus' new commandment of love. Essential background.
- **Matthew 6:24.** Jesus' teaching on two masters. Parallel to John's incompatibility of loves.
- **Galatians 5:16-26.** Paul's treatment of the flesh vs. the Spirit. Complements John's warning about desires of the flesh.
- **James 4:4.** James' sharp parallel: friendship with the world is enmity with God.
- **Romans 12:2.** Paul's call not to be conformed to this age. Parallel concept.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Augsburg Confession, Article VI on New Obedience.** Foundational for how works relate to faith without becoming the ground of justification.
- **Formula of Concord, Article IV on Good Works.** Extended Confessional treatment of the role of good works in the Christian life.
- **Formula of Concord, Article VI on the Third Use of the Law.** How the Law functions for the regenerate — relevant for commandment-keeping.
- **Luther, 'The Freedom of a Christian' (1520).** The classic treatment of Christian liberty and its expression in love and service.

Commentaries

- **Concordia Commentary: 1-3 John.** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment.
- **Colin Kruse, The Letters of John (PNTC).** Strong on the Greek grammar and the tests-of-life structure.

A Final Word

You have taught the first of John's tests of life. If you have held the framing rightly — tests as descriptive markers of the Spirit's work rather than prescriptive demands for salvation — you have given your students something they will use for the rest of their reading of 1 John and, frankly, for the rest of their Christian lives. The tension between genuine biblical calls to obedience and the reality of grace is where many Christians get twisted up. John holds it beautifully. Your teaching this week can help your students hold it too.

Pay particular attention to students who seemed troubled by the love test or the world warning. These are the sections most likely to produce conviction, and conviction is a gift of the Spirit when it leads back to Christ. Be available for follow-up conversation. Some students may need to name specific patterns they want to repent of, specific relationships that have gone cold, specific loves for the world that are disordered. The pastoral opportunity extends beyond the class session.

Next week we meet John's treatment of the antichrists and the anointing. This is harder material — apocalyptic language, discussion of false teachers who had left the community, a pastoral word about the Spirit's teaching in ordinary believers. Begin preparing now. The anointing passage (vv. 20, 27) is particularly important; it is pastoral gold for Christians who feel intimidated by claims that only experts can understand Scripture.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the one who walks as Christ walked — whose life is shaped, even imperfectly, by Christ's commandments — know that he knows Him, and may this assurance carry him through all the weeks ahead.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Three

Antichrists and the Anointing

1 John 2:18-27

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Three. This week you handle two of the most frequently misused passages in the letter: the antichrist language (2:18-19, 22-23) and the anointing language (2:20, 27). Both passages have generated traditions of interpretation that run well past what the text itself supports — antichrist into elaborate end-times systems, anointing into arguments for individualistic spirituality that rejects the teaching office. Your task is to teach the passage as John actually writes it, which means clearing away accumulated misreadings while preserving what the text actually says.

The pastoral opportunity is substantial. Many of your students have been exposed to prophecy conferences, Left Behind novels, YouTube end-times speculation, or other cultural expressions of popular antichrist teaching. The Johannine antichrist is not the figure those traditions have built, and recovering what John actually means gives students a much more useful theological tool. Similarly, the anointing language has been used both to dismiss the teaching office entirely and to justify claims of private revelation apart from Scripture. John's actual teaching is different and better. He is telling his readers that the Spirit given in Baptism equips every Christian with the truth they need, working through the Word received at the beginning — not apart from it.

Handle the 'they went out from us' passage (2:19) with particular pastoral care. Some students will have experienced the departure of a loved one from the Christian faith and may bring that to the class. John's statement can cut in ways he does not intend if taught carelessly. Make the distinction between decisive, final departure into denial of Christ (John's concern) and ordinary seasons of doubt or weakness (not what John is addressing). Christians who struggle and return are showing the pattern of the faithful, not the pattern of the antichrists. Get this distinction clear.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The presence of antichrist-figures within the community — those who deny that Jesus is the Christ — confirms that the last hour has come, but the Christian who has received the anointing of the Spirit through Baptism has everything needed to recognize the truth and refuse the lie, and is called not to chase supposedly higher teachings but to let what was heard from the beginning continue to abide — so that he may abide in the Son and in the Father, which is eternal life.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Three of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 2:18-27 multiple times. Notice the movement: the last hour and antichrists (vv. 18-19), the mark of antichrist as denying Jesus is the Christ (vv. 20-23), abide in what you heard (vv. 24-25), and the anointing that teaches (vv. 26-27).
- Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. This is the other major New Testament passage using the antichrist-related language (though with a different vocabulary — 'man of lawlessness'). Comparing the two passages is useful for showing the breadth of New Testament teaching on this theme.
- Read 1 John 4:1-6, which returns to the antichrist theme with additional content. This will be covered in Session Six, but awareness of it now helps teaching Session Three.
- Review John 6:45 and John 14:26, where Jesus teaches that the Spirit/the Father will teach His disciples. These are the backdrop for the anointing language.
- Review Luther's Small Catechism on Baptism and on the Third Article of the Creed. The teaching that the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the Christian Church is the Lutheran theological frame for what John is saying about the anointing.
- Review Augsburg Confession Article V on the Ministry, for the balancing truth — the anointing works through the ordinary means of grace, including the preaching of the Word.
- Pray, especially for students who have family members or friends who have left the faith. They may experience this session with particular intensity.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Five theological points come into view in this session:

- **The 'last hour' as the whole era between Christ's comings.** Not an imminent countdown but the characteristic shape of the age in which the

Church lives — marked by the presence of counterfeits and the ongoing struggle for the truth of Christ.

- **Antichrist as pattern, not primarily person.** For John, the antichrist is the spirit of denying that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh. Many antichrists have already appeared; the pattern recurs across history.
- **Visible and invisible Church.** 'They went out from us, but they were not of us.' Not everyone visibly associated with the Church is truly of it. The distinction protects both the seriousness of faith and the pastoral care of those who genuinely struggle.
- **The anointing of every baptized Christian.** The Spirit given in Baptism gives knowledge of the truth. No elite inner circle of specially enlightened Christians. The ordinary believer has what she needs to recognize Christ and resist false teaching.
- **Spirit and Word together.** The anointing that teaches does not bypass the Word; it illumines the Word received at the beginning. Lutheran territory — the Spirit works through the Word, not apart from it.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Keep the 'they went out from us' passage (2:19) pastorally calibrated. Teach the seriousness of real departure from the apostolic faith (which is John's concern) without letting students conclude that any season of doubt or struggle in their own lives evidences that they were 'not of us.' The distinction is between decisive, final denial of Christ and ordinary Christian struggle. The faithful Christian who wrestles is showing the pattern of the ones who remain, not the ones who leave. Make this explicit in class.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review of Session 2
0:05–0:18	The last hour and the antichrists (vv. 18-19)
0:18–0:30	The mark of the antichrist (vv. 20-23)
0:30–0:40	Let what you heard abide (vv. 24-25)
0:40–0:55	The anointing that teaches (vv. 26-27)
0:55–0:58	Discussion (1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 4 assignment



Where to Slow Down

The 'they went out from us' passage needs careful pastoral handling — do not rush it. The anointing teaching in verses 26-27 needs extended unpacking because it has been widely misused. These two are the pastoral and theological anchors of the session.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 18-19: The Last Hour and the Antichrists

The Last Hour

Open by establishing what John means. Not the final sixty minutes before Christ returns, but the whole era between the first and second coming. This is the same New Testament framework we saw in Peter (session on 1 Peter 4). The last days began with Christ's first coming and continue until His return. John, writing near the end of the first century, speaks of his time as the last hour because he lives in this era. We, two thousand years later, still live in the same era.

How Do We Know It Is the Last Hour?

John's answer is surprising: we know because these antichrists have appeared. The presence of false teachers denying Christ is itself a sign of the last hour. This has been true throughout Christian history. Every generation of the Church has faced some version of the denial of Christ arising from within. The pattern continues in our day.

Antichrist — What John Actually Means

This is where you correct popular misreadings. John does not describe antichrist as a single future political figure, though other passages of Scripture may point to such a figure at the end. In John, antichrist is primarily a pattern, a spirit, a teaching that denies Christ. 'Many antichrists have come.' The word describes the false teachers already present in the congregation, not a distant future figure. Popular end-times teaching often flattens this into one person; John's usage is broader.

On Popular Antichrist Speculation

Many students will come in with associations shaped by Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, prophecy conferences, YouTube videos, and similar sources. These often identify 'the antichrist' with specific political figures, make elaborate predictions based on current events, and locate the antichrist firmly in the

future. You do not need to fully litigate this against them; just teach what John actually says and let the text do its work. John's antichrists are already present in his own day. The word describes the denial of Christ, not primarily a specific future person. For most students, this will be a helpful and liberating reframe.

They Went Out from Us

The pastoral weight here is heavy. Unpack the distinction between 'with us' and 'of us.' Those who departed had been formally associated — members of the community, participants in worship, visible Christians. But they had not truly been 'of us' in the deep sense. Their departure reveals what was always true.

The Pastoral Care

Make the critical distinction explicit. John is not saying that anyone who ever struggles with doubt, who goes through dark seasons, who wrestles with faith, is therefore revealed as 'not of us.' He is addressing decisive, final departure into denial of the apostolic faith. Peter denied Christ three times and was restored. The disciples fled at the crucifixion and came back. These are not 'not of us' figures; they are figures of the faithful who struggle. The Christian who returns, confesses, receives forgiveness, and keeps walking is showing the pattern of the ones who are 'of us' — even when the walking is halting.

A Pastoral Frame Worth Saying Aloud

Say something like this in class: 'If anyone here has wrestled with doubt or gone through a dark spiritual season, John is not describing you. He is describing people who have made a final, decisive departure into a teaching that denies Christ. The Christian who struggles is showing the pattern of the faithful, not the pattern of the antichrists. Those who remain in the apostolic faith, even through hard seasons, are showing who they truly are — of us, held by the same Lord who kept the disciples through their own failures.'

Verses 20-23: The Mark of the Antichrist

You Have Been Anointed

Brief introduction of the anointing here; you will return to it in depth at the end of the session. For now, note the Old Testament background — anointing of kings, priests, and prophets as the sign of being set apart and empowered. Christ Himself is the Anointed One. Those who are in Christ share in His anointing through the Spirit given in Baptism.

Everyone Has Knowledge

Stress this. 'You all have knowledge.' Against the false teachers who claimed an elite inner knowledge, John says every baptized Christian has the basic knowledge of Christ given by the Spirit. This is a deeply Lutheran emphasis and a liberating word for ordinary Christians who may feel their faith is incomplete because they lack formal theological training.

The Mark: Denying That Jesus Is the Christ

This is the definitional verse (v. 22). The mark of the antichrist is the denial that Jesus is the Christ. Unpack what this meant in John's context — the false teachers were separating the divine Christ from the human Jesus, denying that the eternal Word had truly come in the flesh in this particular man. John rejects every such separation. Jesus IS the Christ. There is no divine Christ apart from the human Jesus. The two are one person.

Denying the Son Denies the Father

The critical Christian claim. There is no knowledge of the Father apart from the Son. Some religious teaching in our own day claims to reach God by routes that bypass Christ. John rules this out. The Father is known only through the Son. This should be taught plainly but pastorally — not as triumphalism against people of other faiths, but as the simple biblical claim about how the Father is actually known.

Verses 24-25: Let What You Heard Abide

The Counsel: Stay Where You Are

John's counsel to his readers is not to advance beyond the apostolic teaching but to remain in it. The false teachers had apparently claimed to offer something higher, more sophisticated, more spiritually mature than the basic Gospel. John's answer is the opposite. The Gospel you heard at the beginning is the Gospel you need now. Do not trade it for a supposedly higher one.

Abide — Menō

Introduce the verb. Meno appears about seventy times across John's writings. It means remain, continue, dwell, settle. To abide in Christ is to make one's settled home in Him. This is the language of a relationship being actively maintained, not of achieving something new.

Eternal Life as Present Possession

Connect to the assurance theme. Eternal life, in John's framing, is not only a future possession; it is a present reality in Christ. The Christian who abides in what he heard from the beginning has eternal life now. This connects directly to 5:13, the thesis verse of the whole letter. We can know we have eternal life because the life is Christ, and we are in Christ through faith.

Verses 26-27: The Anointing That Teaches

This is where you do your most careful teaching. The passage has been widely misused.

The Setup

John says his readers have the anointing, it abides in them, and they do not need that anyone teach them. Taken out of context, this sounds like John is saying Christians need no teachers at all — that the Spirit teaches each believer directly and apart from any external ministry.

Why That Reading Cannot Be What John Means

John is writing to teach. He is giving instruction, correction, and direction in the very words of this letter. If he really meant Christians need no teachers, he would

be acting against his own teaching in the act of teaching. The statement must mean something consistent with his apostolic ministry, not something that cancels it.

What John Actually Means

His readers do not need the teaching of the antichrists. They do not need new revelations beyond what the apostles have given. The anointing they have is sufficient to confirm them in what they have already received. John is rejecting the false teachers' claim to offer something essential that the believers lack. He is not rejecting the ordinary ministry of apostolic teaching — which he is himself doing.

The Spirit and the Word

For Lutherans, this fits within the framework of Spirit working through Word. The anointing that teaches is the Spirit illuminating the apostolic teaching the Christian has received. Not free-floating revelation apart from Scripture, but the Spirit's illumination of the Scripture given to us. This is Augsburg Confession territory — the Holy Spirit works faith through the hearing of the Gospel, through the means of grace.

Connecting to Lutheran Theology of Spirit and Word

Luther's Small Catechism teaches that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the Christian Church through the Gospel. The anointing John describes works in exactly this way — through the Word, illuminating what the Christian has received, keeping the Christian in the truth of what was heard from the beginning. If students ask how Lutherans understand this verse, this is the frame: the Spirit and the Word work together. The Spirit is not separable from the Word; the Word is not effective apart from the Spirit. John's statement fits this framework and does not support appeals to private spiritual experience divorced from Scripture.

Abide in Him

The closing exhortation gathers the whole section. The anointing's teaching ends where it must — in continued abiding in Christ. Not departure. Not advancement. Abide. This is the summary pastoral word of the whole passage.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

How does the Johannine antichrist relate to the antichrist of popular end-times teaching?

They are related but not identical. John uses the word more broadly than popular teaching does. For John, antichrist is primarily a pattern of teaching — the denial that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh. Many antichrists have already come, John says, in his own day. Other passages of Scripture (especially 2 Thessalonians 2 and various passages in Revelation) may point to a culminating figure of opposition to Christ at the end of the age. The Christian tradition has sometimes combined these texts into a composite picture of 'the antichrist' as a future individual. John's usage, however, is broader. His antichrists are already present in his own time. The denial of Christ is ongoing across the era of the Church, not concentrated in a single final figure. You can hold both — the pattern throughout history and the possibility of a culminating manifestation — without reducing one to the other.

Does 'they went out from us' mean that anyone who leaves the church was never really a Christian?

It depends on what you mean by 'leaves the church.' John is talking about specific people who departed into a teaching that denied Christ — not about people who simply stopped attending, or had a falling out with their pastor, or went through a period of disillusionment. For those who finally and decisively adopt a teaching that denies the apostolic Gospel — who reject Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh — John's word is that their departure reveals what was always true: they were not of the true Church, however formally associated they had been. For those who wrestle, doubt, drift, and return, the pattern is different. The returning is itself evidence that they are among the 'of us.' The Lutheran tradition has been careful here. We do not judge individual hearts, which is God's alone. What we can say is that continued, final, decisive denial of Christ is what John is naming, and Christians who struggle and return are not in that category.

If I have the anointing, why do I still need to come to church or listen to sermons?

Because the anointing works through the Word, not apart from it. The Spirit given in Baptism does not replace the ordinary ministry of Word and Sacrament; He works through it. When you hear the Gospel preached, the same Spirit who was given in your Baptism is illuminating what you are hearing. When you receive the Lord's Supper, the Spirit is at work in that reception. When you read Scripture, the Spirit is making the Word alive to you. The means of grace are the channels through which the Spirit normally works in the Christian's life. The anointing is not a substitute for these means; it is the reality of the Spirit's presence that makes them effective. A Christian who thought he could dispense with the ordinary ministry of the Church because he had the Spirit would be cutting himself off from the means through which the Spirit has chosen to work. This is what Augsburg Confession V and the Small Catechism preserve. The Spirit and the means of grace go together.

Can someone who genuinely believed at one point really fall away?

This is one of the hardest pastoral questions in the Christian tradition, and different streams have answered it differently. The Lutheran tradition holds that yes, genuine Christians can fall away — this is taught in the Augsburg Confession and elsewhere. But John's statement here is not addressing the question in general. He is saying that the particular people who left his congregations and took up the antichrist teaching were never truly of the community in the deep sense. Their departure revealed this. For our pastoral purposes, we do not need to try to answer the general question about falling away every time we encounter someone who has left the faith. What we can say is this: the person who is currently in Christ should abide in Christ, trusting the Lord to preserve her; the person who has left should be prayed for and called back; and the Lord, who alone sees the heart, will make all things plain in the end. We do not need to resolve every theoretical question to live faithfully in our own lives.

What does it mean practically to 'let what you heard from the beginning abide in you'?

It means continuing to return to the Gospel as you first received it. Not looking for new teachings that supposedly advance beyond the Gospel. Not constantly pursuing spiritual experiences that feel more sophisticated than ordinary Christian life. But letting the simple Gospel of Christ crucified and risen continue to shape you, deepening into what is already there rather than drifting toward what promises more. Practically, this looks like continued engagement with Scripture, continued participation in the worship of the Church, continued use of the Catechism or whatever basic teaching tools shaped you, continued prayer. None of it is flashy. All of it is the ordinary maintenance of a relationship with Christ. The Christian who does this is abiding in what she heard from the beginning, and the Spirit is at work in the abiding.

If the Spirit teaches every Christian, why do we have pastors and teachers?

Because the ordinary ministry of Word and Sacrament is the means through which the Spirit normally teaches. The pastor who preaches is not bringing his own content; he is handling the Word that the Spirit has given and is using. The teacher who catechizes is serving the same Spirit's work. Pastors and teachers do not replace the Spirit's anointing in the believer; they serve it. Augsburg Confession V teaches that the office of the ministry was instituted by Christ precisely so that the Gospel would be preached and the sacraments administered — the very means through which the Spirit produces faith in the hearers. John's language in this passage is not anti-ministry; it is anti-false-teacher. The false teachers claimed to offer what the ordinary apostolic ministry could not. John says the ordinary apostolic ministry is sufficient — there is no need for the supposedly higher teaching the antichrists are offering. This preserves the pastoral office as essential while denying that anyone stands above or beyond it with special access to Christ.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. Notes:

Question 1 — The Johannine antichrist vs. popular end-times teaching

A good opener. Often surfaces interesting reflections on what students have absorbed from popular Christian culture. Keep the discussion focused on what John actually says rather than on evaluating specific end-times systems.

Question 2 — Pastoral reading of 'they went out from us'

The most important question pastorally. Students who have family members or friends who have left the faith often have significant reflections here. Handle with care and be ready to follow up individually.

Question 3 — Modern forms of denying Jesus is the Christ

Theologically substantial. Can produce good discussion of how various contemporary spiritualities redefine Christ. Watch for triumphalism; keep it pastoral.

Question 4 — What you heard from the beginning

Personal and formative. Students often reflect meaningfully on their earliest Christian formation and how it continues to shape them.

Question 5 — The anointing and ordinary Christian life

The liberating question. Often pastorally significant for students who feel their faith is incomplete because they lack formal training.

Question 6 — Experience of Spirit through Scripture and Church

Good for classes with mature members who can speak from lived experience of the means of grace.

A Recommendation

For classes with members who have experienced the departure of loved ones from the faith, Question 2 is often the most pastorally useful. For theologically reflective classes, Question 3 goes deepest. Question 5 is a good choice for classes in which some members have low confidence in their own Christian standing.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- Brief framing of the last hour and the antichrists as pattern (not single figure) — 5 minutes.
- 'They went out from us' with careful pastoral framing — 7 minutes.
- The mark of antichrist as denying Jesus is the Christ (v. 22) — 8 minutes.
- Abide in what you heard from the beginning (vv. 24-25) — 5 minutes.
- The anointing that teaches, with the Spirit-through-Word framing — 12 minutes.
- Closing: abide in Him.
- One discussion question — Question 2 or 5 recommended.
- Closing prayer and Session 4 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- Detailed historical catalog of antichrist movements across history. Name the pattern briefly.
- Extended discussion of eternal life as present possession. The student book covers it.
- Detailed analysis of meno as John's favorite verb. Mention briefly.

The Single Non-Negotiable

Do not cut the pastoral framing of 'they went out from us.' If a student hears this passage taught without the careful distinction between decisive departure and ordinary struggle, it can do real spiritual harm. Protect this even if you have to cut material from the anointing section.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.** Paul's treatment of 'the man of lawlessness' — the other major New Testament passage related to antichrist. Complements John's broader usage.
- **1 John 4:1-6.** John's return to the antichrist theme with additional content. Foreshadows Session Six.
- **Matthew 24:23-28.** Jesus' warning about false christs and false prophets. Background for John's teaching.
- **John 14:16-17, 26; 16:13.** Jesus' teaching on the Spirit as teacher. Gospel background for the anointing language.
- **John 15:1-11.** The vine and branches discourse. The classic Johannine treatment of abiding — worth reading to feel the depth of the meno language.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Third Article of the Creed.** Luther's teaching on the Spirit's work through the means of grace. The framework for understanding the anointing.
- **Augsburg Confession V.** The office of the ministry as the divinely instituted means through which the Spirit works faith. Balances and illumines John's anointing language.
- **Luther, 'Against the Heavenly Prophets' (1525).** Luther's extended treatment of those who claimed direct spiritual revelation apart from the Word. Directly relevant to modern misuses of the anointing passage.

Commentaries

- **Concordia Commentary: 1-3 John.** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment.
- **Colin Kruse, The Letters of John.** Strong on the historical situation and the Johannine theology of the Spirit.

A Final Word

You have taught a session with real pastoral stakes this week. The passages on antichrist and the anointing have been widely misused across Christian history, and teaching them faithfully is itself a gift to your congregation. If you have cleared away popular misreadings while preserving the seriousness of what John is saying, and if you have given your students a clearer sense of the Spirit's work through the Word, you have served them well.

Pay particular attention to students who have family members or friends who have left the faith. The 'they went out from us' passage can cut in painful ways if not carefully framed. A private conversation after class may matter more than any content delivered in class.

Next week we move into 1 John 2:28-3:10, the passage on Christians as children of God and the difficult tension between John's teachings on sin. This is theologically dense territory, and it rewards careful preparation.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the anointing that teaches your students continue to keep them in the Christ who was proclaimed from the beginning.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know — Teacher's Guide, Session Four

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Four

Children of God

1 John 2:28-3:10

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Four. This is the session where you have to teach the most difficult interpretive problem in the letter — the apparent contradiction between John's teaching on sin in chapter one (the one who claims to have no sin is self-deceived) and his teaching in chapter three (no one born of God makes a practice of sinning). You will hear echoes of this tension throughout the remainder of the letter, and getting the resolution clear in Session Four sets up everything that follows.

The resolution is the *simul iustus et peccator* framing we introduced in Session One, now applied to the Greek tense of John's verbs in 3:6 and 3:9. The present-tense forms indicate ongoing, habitual, characteristic action — not single acts of sin but a pattern of life marked by sin. This is why many modern translations render the phrase as 'makes a practice of sinning' or 'keeps on sinning.' With this lexical clue, chapter one and chapter three hold together. The Christian still commits sin (chapter one). The Christian does not live as a slave to sin (chapter three). Both are true. Both are John. And both are Lutheran.

The pastoral stakes are high. Taught poorly, the chapter-three passage drives sensitive Christians into despair (I still sin; therefore I must not be born of God) or drives insensitive Christians into presumption (I'm born of God; therefore my sin must not really be sin). Taught well, the passage serves neither despair nor presumption. It gives the Christian a realistic way to read her own life — noting the trajectory rather than demanding perfection, while also calling her to honest self-examination where the trajectory has gone off course.

The adoption theology earlier in the passage is pure pastoral gold. See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God — and so we are. This is deep, assurance-giving material that many students need to hear. Do not rush past it to get to the sin-teaching. The identity as children of God is the foundation that makes the rest of the passage bearable. Without the identity, the

sin-teaching becomes crushing. With the identity, the sin-teaching is a call to live into what we already are.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

We are God's children now — by the love the Father has given us and the new birth by which His seed abides in us — and though what we will be has not yet appeared, we know we shall be like Christ when we see Him as He is; this hope is already purifying us now, so that the settled pattern of our lives, however halting, is no longer the pattern of those enslaved to sin but the pattern of those being shaped into the family likeness.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Four of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 2:28-3:10 multiple times. Notice the movement: abiding and confidence (2:28-29), the Father's love and our identity (3:1-3), the sin teaching (3:4-9), the binary of children of God and children of the devil (3:10).
- Re-read 1 John 1:8-10 and lay it alongside 3:6-9. You need to feel the apparent tension before you teach the resolution.
- Read Romans 8:12-17 and Galatians 3:26-4:7, the major Pauline passages on adoption. These complement John's teaching and will help you feel the breadth of the New Testament's teaching on the children-of-God theme.
- Review Augsburg Confession Article II on Original Sin and Article IV on Justification. Both bear on the sin-teaching.
- Review Apology IV for the extended Lutheran treatment of *simul iustus et peccator* — particularly the sections on the righteousness of faith.
- If you have access to Luther's Galatians commentary (1535), the comments on Galatians 3 contain some of his richest treatments of the tension between the reality of ongoing sin and the reality of full justification in Christ.
- Pray, particularly for students who may be in despair over their sin or students who may be presuming on grace. Both groups need this passage, and both will hear it differently.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Five theological points come into view in this session:

- **Adoption as the deepest Christian identity.** Not metaphor but reality. The Father has made us His children by the love He has given. This is more foundational than any of our failures or struggles.
- **The already-and-not-yet of glorification.** We are God's children now. What we will be has not yet appeared. We live between the already-settled identity and the not-yet-complete transformation.

- **The purifying effect of hope.** The Christian who hopes in Christ's appearing is already being shaped now. Sanctification is not earned toward inheritance; it flows from inheritance already secured.
- **Simul iustus et peccator in Johannine form.** The Christian still commits sin (ch. 1). The Christian does not live as a slave to sin (ch. 3). The Greek tenses of chapter 3 support the distinction. Both passages stand.
- **Children of God and children of the devil — visible marks.** The binary John draws is not about secret inner states but about visible patterns of life — practice of righteousness and love of the brother.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Teach the adoption theology first, and teach it with warmth. If your students feel the weight of being called children of God, the sin-teaching that follows will land as invitation rather than condemnation. The identity comes before the ethics. See what kind of love the Father has given us — linger here. Let your students receive it as the ground on which the rest of the session stands.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review of Session 3
0:05–0:13	Abide and have confidence (2:28-29)
0:13–0:25	See what kind of love — the Father's love and our identity (3:1-2)
0:25–0:33	We shall be like Him and the purifying hope (3:2-3)
0:33–0:52	The difficult sin passage (3:4-9) — extended treatment
0:52–0:56	Children of God and children of the devil (3:10)
0:56–0:58	Discussion (1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 5 assignment



Where to Slow Down

The sin passage (vv. 4-9) requires the longest segment in this session. Do not shortchange it. The resolution of the apparent contradiction with chapter one is where students either get clarity or get lost, and this is one of the most pastorally consequential teaching moments in the whole volume.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 2:28-29: Abide and Have Confidence

The Continued Call

The exhortation to abide continues directly from last week. Now it is connected to a future moment — the coming of Christ. Abiding now produces confidence then. Drifting now produces shame then.

Parrhesia: Confidence

Unpack the Greek word briefly. It means openness, boldness, freedom of speech — the posture of one who has a right to be where she is. The abiding Christian will have this confidence at Christ's appearing. Not because she earned her place, but because she has been with Him all along.

Born of Him

Note the first appearance of the born-of-Him language. The practice of righteousness is the evidence of the new birth. This is the first thread of what John will develop across the passage.

Verses 3:1-2: The Father's Love and Our Identity

See What Kind of Love

Linger here. The Greek word *potapen* is a word of wonder. John is asking his readers to stop and look at something remarkable. The love the Father has given us is not ordinary love. It is love that adopts — that takes those who were outside the family and makes them children in the deepest sense.

Called Children of God — and So We Are

The 'and so we are' is critical. John is not saying the title is ceremonial. We are what we are called. The name establishes the reality. This is adoption theology at its deepest. Paul develops it at length in Romans 8 and Galatians 4; John states it compactly here with equal force.

A Lutheran Note on Adoption

For Lutherans, the adoption is tied to Baptism. In Baptism, the Christian is named by the Triune God, declared His own, adopted into the family. This is not merely a symbolic act; it is the event through which the relationship is established. Connect the adoption theology here to the Baptism theology you have been building. Luther's explanation of Baptism in the Small Catechism — 'it effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe' — is the same reality John is describing. The baptized Christian is already a child of God, and this is the deepest thing about her.

The World Does Not Know Us

Pastoral frame for the experience of cultural alienation. Christians are sometimes misunderstood or dismissed; John's explanation is that the world does not recognize us because it did not recognize Christ. This is not a failure on the Christian's part; it is the expected result of belonging to the one the world did not see.

We Are — and What We Will Be

The already-and-not-yet structure. We are God's children now (already settled). What we will be has not yet appeared (not yet complete). Christians live between these two realities. The identity is settled; the consummation is coming.

Verses 3:2-3: Like Him, Purified by Hope

We Shall Be Like Him

The astonishing promise. When Christ appears, we shall be like Him — conformed to His image. And the cause is the seeing. We shall see Him as He is, and the seeing will transform us.

Paul's Parallel

2 Corinthians 3:18 — 'we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.' Paul describes the gradual process; John describes the consummation. Both are true; the pattern is one. The seeing transforms.

The Purifying Hope

The consequence for the present. Everyone who hopes in Christ purifies himself. The hope shapes the life of the one who holds it. This is sanctification in its Lutheran frame — not a work toward salvation but the outflow of salvation already given. The Christian who is looking toward the final likeness participates now in the shaping that will be completed then.

Verses 3:4-9: The Difficult Sin Passage

This is the center of the session. Slow down and do the work.

Set Up the Apparent Problem

Start by putting chapter one and chapter three alongside each other. Read 1:8-10 aloud. Then read 3:6-9 aloud. Pause. Ask the class: do these passages seem to say the same thing? Let them feel the tension before you resolve it. The tension is real, and pretending it isn't does not help your students.

Reject the Misreadings

Walk through the misreadings and why they fail.

- Chapter one = pre-conversion; chapter three = post-conversion. Fails because chapter one is clearly written to Christians about their current life.
- Two levels of Christians — ordinary and advanced. Fails because John's theology of all Christians sharing the same anointing, same knowledge, same standing rules this out.
- John is simply inconsistent. Gives up on hearing Scripture as Scripture.

The Lexical Key

The Greek verbs in 3:6 and 3:9 are present-tense forms indicating ongoing, habitual, characteristic action. Not single acts but pattern. This is why modern translations render the phrases as 'makes a practice of sinning' or 'keeps on sinning.' The grammar supports the distinction.

The Resolution

With this distinction, the passages hold together. Chapter one: specific sin, single acts or present states, are continuing realities in the Christian's life. Chapter three: the settled pattern of a born-again life is not the pattern of slavery to sin. The

Christian still commits sin (chapter one). The Christian does not live as a slave to sin (chapter three). Both stand.

Simul iustus et Peccator

Connect to the Lutheran framing you introduced in Session One. The Christian is at the same time righteous and a sinner. Fully righteous in Christ; fully in need of ongoing grace. What John says in chapter three addresses the fully-righteous-in-Christ side — the new life that does not live in slavery to sin. What he says in chapter one addresses the still-in-need-of-cleansing side — the continuing reality of sin that requires confession and cleansing.

The Two Pastoral Extremes This Passage Can Produce

Two opposite errors emerge when this passage is taught badly. The despair error: 'I still sin, therefore I must not be born of God.' The presumption error: 'I'm born of God, therefore my sin must not really matter.' Both are misreadings. The right reading serves neither. The Christian who sins and grieves, confesses and returns, is showing the pattern of the born-again. The Christian who sins without grief, without any inclination toward Christ's commandments, has evidence against her claim that needs honest examination. Teach both cases, so students hear the passage as it addresses them.

God's Seed Abides in Him

The striking image in 3:9. The new birth is not metaphorical; there is a seed of God that abides in the Christian. This seed is the ongoing work of the Spirit through the Word — the implanted Word of James 1:21, the imperishable seed of 1 Peter 1:23. The Spirit's ongoing presence in the Christian is what makes the sinless-life language meaningful. The Christian does not produce her own sinlessness; the seed of God is at work in her, shaping a life that is not enslaved to sin.

Verse 3:10: Children of God and Children of the Devil

The Binary

Children of God or children of the devil. No third category. This sharp binary may sound harsh, but John is clear. Every human being is in one family or the other. The visible marks distinguish the two.

The Visible Marks

Two markers: practice of righteousness, and love of brother. These are not achievements that earn the status of child of God; they are the marks that show the status is real. The Father's children resemble the Father.

Pastoral Application

For the Christian worried about her standing, the markers are reassuring when they are present, even imperfectly. The trajectory of a life oriented toward righteousness and shaped by love of brother is evidence of the new birth. For the person whose verbal profession of faith is matched by a life with no regard for Christ's commandments and no love for the brothers and sisters of the Church, the markers indicate that the profession needs examination.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Does 1 John 3:9 teach that real Christians never sin?

No. Taken in isolation, the verse can sound that way, but taken with 1 John 1:8-10 and with the Greek tense of the verbs in chapter three, the meaning emerges. The present-tense forms in 3:6 and 3:9 indicate ongoing, habitual action — not single acts but a pattern of life. The Christian does not live as a slave to sin, does not have sin as the settled direction of her life, does not practice sin as her normal way of being. But she does still commit sin, and when she does, chapter one's teaching on confession and cleansing applies. The two passages together give us the realistic Christian life: the Spirit is at work producing a new pattern, and when we fail within that pattern, we confess and are cleansed. This is the *simul iustus et peccator* reality.

How can I tell if I'm 'practicing righteousness' or just going through the motions?

The presence of genuine spiritual struggle is itself evidence of the new birth. The Christian who is merely going through the motions, who has no concern about whether her life matches Christ's commandments, who experiences no grief over her failures, who does not love her brothers and sisters in any meaningful way — this person has reason to examine whether the new birth has occurred. But the Christian who cares about righteousness even when she fails to achieve it, who grieves over her sin, who loves imperfectly but genuinely, who keeps returning to Christ when she wanders — this person is practicing righteousness in the sense John means. The practice is not perfection; it is orientation. Your caring about the question is itself a good sign, not a bad one.

What about Christians who struggle with a specific besetting sin for decades?

John's teaching applies. A Christian may wrestle with a specific pattern of sin — pornography, anger, substance addiction, gossip, envy — for many years without

ever being fully delivered from it in this life. This does not, by itself, mean she is not born of God. What matters is the overall trajectory. Is she genuinely wrestling with the sin rather than excusing it? Is she confessing when she falls? Is she continuing to seek the means of grace (Word, sacraments, fellowship) that sustain the Christian life? Is the rest of her life oriented toward Christ, even if this particular struggle remains? If yes, she is showing the pattern of the born-again, even when one particular battle is not yet won. The full victory over indwelling sin is not promised in this life for every specific struggle; the deliverance from slavery to sin as a whole way of being is what John describes, and that is consistent with ongoing battle in specific areas. If a student is struggling in this way, encourage perseverance, confession, use of the means of grace, and if helpful, pastoral counsel or Christian friendship to walk alongside.

If we shall be like Christ when He appears, does that mean we'll be divine?

No. The Creator-creature distinction is maintained in Christian theology. Christ is the eternal Son of God, of one substance with the Father — fully divine and fully human. We are human creatures, made in the image of God, redeemed by Christ, destined for glorification. Being like Christ means being conformed to His resurrected humanity — having resurrection bodies, freed from sin and suffering, seeing God face to face, sharing in the life of the new creation. It does not mean becoming divine in the sense that Christ is divine. Some Christian traditions speak of theosis or divinization, but even these traditions maintain the Creator-creature distinction. The Orthodox formula is that we become 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4) by grace, but we do not become God. Our likeness to Christ at His appearing is the fullness of our glorified humanity, not a change of kind of being.

Why is the world unable to recognize Christians?

Because recognizing what it means to be a Christian requires understanding Christ, and the fallen human order has a fundamental blindness to Christ. John says elsewhere that the light came into the world, but people loved the darkness rather than the light. The same blindness that kept the world from recognizing Christ when He came keeps the world from recognizing those who belong to Him. This

does not mean every individual non-Christian is hostile or unaware of anything good in Christians. It means that at the level of the deep spiritual realities — what we actually are as children of God, what our lives are ultimately oriented toward, why we do what we do — the world's categories are inadequate. Christians will be understood when Christ is understood. Until He appears in glory, both His identity and ours are largely invisible to those who have not been given eyes to see.

What does it mean practically to 'purify yourself as He is pure'?

It means actively participating in the sanctification the Spirit is already producing in you. This is not self-effort apart from grace; it is the Christian's cooperation with what grace is doing. Practically, it includes the ordinary disciplines of Christian life: regular participation in worship and the sacraments, ongoing engagement with Scripture, prayer, confession of sin, accountability to fellow Christians, attention to the specific areas where Christ's commandments call you to change. It includes saying no to patterns of life that are incompatible with Christ's character, and saying yes to patterns that reflect His. None of this produces salvation; the salvation is already secured. But all of it participates in the purifying work that hope of Christ's appearing has set in motion in those who hope in Him.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. Notes:

Question 1 — Identity as God's children

A good opener. Personal and formative. Often surfaces reflections on what students actually believe about themselves at the deepest level.

Question 2 — The world not recognizing us

Situational. Good for students who have experienced cultural alienation for their faith and want to understand it in biblical terms.

Question 3 — Living with the hope of being like Christ

Forward-looking. Can produce meaningful reflection on how eternity is shaping present life.

Question 4 — The *simul iustus et peccator* resolution

Theologically dense. Best for mature classes ready to wrestle with the interpretive problem.

Question 5 — Trajectory vs. perfection

The most useful question for classes with a mix of mature and newer Christians. Accessible but substantive.

Question 6 — Visible marks in your life

Searching. Invites honest self-examination with specificity. Handle with pastoral care.

A Recommendation

For classes that have students wrestling with their own standing, Question 5 is often the most pastorally useful. It gives permission to acknowledge

ongoing struggle while offering the reframe of trajectory. Question 1 is a gentler opener if the class is new to the study.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- Brief framing of abide and confidence (vv. 2:28-29) — 3 minutes.
- See what kind of love — the Father's love and our identity (3:1-2) — 8 minutes.
- Purifying hope briefly (3:3) — 3 minutes.
- The sin passage with full simul iustus et peccator treatment (3:4-9) — 18 minutes. Do not cut.
- Children of God / children of the devil (3:10) — 5 minutes.
- One discussion question — Question 5 recommended.
- Closing prayer and Session 5 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- Extended parrhesia word study. Mention briefly.
- Detailed discussion of 'what we shall be.' The student book covers it.
- Extended treatment of Paul's parallel in 2 Corinthians 3. Mention once.

The Single Non-Negotiable

The sin passage with the simul iustus et peccator framing. If your students leave without a workable way to hold 1:8-10 and 3:6-9 together, you have left them with a contradiction that could genuinely damage their reading of Scripture. Protect this teaching even if you have to cut the adoption material more than you'd like.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Romans 8:12-17.** Paul's major adoption passage. The Spirit of adoption, crying 'Abba, Father.' Essential Pauline parallel.
- **Galatians 3:26-4:7.** Paul's extended treatment of adoption as sons through faith in Christ Jesus.
- **Romans 7.** Paul's extended treatment of the Christian's ongoing struggle with sin. Companion to the tension in 1 John.
- **2 Corinthians 3:17-18.** Being transformed into Christ's image by beholding His glory. Paul's parallel to John's 'we shall be like Him.'
- **Philippians 3:12-16.** Paul on pressing on toward the goal without claiming to have attained it. Useful for the trajectory-not-perfection frame.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Augsburg Confession II and IV.** On original sin and on justification. Foundational for the sin teaching.
- **Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV.** Melancthon's extended treatment of justification and simul iustus et peccator.
- **Luther, Galatians Commentary (1535), on Galatians 3.** Some of Luther's richest reflections on the Christian life as simultaneously justified and sinful.
- **Formula of Concord, Article VI on the Third Use of the Law.** The proper use of the law for the regenerate. Relevant to John's ethical teaching.

Commentaries

- **Concordia Commentary: 1-3 John.** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment — especially strong on the sin passage.
- **Karen Jobes, 1, 2, and 3 John (ZECNT).** Accessible and pastorally sensitive, with good discussion of the interpretive options.

A Final Word

You have taught the most theologically demanding session in the letter. If your students have come away with a workable way to hold 1 John 1 and 1 John 3 together, and with a deeper sense of their identity as children of God, you have given them something that will serve them for life. The *simul iustus et peccator* teaching is not just academic; it is the pastoral lens through which Christians can live honestly before God, neither claiming perfection nor sinking into despair.

Pay particular attention to any students who have struggled to speak during the session. Some of the pastoral territory here is tender — those who wrestle with besetting sin, those who carry secret shame, those who wonder whether they are really Christians. A private conversation after class may matter more than any content delivered in class. Be available.

Next week we continue into 1 John 3:11-24, where John develops the love theme with particular force. Cain, Christ as the one who laid down His life, our calling to lay down our lives for the brothers, boldness before God. Another rich session, and one that depends on the identity work we have done this week.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the Father whose love has made us His children continue His work of purifying us into the likeness of His Son, until the day we see Him as He is.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know — Teacher's Guide, Session Five

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Five

Love One Another

1 John 3:11-24

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Session Five takes your class into the heart of 1 John. After four sessions establishing the foundations — the Word of life, walking in the light, the tests of life, antichrists and the anointing, children of God — John now brings the great theme of love to its fullest statement. And he does it with unusual force. This is not a sentimental session on being nicer to each other. This is John at his most searching, drawing contrasts so sharp that students will feel the edges.

The session hinges on two movements. First, the contrast between Cain and Christ — the man who slew his brother over resentment at his brother's righteousness, and the Christ who laid down His life for His brothers. This contrast gives John's definition of love. Love is what Christ did. Love is not defined by cultural convention or by romantic feeling or by comfortable friendship; love is defined by the cross. And the Christian is called to the same shape of life — to lay down his life for the brothers, in the ordinary small deaths that ordinary Christian life continually requires.

Second, the passage on the Christian whose heart condemns him. This is some of the most pastorally healing material in the entire New Testament. John knows his readers — he knows that tender consciences will read his demanding teaching on love and find themselves condemned by it. And he gives them the word they need. God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything. The God who knows everything about us knows more than our self-condemning heart knows, and His assessment is the one that counts. This passage is why some students will leave Session Five different than when they arrived. Teach it tenderly.

Two specific cautions deserve explicit attention. First, the equation of hatred with murder (3:15) can terrify sensitive Christians into wondering whether occasional anger or irritation damns them. It does not. John is addressing the settled, orienting hatred that refuses reconciliation, not the passing angers of ordinary human life. Frame this carefully. Second, laying down our lives for the brothers can sound so massive that students hear it as irrelevant to their daily lives. Most of us will not

die for a brother. But John's application (v. 17) is immediate and practical — the one who has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart. The laying down of life begins in those small daily surrenders of what is ours for the sake of one who needs it.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Love is defined by the cross — Christ laid down His life for us — and the Christian is called to the same shape of life in ordinary daily deaths for the sake of the brothers, knowing that when our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and that faith in Christ and love for the brothers are the single commandment that grounds our boldness before Him and our confident prayer.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Five of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 3:11-24 multiple times. Notice the structure — from the message-from-the-beginning opening, through the Cain-Christ contrast, through the definition of love, through the practical application, through the heart-condemnation passage, to the closing on faith and love as the single commandment with the Spirit as seal.
- Read Genesis 4:1-16. The Cain narrative is the background for John's 'like Cain' language. The question of why Cain killed Abel matters for how you teach verse 12.
- Read Matthew 5:21-26. Jesus's teaching on anger and murder in the Sermon on the Mount is the key parallel for John's hatred-as-murder equation.
- Read John 13:34-35 and John 15:12-17. The new commandment, and the definition of greater love as laying down one's life for one's friends, are directly behind this passage.
- Read Luther on vocation — the Large Catechism on the commandments, or his treatise on Christian liberty. The Lutheran understanding of vocation as the locus of laying down our lives in ordinary daily service is crucial background for the practical application.
- Pray — especially for students who are carrying a heart that condemns them. This session has a specific word for them, and your pastoral sensitivity will matter.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Five theological points come into view in this session:

- **Love defined by the cross.** Not by feeling, convention, or affinity — by what Christ did. Verse 16 is the hinge: 'By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us.'
- **Hatred as murder in orientation.** John's shocking equation is not meant to terrify over momentary anger but to expose the settled refusal-to-reconcile that shares Cain's orientation, even without Cain's knife.

- **Laying down life as ongoing practice.** The Greek *psychē* (life, soul) connotes the whole self. Most Christians lay down their *psychē* in ordinary surrenders — time, money, preference, comfort, convenience — for the sake of brothers in need. This is daily cross-bearing in Luther's vocation sense.
- **God greater than our hearts.** The pastoral hinge of the session. When our self-accusing heart condemns us, the God who knows more than our heart knows is the God whose assessment matters. He sees what we cannot see in ourselves — the Spirit's work, the faith's reality, the love imperfectly present.
- **Faith and love as the single commandment.** Verse 23: believe in the name of Jesus Christ and love one another. Not two commandments but one — the proper shape of the life that has received the Gospel. This is where John is headed across the whole letter.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Students often hear demanding teaching on love as law heaped on law. Your task in Session Five is to show how John's teaching serves assurance rather than undermining it. Hold the session in the order John gives it: the Cain-Christ contrast grounds the definition of love in the cross, not in our performance; the practical application shows the ordinary shape of laying down our lives; and then comes the heart-condemnation passage precisely to protect tender consciences from being crushed by what has just been taught. The flow is pastoral. Teach it in that order, and the demanding material finds its proper frame.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and recap of Session 4 (children of God / children of the devil)
0:05–0:17	The message from the beginning (3:11) and Cain's contrast (3:12-15)
0:17–0:30	Hatred as murder and passing from death to life
0:30–0:42	The definition of love (3:16) and its practical application (3:17-18)
0:42–0:52	God greater than our hearts (3:19-20) — pastoral hinge
0:52–0:58	Confidence in prayer, the single commandment, the Spirit as seal (3:21-24)
0:58–1:00	Discussion (1 question) and closing prayer



Where to Slow Down

The two slow-down sections are the definition-of-love hinge (v. 16 into v. 17) and the heart-condemnation passage (vv. 19-20). These are the pastoral centers of the session. Everything else sets them up or applies them. If the class runs long on the Cain contrast, cut from there — not from the central two.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verse 11: The Message from the Beginning

Begin where John begins — with the continuity of the love command. This is not new teaching. Your readers have heard it from the beginning of their Christian lives. The false teachers did not bring it; John is not inventing it. Love one another is the message from the beginning. This matters because it frames everything that follows as restoration of what has always been true, not as a new demand.

Connect backwards to Session Two (the old-new commandment from 2:7-11). John has been circling this theme. He now brings it to its fullest treatment.

Verses 12-15: The Cain Contrast

Why Cain Killed Abel

Read Genesis 4 background briefly. Notice John's explicit answer: because Cain's deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Abel's righteousness exposed Cain's evil, and rather than repenting, Cain killed the one whose life indicted him.

This is a recognizable pattern. Students will recognize it in the everyday hostilities of the fallen world — and within the Church. The visible integrity of one Christian can provoke resentment rather than emulation in another. The modest witness of quiet faithfulness can draw irritation rather than respect. When we see ourselves in Cain — and we all do sometimes — the honest recognition is itself a step toward repentance.

Teaching the Cain Pattern in Modern Terms

The Cain pattern explains so much of ordinary human hostility that it is worth letting students feel the recognition. Why do adults belittle the earnest faith of their more faithful siblings? Why do coworkers sneer at the colleague whose ethics are uncompromised? Why do church members grow resentful of the fellow member whose quiet faithfulness makes their own compromises visible? The pattern is Cain's: the brother's righteousness

exposes my evil, and I would rather silence him than repent. Naming this honestly, without turning it into a self-righteous accusation of others, can produce real pastoral fruit.

Do Not Be Surprised

Verse 13 connects backward to the Gospel of John (15:18-19, 17:14) — the world's hatred of Christians is not a new or strange thing but the ancient Cain-pattern extended through history. If the world hated Christ, it will hate those who belong to Him. This is not paranoid victimhood; it is honest realism, and for Christians who are bewildered by the world's hostility, it is strangely reassuring. You are not failing; this is what the pattern produces.

Passed from Death to Life

Verse 14 is pastoral gold. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Notice — love of brother is an evidence of the transition, not the cause of it. The new birth has happened; the evidence of its happening is the love that is now present for the family we have been joined to. This is the tests-of-life framing from Session Two brought to its clearest statement. Students who love their fellow Christians (imperfectly, but truly) can receive this as assurance.

Hatred as Murder

Now the difficult verse. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Teach this carefully.

Handling the Hatred-as-Murder Equation

This verse can terrify sensitive consciences into wondering whether occasional anger or irritation with a fellow Christian damns them. It does not. John is following Jesus's logic in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-22) — that the murderous orientation is present in the heart before the hand lifts the weapon. What he is exposing is not the passing flashes of anger that are part of ordinary fallen human experience (these need ordinary confession, not terror) but the settled orientation that refuses reconciliation, cherishes contempt, will not let a brother be forgiven. This is Cain's stance

extended through life. Most of your students do not have this settled orientation toward any brother. The ones who do will know it, and the passage calls them to repentance. The ones who occasionally lose patience with a fellow Christian need to confess and receive cleansing, not conclude they are murderers.

Verses 16-18: The Definition of Love

By This We Know Love

Verse 16 is the hinge of the session. By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us. Love is not defined by feeling, by cultural convention, by romantic intensity, by natural affinity. Love is defined by what Christ did. The cross is the lens through which Christians see what love actually is. This is crucial — it rescues love from every sentimental counterfeit and grounds it in objective reality.

And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. The 'ought' here is not a heaped-on demand but the natural shape of life that has received the love Christ showed. The one who has been loved to the death by Christ is now oriented toward the same shape of life toward fellow members of Christ's family.

Laying Down Psychē

The Greek word for 'life' here is *psychē* — soul, life, the whole self. The idea is not primarily martyrdom (though it includes that possibility). It is the surrender of self for the sake of the other. In Luther's framework of vocation, this happens constantly in ordinary Christian life. The parent who surrenders sleep for the sick child. The spouse who surrenders preference for the sake of the other. The neighbor who surrenders convenience to help someone in need. The church member who surrenders time to sit with one who is grieving. The worker who surrenders advantage to treat a colleague fairly. These small daily surrenders are genuine layings-down of *psychē*. Most Christians lay down their lives for the brothers this way, unremarkably, every day of their lives.

The Practical Test

Verse 17 is John's ruthless practical test. If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in

him? The logic is devastating. Closed-heart Christianity is a contradiction. The one who sees need and can meet it and does not is showing — whatever his verbal profession — that God's love is not abiding in him in any vital sense.

But the verse is not calling for indiscriminating charity to every request. It is calling for open-hearted responsiveness to genuine need within the family of faith. The Christian whose heart is closed to a brother in need has a problem that no amount of theological correctness can paper over. The remedy is not to feel guilty; it is to open the heart and act.

In Deed and in Truth

Verse 18 gathers the point. Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. Love that stays at the level of warm words while the concrete needs of a brother remain unaddressed is not love in John's sense. Real love shows itself in action.

Verses 19-20: God Greater Than Our Hearts

This is the pastoral hinge of the session, and possibly of the whole letter. Take your time.

Why John Writes This Verse

John has just given teaching that would terrify a tender-conscience Christian. If you claim to love and your life does not show it, you deceive yourself. If you see your brother in need and close your heart, God's love is not in you. The obvious response of the sensitive Christian is: then I am lost — because my love is so imperfect, my practical care for brothers is so inconsistent, my heart closes more often than it opens. John knows this reaction will come. And he addresses it directly.

Reassuring Our Hearts

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before Him. Verse 19 begins the answer. There is a way to reassure the heart that accuses itself. And John gives the ground for that reassurance in verse 20.

The Great Pastoral Verse

For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything. Slow down here. Let this land. The Christian's self-condemning heart is real, and its condemnation often has some truth in it — the Christian has failed, has closed his heart, has fallen short. But the self-condemning heart is not the final word. God is greater than the heart that condemns. And He knows everything — more than our heart knows.

The Heart's Condemnation and God's Greater Knowledge

Teach this slowly, because it is pastorally transformative. Our condemning heart sees our failures, our half-love, our imperfect obedience. But our heart does not see everything. It does not see the faith the Spirit has planted, which is hidden behind our felt doubts. It does not see the love that is imperfectly present but genuinely present. It does not see the direction our life is moving, which trends toward Christ even when we stumble. God sees all of this. His knowledge is greater than our heart's. His assessment is the one that counts. The Christian who has received the Gospel and is imperfectly walking in it can be condemned by his own heart and yet not condemned by the God who knows everything. This is the very ground of Christian assurance, and it will appear again in 1 John 5:13 where the whole volume finds its focus.

Verses 21-24: Confidence, Commandment, Abiding

***Parrhēsia*: Confidence Before God**

Verse 21: if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. The Greek word *parrhēsia* — bold access, freedom of speech, the confidence of a child before a loving father. This word will return in 1 John 4:17 and 5:14, and especially in Session Nine where it grounds confident prayer. Notice that John sets this up as the positive counterpart to the condemning heart. The Christian whose heart is at rest in the Gospel comes before God with the boldness of a beloved child.

Confident Prayer

And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him. This is not magical transactionalism ('obey enough and

God owes you answers'). It is the natural coherence of the life of abiding — the one who is living in communion with God, whose desires are being shaped by that communion, prays in the direction of God's own will, and those prayers find their fulfillment.

The Single Commandment

Verse 23: this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another. Singular: His commandment. Not two commandments side by side but one seamless calling. Faith and love are the single shape of the Christian life. Believe in Jesus and love one another. This is what the Gospel produces. This is what being Christ's looks like.

The faith-love unity will be central in Session Eight (Faith That Overcomes). Name it here so students start to see the pattern coming.

Mutual Abiding

Verse 24: whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. The mutual abiding that will dominate chapter four. The Christian abides in God; God abides in the Christian. This is the real, ontological fact of Christian existence, not a feeling or achievement.

The Spirit as Seal

And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. The Holy Spirit's presence is itself the evidence that God abides in us. This is the first explicit mention of the Spirit in the letter and it anticipates Session Six (Testing the Spirits) where the Christological test of spirits will take center stage. The Spirit given to us is the seal, the pledge, the guarantee that the abiding is real.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

So does John mean that if I've ever hated a Christian, I'm a murderer and don't have eternal life?

No — and this is one of the most important pastoral questions to handle carefully. John is following Jesus's logic in the Sermon on the Mount, that the murderous stance is present in the heart before the hand acts. But he is not saying that every flash of anger, every frustration with a fellow Christian, every moment of wounded pride over a fellow member's behavior, makes you a murderer with no eternal life. He is exposing the settled orientation — the hatred that refuses to repent, refuses to forgive, refuses reconciliation, cherishes contempt as a way of life. That orientation is indeed incompatible with the new life. The occasional angers of ordinary Christian life are sin and need confession, but they are the stuff of chapter one's ongoing cleansing, not the death-stance of this verse. If your heart is troubled by occasional anger and moves to repentance, that is itself evidence that you are not in Cain's orientation. The Cain-orientation is not troubled; it cherishes its hostility. That difference matters.

Most of us won't die for a fellow Christian. So how does 'lay down our lives for the brothers' apply to ordinary life?

In the way Luther taught vocation. Laying down your psychē — your life, your self — happens constantly in ordinary Christian life, usually without any drama. The parent who gets up at 3 a.m. with a sick child. The spouse who surrenders her preference so her husband can rest. The church member who sits with a grieving friend instead of going home after a long day. The employee who covers a coworker's shift when there is no reward for doing so. The neighbor who spends Saturday helping someone move. Each of these is a small death — a surrender of what belonged to me for the sake of one who needed it. Most Christians live this way every day without thinking of it as laying down their psychē. But that is exactly what it is. Martyrdom, if God should call a Christian to it, is the same thing

in its ultimate form — but the daily form is the training and the reality for nearly all of us.

Verse 20 says God is greater than our heart — but what if my heart accuses me because I actually am guilty of something?

A crucial question. The verse is not saying that God always disagrees with our self-condemnation. Sometimes our conscience is accurately naming something that needs confession and repentance. In those cases, the word we need is chapter one, verse nine — confess your sins, and He is faithful and just to forgive. The verse is addressing a different situation — the heart that continues to condemn even after confession has happened, or that condemns in general and vague ways (I'm not a real Christian, I don't love enough, my faith is too weak), condemnations that are not about specific confessable sins but about the Christian's overall standing. For those general, crushing self-accusations, God's greater knowledge is the remedy. He knows our faith is real even when we doubt it. He knows our love is present even when we feel it is absent. His assessment of the Christian's standing is the one that counts, and He knows more than our self-condemning heart can see.

If faith and love are a single commandment, does that mean I need to produce love in order to be saved?

No — this is where Lutheran theology has a particular clarity to offer. The faith-love unity is the description of Christian life, not the combined price of salvation. Faith is what receives salvation; love is what faith produces when it is real. Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5:6 — faith working through love. The faith that saves is living faith, which is never dead faith; living faith always shows itself in love. But love is not paying anything. Love is the natural outflow of the life that has received the Gospel. You cannot manufacture love as a kind of supplementary down-payment to secure salvation. You simply trust Christ, and as you abide in Him, the love grows, imperfectly but really. The verse says faith and love are His commandment because that is what He produces in His people — and John's readers can examine whether those fruits are present, as evidence that the Gospel has actually taken root.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. Some notes:

Question 1 — The Cain pattern in modern life

Accessible and searching. Students will often recognize the pattern first in others and then — with the Spirit's help — in themselves. Keep it moving toward self-examination rather than letting it stay at naming the pattern in absent third parties.

Question 2 — Hatred as murder, with care

Only ask this if your class can handle nuance. The risk is that sensitive students spiral into scrupulosity. If you sense that risk, Question 5 is pastorally safer and covers similar ground.

Question 3 — Laying down life in daily vocations

Lovely question for this passage. Connects John's soaring language to the concrete shape of Christian life in ordinary week-to-week existence. Farming, family, congregation, and work all give good material.

Question 4 — The closed-heart test

Direct and practical. Some students will bring specific situations. Be prepared to handle gently and without turning it into a public rebuke of anyone present.

Question 5 — God greater than our hearts

The most pastorally healing question. Students who carry self-condemnation will find real relief in this verse, and hearing others speak about it often frees them to speak themselves.

Question 6 — Confident prayer and keeping His commandments

Best for classes that have been wrestling with prayer. Connects forward to Session Nine's treatment of parrhēsia and confident prayer.

A Recommendation

For most classes, Question 5 is the deepest pastoral opportunity — it frees people to speak about self-condemnation in a shared context where the verse itself becomes the medicine. Question 3 is the best alternative if the class is tired or unusually reserved; it keeps the discussion practical and concrete without requiring emotional vulnerability.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- Brief recap of Session 4 (children of God identity) in two minutes.
- The Cain contrast (3:11-12) briefly, as setup for what follows.
- The definition of love in verse 16 — non-negotiable.
- The practical application in verse 17 (world's goods and closed heart).
- The God-greater-than-our-hearts passage (3:19-20) — non-negotiable.
- Verse 23 (the single commandment) briefly.
- One discussion question — Question 5 recommended.
- Closing prayer and Session 6 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- The detailed hatred-as-murder treatment. Mention it briefly; the student book develops it. The risk of inadequate time making this material terrifying is real.
- The 'do not be surprised the world hates you' material (v. 13).
- The extended treatment of confident prayer in verses 21-22. Name it and move on.
- The Spirit-as-seal material in verse 24. The student book carries it; let it prepare for Session 6.

The Single Non-Negotiable

The definition of love in verse 16 plus the God-greater-than-our-hearts passage in verses 19-20. These are the Gospel center of the session. The cross defines love, and the God who knows everything is greater than our self-accusing heart. If your students leave with these two truths clearly received, you have taught the session well, even if you cut half the surrounding material.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Genesis 4:1-16.** The Cain narrative. Essential background for John's 'like Cain' language.
- **Matthew 5:21-26.** Jesus on anger and murder in the Sermon on the Mount. The direct parallel to John's hatred-as-murder teaching.
- **John 13:34-35 and 15:12-17.** The new commandment and the definition of greater love as laying down life for one's friends. Directly behind this passage.
- **James 2:14-17.** The closed-heart test has a direct parallel here. If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in daily need of food, and one of you says, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them what is needed, what good is that?
- **Romans 8:31-39.** The greater parallel to 'God is greater than our hearts' — who shall bring any charge against God's elect? Read with John's verse for pastoral reinforcement.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Luther, Large Catechism on the Fifth Commandment.** Luther's treatment of 'You shall not murder' illumines the hatred-as-murder equation with pastoral balance.
- **Luther, Treatise on Christian Liberty.** The classic statement of how faith produces love, and of love's shape in ordinary vocation.
- **Luther on vocation (Estate of Marriage, sermons on the household).** The concrete framework for understanding laying-down-life in daily Christian callings.
- **Augsburg Confession, Article XX.** On faith and good works — the classic Lutheran statement of how the faith-love relation works without confusion of their roles.

Commentaries

- **Concordia Commentary: 1-3 John.** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment.

- **Colin Kruse, The Letters of John (PNTC).** Particularly helpful on the Greek of verses 19-20 and the heart-condemnation passage.
- **Karen Jobes, 1, 2, and 3 John (ZECNT).** Accessible and pastorally sensitive on the love passages.

A Final Word

You have taught one of the richest passages in the New Testament, and if you have taught it well, some of your students will leave changed. The definition of love from the cross will have cut through years of sentimental counterfeits. The God who is greater than their condemning hearts will have met them in a moment of tenderness they will remember. The single commandment — believe in Jesus and love one another — will have clarified, perhaps for the first time, what the Christian life actually is.

Pay attention to any student who seems especially quiet after verse 20. The God-greater-than-our-hearts passage often lands most deeply in those who have been carrying the heaviest self-accusation, and they may need a gentle follow-up conversation after class. Do not press, but be available.

Next week we move into chapter four and the testing of spirits. The session is shorter in passage length but crucial in theological content. John addresses discernment — how does the Christian distinguish the Spirit of God from the spirits of deception that the antichrist figures of chapter two embodied? The test is Christological, and its pastoral applications in our own age of spiritual claims and counterclaims are significant. The faith-love unity you have just taught will reappear — faith in Christ as the defining mark of the Spirit of God, love for one another as the visible fruit of belonging to Him.

May the Lord bless your teaching. May the God who is greater than our hearts meet your students in their condemning places. And may the love that laid down its life for them be the shape of the life they are being formed into, as they walk with the Christ whose commandment is at once old and new.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Six

Testing the Spirits

1 John 4:1-6

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Session Six is a shorter passage than those around it — only six verses — but it carries disproportionate weight. John pauses his developing teaching on love to insert a sharp word about discernment. The Christian is called to test the spirits, not to believe every spiritual claim that presents itself as authoritative. And the test is Christological: does the spirit confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?

The session's main task is to make this test practical for your students. They live in a time of competing spiritual claims, within Christian circles and outside them. Voices across the Church claim prophetic authority for their latest insights. Spiritual language circulates in wider culture, often disconnected from Christian substance. Individual Christians report spiritual experiences and offer their content as authoritative. How does the ordinary believer sort through all this? John tells them. Bring every claim to the question of Christ. What does this teaching, this message, this voice, actually confess about Jesus?

The session also has a reassuring note that should not be lost. John does not leave his readers anxious about their ability to resist false teaching. He tells them they have already overcome, because He who is in them is greater than he who is in the world. This is pastoral encouragement grounded in the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Christian who feels weak against the cultural pressures of his age is not relying on his own strength; he is relying on the Spirit given to him in Baptism, who is greater than the spirit of the age. This is sober confidence, not triumphalism.

Two teaching emphases deserve care. First, connect the passage backward to Session Three, where John first introduced the antichrist figures. The 'spirit of the antichrist' in 4:3 is the same reality treated more fully in 2:18-27; this session is showing how that spirit operates and how to recognize it. Second, connect the test forward. The Christological test will appear again in 1 John 4:15 and in 1 John 5:1, 5-6 (Session Eight's material on water and blood). John is building. Your job is to help students see the arc.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Not every spiritual voice is from God; the Christian is called to test the spirits by the Christological criterion — does it confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh? — and can do so with confidence because the Spirit who indwells us is greater than the spirit of error at work in the world.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Six of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 4:1-6 multiple times. The passage is short enough to memorize; doing so will help you teach it fluently.
- Re-read 1 John 2:18-27 from Session Three. The antichrist treatment is continuous with this session's spirit-of-antichrist language.
- Read John 14:16-17, 15:26-27, 16:13-15. Jesus's farewell-discourse teaching on the Spirit of truth is directly behind John's language here.
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Both give related treatments of discernment and the spirit of lawlessness/antichrist.
- Review the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds. The Christological tests of the fourth and fifth centuries flow directly from John's criterion here, and the creeds are its later crystallization.
- Review Small Catechism Part III (Lord's Prayer) on 'deliver us from evil' and Part IV (Holy Baptism) on the old Adam drowning. Luther's anti-enthusiast stance is relevant background.
- Pray — for discernment in your own life, and for your students as they face their own spiritual-marketplace pressures.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Five theological points come into view in this session:

- **Discernment is mandatory, not optional.** The command is 'do not believe every spirit.' Christian faithfulness includes evaluating spiritual claims, not receiving them uncritically.
- **The Christological test.** Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. Every spirit that does not is not. This is simple enough to apply in real situations and decisive enough to settle them.
- **Perfect-tense incarnation.** The Greek verb for 'has come' is perfect tense — the incarnation is a past event with continuing effect. Jesus became flesh and remains flesh. The Son did not shed His humanity at the resurrection.

- **The greater indwelling.** He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. The Christian's confidence in resisting false spirits rests on the indwelling Holy Spirit, not on the Christian's own strength.
- **The two hearings.** Those who know God hear the apostolic witness; those who are from the world hear the spirit of the world. This is not circular; it is descriptive of how spiritual recognition actually operates.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Connect the passage to the ancient Christological controversies. Your students probably do not realize that the early Church's creedal battles — Nicaea against Arius, Chalcedon on two natures — were living applications of exactly this test. They were the Church testing the spirits. Naming this connection gives students a framework for understanding why Christology matters and why precise formulations developed. Christology is not theological nitpicking. It is the Church doing what John commanded — testing the spirits by the criterion of what they confess about Christ.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and recap of Session 5 (laying down life and God greater than our hearts)
0:05–0:15	The command to test the spirits (4:1) and what spirits are
0:15–0:30	The Christological test (4:2-3) with historical application
0:30–0:42	The spirit of the antichrist, already in the world
0:42–0:52	He who is in you is greater (4:4) — pastoral reassurance
0:52–0:58	Two hearings (4:5-6) and the apostolic voice
0:58–1:00	Discussion (1 question) and closing prayer



Where to Slow Down

The Christological test (vv. 2-3) is the heart of the session, and the greater-indwelling reassurance (v. 4) is its pastoral counterpart. Give both their time. The 'two hearings' material at the end is rich but can be compressed if needed.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verse 1: Do Not Believe Every Spirit

The Affectionate Imperative

John writes 'beloved' before the warning. Pastoral tone. The warning is protection, not scolding. Students who have been raised to believe that questioning spiritual claims is somehow unspiritual need to hear this framing clearly.

Both Halves Matter

Do not believe every spirit. Test the spirits. Both imperatives together. Christianity is neither undiscerning openness nor cynical rejection. It is careful evaluation using criteria the Spirit has given through the apostolic writings.

What Counts as a Spirit

Broaden beyond personal spiritual beings. A spirit in this context is primarily a spiritual message — an utterance claiming divine authority, a teaching presenting itself as inspired. The false teachers presented their teachings this way. Modern parallels: the prophetic claim, the spiritual insight, the 'God told me' authority, the popular spiritual content presented as divinely authorized.

Many False Prophets

Not hypothetical. Not future. Present reality in John's day, and in every generation since. This is not paranoid but realistic.

Verses 2-3: The Christological Test

Jesus Christ Has Come in the Flesh

The specific phrasing matters. Not 'confesses Jesus' — which many false teachers did. 'Confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' — the real incarnation of the eternal Son. This was the watershed in John's day (docetism), and it remains the watershed in many modern theological distortions.

Perfect Tense

In Greek, 'has come' is perfect tense — a past event with continuing effect. Jesus became human and remains human. This is important against any teaching that treats Christ's humanity as temporary, a stage to be transcended. The glorified Christ at the Father's right hand is still the man Jesus. The incarnation is permanent.

Why Christology Is the Test

Spend time here. Why make Christology the decisive criterion? Because everything Christian flows from what is true about Christ. Wrong Christology collapses the whole structure — the death does not bear the weight we ascribe to it, the salvation is not the salvation the Gospel proclaims, the reconciliation is not real reconciliation. Get Christ wrong, and everything built on Him comes down.

The Ancient Christological Battles

Name them for your students. Arianism in the fourth century (Son as creature, not of same substance as Father) — answered at Nicaea.

Apollinarianism (Christ had divine mind but human body only) — answered at Constantinople. Nestorianism (two persons in Christ, not one) and Eutychianism (one mixed nature, neither fully divine nor fully human) — answered at Chalcedon. Each of these was a spirit that failed John's test in a specific way. Each was identified and rejected by the Church doing what John commanded. The creeds we confess today are the crystallized result of that testing. This is not ancient history; it is the living legacy of Christian discernment, and it serves as a pattern for our own.

The Spirit of the Antichrist

Connect backward to Session Three. The 'many antichrists' of 2:18-27 share the 'spirit of the antichrist' that John names here. Same reality, different angles. The antichrist spirit is whatever denies or distorts Christ, wherever and whenever it appears. It was already in the world in John's day. It has been in the world continuously since. It will be until the Lord returns.

Already in the World

Important for calibrating end-times expectations. John does not say the antichrist spirit is something only at the end. He says it is already in the world, already at

work, already operative in the false teachers of his day. This means Christians have always been living in the age of the antichrist spirit, and discernment has always been necessary. There is nothing uniquely end-time about needing to test spirits.

Verse 4: He Who Is in You Is Greater

Pastoral Reassurance

After the demanding material on testing, John turns reassuring. His readers have not been left to resist false teaching in their own strength. They have the indwelling Spirit, who is greater than the spirits of error at work in the world.

Perfect Tense Again

'You have overcome them.' Perfect tense. Completed action, continuing effect. The false spirits have been overcome. The Christian lives on the other side of a victory already won. This is the objective ground of Christian confidence against spiritual opposition.

Greater Than

Not the Christian's own strength. The Spirit's strength. The Christian who feels weak against cultural or intellectual pressures does not need to generate confidence in himself. He needs to remember who indwells him. This is pastorally important for students in hostile environments — academic, professional, cultural — who feel isolated. They are not relying on their own resources; they are in communion with the Spirit who has already overcome the world.

Verses 5-6: Two Hearings

They Are from the World

The false teachers are from the world — not in the sense of being created (everyone is), but in the sense of having their orientation and allegiance there. Their speech flows from that orientation. The world recognizes its own voice and receives them readily.

The Apostolic We

'We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us.' The we is the apostolic community. For John's readers, the practical meaning was: listen to the apostolic

proclamation carried by John's letter and the other apostolic writings. For us, it means: listen to the apostolic writings that form our New Testament. The one who knows God recognizes the apostolic voice.

Not Circular Reasoning

Students may push back: isn't this circular — those who agree with us are from God, those who disagree aren't? Not quite. John is describing the phenomenon of spiritual recognition. The Christian formed by the Scriptures over time finds the apostolic voice becoming the familiar voice of the Father he has come to know. This is experiential and progressive, not an arbitrary in-group declaration.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

Final summary. Two spirits at work. The test has been given. The criteria have been provided. The indwelling Spirit is greater than the opposing spirit. The Christian has everything needed for discernment.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Is it judgmental to say someone's teaching isn't from God?

The question reflects a cultural pressure Christians feel strongly. But John's command is direct: test the spirits. Refusing to evaluate teaching is disobedience to this verse, not neutrality. Judgmentalism in the sinful sense is condemning persons or assuming one's own superiority, and Christians should avoid it. But evaluating teachings by whether they confess Christ come in the flesh is not judgmentalism. It is what the New Testament commands. The distinction matters. We evaluate the teaching without claiming personal superiority over the teacher. We do so with the humility of knowing we too are under the same apostolic test. But we do test. Refusing to do so leaves the flock vulnerable to every false spirit that presents itself with spiritual confidence.

What about teachings that don't directly say anything about Christ — are they automatically fine?

No. The test functions as a sufficient negative criterion (teaching that denies the incarnation is from the antichrist spirit) but not as the only positive criterion. A teaching might not explicitly address Christology and still be wrong in other ways — promoting immorality, contradicting clear apostolic teaching, encouraging hostility toward fellow Christians. John's Christological test settles one crucial question definitively, but there are other tests throughout Scripture — the test of obedience (2:3-6), the test of love (3:14), the test of consistency with apostolic teaching (4:6). All of them operate together. Use the Christological test first because it settles the most fundamental question; use the others alongside for matters the Christological test does not directly address.

How do I test a specific teacher or book without being able to examine their entire theology?

Look for the treatment of Christ at key places. Does the teacher confess Jesus as fully God and fully man? Does the teacher affirm the bodily incarnation, death,

and resurrection? Does the teacher present the cross as the substitutionary atonement for sin, or as primarily an example, a symbol, or a political statement? Does the teacher treat Jesus as the unique Son of God or as one of many spiritual masters? Listen for these at the places where Christology matters most. Most teachers will reveal their Christological orientation within the first hour of honest listening. The teacher whose Christ is vague, diminished, symbolic, or optional has failed the test, however pleasant the rest of the message may be.

What about sincere Christians who hold some Christological error — are they not saved?

A pastoral question that deserves a careful answer. Scripture is clear that salvation is through faith in Christ, and the Christ who saves is the Christ Scripture reveals — God incarnate, crucified, risen. Teaching that substantially distorts this Christ places the hearer in real danger. At the same time, individual believers often hold inconsistencies without fully understanding them, and saving faith can coexist with imperfect theology. Luther would say: we are saved not by the accuracy of our theology but by the faithfulness of Christ, received in faith even when that faith is theologically confused. This means we teach Christology clearly, correct what we find distorted, and leave final judgments to God. But we do not conclude that Christology does not matter, or that every sincere spirituality is automatically from God. Some sincere people have been sincerely deceived, and the apostolic test stands regardless of the sincerity with which error is held.

Could the Holy Spirit say something not already in Scripture?

This question connects to Lutheran convictions about the Word. The Spirit who inspired Scripture does not contradict what He has given. Claims of new revelation that contradict Scripture are not from the Holy Spirit, whatever the spiritual intensity of the person making them. The Spirit continues to speak today — to convict, to illumine, to comfort, to guide — but always in consonance with what He has already said in the Scriptures He authored through the apostles and prophets. Any 'spirit' that claims to say something Scripture denies, or to add revelation that changes the meaning of what Scripture teaches, fails John's test. The Christological criterion works in this situation too: any voice inconsistent with

the Christ of Scripture is inconsistent with the Spirit who bears witness to that Christ.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. Some notes:

Question 1 — Testing in your own life

Good opener. Accessible. Invites students to bring concrete examples of voices they have encountered. Keep it focused on the testing process, not on criticizing specific named persons or groups.

Question 2 — Why Christology is the decisive test

Theologically substantive. Best for classes that have been wrestling with the letter's big ideas. Connects to the ancient creedal battles.

Question 3 — Forms of the antichrist spirit today

Rich but requires care. Has potential to turn into criticism of absent others. Redirect toward patterns and logics rather than specific names, unless an individual named is a clear historical figure on which there is Christian consensus.

Question 4 — Greater than the spirit of the age

Pastorally valuable for students in academic, professional, or cultural contexts where Christian belief is under pressure. Often surfaces specific experiences of isolation.

Question 5 — The two hearings

Searching. Invites students to reflect on their own spiritual hearing — what they find resonant, what they find foreign. Can reveal surprising things about formation.

Question 6 — Practices of discernment

Practical. Good for classes that want concrete takeaways. Invites sharing of prayer practices, reading habits, accountability relationships.

A Recommendation

For most classes, Question 4 or Question 6 works best — both are personal without being polemical. Question 4 if the class has members in hostile environments; Question 6 if the class is pragmatically minded and ready for practices.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- Brief recap of Session 5 in two minutes.
- The command to test the spirits (4:1) briefly.
- The Christological test in full (4:2-3) — non-negotiable.
- The spirit-of-the-antichrist connection to Session 3 briefly.
- The greater-indwelling reassurance (4:4) — non-negotiable.
- One discussion question — Question 4 or 6 recommended.
- Closing prayer and Session 7 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- Detailed treatment of 'what counts as a spirit.' Mention briefly; the student book develops it.
- The ancient Christological battles. Name one (e.g., Arianism) and move on.
- The two-hearings material (4:5-6). Summarize in a sentence or two; the student book carries it.

The Single Non-Negotiable

The Christological test in verses 2-3 together with the greater-indwelling reassurance in verse 4. These are the two halves of the session — the criterion that enables discernment and the confidence that sustains it. If students leave with these two clearly received, you have served them well.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **John 14:16-17, 15:26-27, 16:13-15.** Jesus's farewell-discourse teaching on the Spirit of truth. Directly behind this passage.
- **1 Corinthians 12:1-3.** Paul's parallel test — no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. Related but distinct criterion.
- **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.** Paul on the man of lawlessness and the mystery of lawlessness already at work. Complementary to John's 'spirit of antichrist already in the world.'
- **Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:15-22.** Old Testament tests of prophecy. John's Christological criterion is the fulfillment of the older tests.
- **Revelation 13 and 17.** John's apocalyptic treatment of the beast/antichrist figures. Thematic continuity with 1 John on the spirit of antichrist.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **The Nicene Creed.** The Church's formal response to the Arian failure of John's Christological test. Worth reading slowly with this session in mind.
- **The Chalcedonian Definition.** The further development at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Two natures, one person, against various Christological distortions.
- **Formula of Concord, Article VIII.** The Lutheran statement on the person of Christ — how the two natures are united and how they communicate.
- **Luther, Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article I.** The chief article — Christ crucified for our sins — as the touchstone by which all teaching is evaluated.

Commentaries

- **Concordia Commentary: 1-3 John.** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment.
- **Colin Kruse, The Letters of John (PNTC).** Helpful on the Greek of 'has come in the flesh' and its doctrinal implications.
- **Karen Jobes, 1, 2, and 3 John (ZECNT).** Accessible and historically informed on the Johannine-community context.

A Final Word

You have taught a short passage that punches well above its length. The Christological test you have given your students is one of the most useful tools they will carry away from the entire study. In every decade of their remaining lives, they will encounter spiritual claims that require evaluation. The test you have taught them tonight is adequate to that task, applied faithfully and with pastoral humility.

The reassurance is equally important. Discernment without confidence produces anxious Christians, always worried whether they are doing it right. Confidence without discernment produces gullible Christians, unprotected against whatever spiritually confident voice comes their way. John gives both — the clear test and the grounded confidence. Your students need both.

Next week we move into the love passage that has been the destination of the whole letter. God is love. He loved us first. Perfect love casts out fear. The incarnation is the measure of love's depth and the source of its power in us. This is the session that gathers everything the letter has been building toward. Teach it with warmth.

May the Lord bless your teaching. May your students learn to test the spirits with the confidence of those who have received the Spirit of truth. And may the one who is in them, who is greater than the one in the world, strengthen them for every faithful witness in the generation to which they have been called.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Seven

God Is Love

1 John 4:7-21

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Seven, the great love chapter of the letter. This passage contains some of the most beloved statements in Scripture — God is love, He first loved us, perfect love casts out fear, we love because He first loved us. Your task this week is to teach these with warmth, without slipping into sentimentality.

The potential pitfall is cultural sentimentality. The word 'love' carries heavy cultural freight, and teachers sometimes treat this passage as a warm bath of feeling rather than the specific theological teaching it is. Resist this. John's love is not a feeling we summon; it is a specific gift, demonstrated in a specific event, with specific implications. Teach what he actually says, with all the concreteness he gives it.

Two places especially need care. First, 'God is love' must not be inverted into 'love is God.' The cultural temptation to use a modern sentimental definition of love as the measure by which God Himself is evaluated is strong. Make the distinction explicit — love is defined by God, specifically by the cross, not the other way around. Second, the propitiation language in verse 10 must be taught in continuity with Session One, not against the love of God. Propitiation is love's fullest expression.

Verses 17-18 ('perfect love casts out fear') deserve particular pastoral care. Many students carry fear of God's judgment that has not been released by intellectual assent to the Gospel. They know it; they have not yet rested in it. Verse 18 is medicine for them. Take time with it.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

God Himself is love — not merely loving, but love in His eternal Triune being — and He has demonstrated that love definitively in sending His Son as the propitiation for our sins; this love, received by faith and worked into us by the Spirit, produces in us the love of the brothers, makes the invisible God visible, casts out the fear of judgment, and gives us confidence for the

day of judgment because as Christ is, so also are we in this world.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Seven of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 4:7-21 multiple times. The passage has five movements: God is love (vv. 7-8), demonstration in the Son (vv. 9-10), consequence for us (vv. 11-12), Spirit and confession (vv. 13-16), love perfected and fear cast out (vv. 17-19), the final test (vv. 20-21).
- Read John 3:16 and Romans 5:6-8 — the great parallel passages on the love of God in sending the Son.
- Re-read 1 John 2:1-2. The propitiation language returns in verse 10. Continuity matters.
- Review the Small Catechism on the First Article of the Creed and on Baptism — the reality of the Spirit given connects directly to Baptism.
- Review the Athanasian Creed on the Trinity. 'God is love' has Trinitarian implications that the confessional tradition helps articulate.
- Pray — especially for students who carry fear of God that has not been released, and for students wrestling with loving difficult people.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

- **God is love in His eternal Triune being.** Not love as response to creation, but love as the eternal life of Father, Son, and Spirit.
- **The cross defines love.** Love is not a feeling we bring to God; it is a gift demonstrated in the sending of the Son as propitiation.
- **Love and propitiation are not opposed.** Propitiation is love's fullest expression. The Father is not opposed to the Son; the Triune God together accomplishes salvation.
- **The invisible God becomes visible in Christian love.** No one has seen God; but when Christians love one another, God abides in them, and the witness becomes visible.
- **Confidence for judgment.** Not from our performance but from our union with Christ — 'as He is, so also are we in this world.'

- **Perfect love casts out fear of judgment.** Specifically the fear of punishment, incompatible with the love received in Christ. Not the reverent fear of the Lord, which remains.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Teach verse 10 carefully — 'In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' Some students come in with cultural definitions of love that exclude propitiation. Show them that John explicitly makes propitiation the definition of love. The cross does not violate love; it is love in its deepest form. Get this right here and everything else falls into place.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review of Session 6
0:05–0:15	God is love — the Trinitarian claim (vv. 7-8)
0:15–0:28	The demonstration and propitiation (vv. 9-10)
0:28–0:38	Flowing love; invisible God made visible (vv. 11-12)
0:38–0:47	Spirit, confession, abiding (vv. 13-16)
0:47–0:55	Confidence for judgment; fear cast out (vv. 17-19)
0:55–0:58	The final test (vv. 20-21) and discussion
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 8 assignment



Where to Slow Down

Verses 9-10 (the demonstration with propitiation) and verses 17-18 (confidence and fear cast out) are the paired anchors. Do not rush either. The rest of the session orbits around these two.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 7-8: God Is Love

The Exhortation

John opens with exhortation and ground. Let us love one another, for love is from God. Love is given first; the exhortation follows. Christians love because they have been given the love they are called to show.

The Astonishing Statement

God is love. Three words, infinite depth. Love is not one attribute among many; it is what God is, in His essence. This has Trinitarian implications — within the eternal life of Father, Son, and Spirit, love has always existed, before any creation. When God loves us, He is acting out of what He has always been.

What This Does NOT Mean

Make this explicit. 'God is love' does not mean 'love is God.' The subject is God; the predicate is love. What love is must be defined by who God is, not the reverse. The cultural temptation to use a modern sentimental definition of love as the measure by which God Himself is evaluated inverts John's claim. Teach the proper direction.

A Cultural Formation Worth Naming

In our cultural moment, 'God is love' is often quoted to argue that since God is love, He must affirm whatever we currently understand love to require. John's claim cuts the other way. God IS love, and therefore what love is must be learned from Him, including the hard-to-receive things He actually does and commands. Name this dynamic in class. Many students have absorbed it without recognizing it.

Verses 9-10: The Demonstration

Made Manifest

The Greek means 'made visible' or 'made public.' The love of God is not an abstract idea; it is a specific historical event. God sent His only Son into the world. Datable. Historical. Concrete.

Not That We Loved God

The direction of initiative. The love did not begin with our love for God; it began with His love for us. We responded, later, to a love already in action. Paul says the same in Romans 5:8 — while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The timing matters. The love came when we were far from loving Him.

Propitiation Returns

The pastoral pivot. Propitiation, introduced in Session One (2:2), returns — and John now makes it the definition of love. 'In this is love... He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' Some students come in with a sense that propitiation contradicts love. John is saying the opposite. The propitiation IS love, at its fullest. Not an embarrassing addition to a more palatable God; the deepest demonstration of who God is.

Trinitarian Unity

The Father is not opposed to the Son. The Triune God together accomplishes salvation. The Father sends in love. The Son comes willingly in love. The Spirit applies the work in love. This is not 'cosmic child abuse'; it is the Triune God's single work of love for those who did not love Him first.

Connecting Back to Session One

Remind students that propitiation first came up in Session One. There it was introduced; here it is deepened. This is how John teaches — circling back, adding dimension. Pastoral payoff: students can now see why John kept teaching propitiation. It is not a hard doctrine to get past; it is the ground on which everything else stands.

Verses 11-12: Flowing Love; the Invisible Made Visible

If God So Loved Us

The ethical implication. Because we have been loved in this specific, costly way, we ought to love one another. The obligation flows from the gift, not from an external demand.

No One Has Seen God

A striking parenthesis. The Father is invisible. But God becomes visible through the love of Christians for one another. Where Christians love one another well, God becomes visible to the world. Where Christians fail — where bitterness, division, contempt dominate — something else becomes visible, and the witness to the invisible God is compromised. This is a high calling and a serious responsibility.

His Love Perfected

Teleioō returns. The love of God is brought to its goal when it moves through us to others. Not that we perfect God's love by our obedience; the love was given to move through us, and when it moves, it does what it was sent to do. The Christian is a conduit, not a terminus.

Verses 13-16: Spirit, Confession, Abiding

By This We Know

The Spirit is the confirming gift. We know we abide in Him because He has given us of His Spirit. Ongoing reality, not past event — the Spirit continues to be present, working through Word and Sacrament.

The Apostolic We

'We have seen and testify.' The apostolic witness returns. Christian assurance is rooted in something external — the apostolic testimony — not primarily in inner experience. This matters for Christians whose feelings fluctuate.

Known and Believed

The beautiful summary: 'We have come to know and to believe the love God has for us.' Both verbs. Experiential knowing through relationship; trusting belief by faith. Two aspects of one response.

Verses 17-19: Perfect Love and Fear Cast Out

Pastoral anchor. Slow down.

Confidence for the Day of Judgment

Parrhesia again. The Christian may have confidence on the day of judgment. Not hope, not wishing — confidence. Many Christians never expect to feel confident about the last day; John says they should.

As He Is, So Are We

The critical theological ground. Our confidence is not in our performance but in our union with Christ. What is true of Him is, by grace through faith, true of us. His righteousness is ours. His standing before the Father is ours. His relationship with the judge is ours, because He IS the judge. Union with Christ in compressed form.

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

Perfect love — love brought to its goal in us — casts out fear. What fear? John says specifically fear of punishment. The fear of being condemned at the last day. This kind of fear is incompatible with the love that has reached us in Christ.

Important Clarifications

Be careful with what John is NOT saying:

- He is not saying all fear is incompatible with Christian love. The fear of the Lord — awe and reverence — remains throughout Scripture.
- He is not saying Christians will never experience ordinary anxieties.
- He is not saying Christians always feel this confidence. He is saying it is theirs by right of what Christ has done.

The Student Who Carries Persistent Fear of God

Some students carry fear of God from early formation — a parent who used

God as a threat, a preacher who emphasized judgment without grace, a church culture that made love of God feel conditional. They have heard the Gospel but not fully rested in it. For them, teach verse 18 specifically and personally. Perfect love casts out fear. The God who loved them first, who sent His Son as the propitiation for their sins, does not stand over them as the Punisher they have feared. He stands as the Father who has called them His children. The fear can be laid down. This may be one of the most important pastoral moments in the whole volume for some students.

We Love Because He First Loved Us

The summary. The whole Christian life in one sentence. We are not originators; we are recipients and conduits. When love is hard, return to the love we have received. Out of that abiding, love for the difficult brother becomes possible again.

Verses 20-21: The Final Test

The Liar

John's sharpest statement. The one who says he loves God and hates his brother is a liar. Not merely inconsistent — a liar. The claim is incompatible with the reality.

The Argument

The brother is visible; God is not. If we fail at the easier case (loving the brother we can see), the harder case (loving the God we cannot see) is beyond us. Psychologically penetrating. Love of God can be abstract and easy; love of brother is concrete and demanding.

The Single Commandment

The two are gathered. Whoever loves God must also love his brother. One commandment with two aspects. Neither can be refused without the other being refused. This is the Johannine way of saying what James said about faith and works — they come together or they fail together.

Anticipated Questions

If God is love, why does He judge people?

Because God is love, and love that overlooks evil is not love. The love of God is not indifferent to what happens to His creatures or to the harm evil does. When someone has been abused, exploited, or destroyed by the sin of another, a God of love does not respond with shoulder-shrugging indifference. He responds with righteous judgment against the evil that has harmed His creatures. God's judgment is therefore an expression of His love, not a contradiction of it. And for Christians, the judgment we would have faced has already been borne by Christ on the cross. The Father's love sent Him; the Son's love came willingly; the judgment has been satisfied for those who are in Him.

Does 'perfect love casts out fear' mean I should never fear God?

Not quite. Scripture distinguishes two kinds of fear. One is the fear of punishment — the dread that God will reject or condemn you. This has been cast out by the love that reached you in Christ. The other is the fear of the Lord — reverent awe of God's holiness, named throughout Scripture as the beginning of wisdom. This is not cast out by love; it is deepened by love. The Christian who has been loved by God has more, not less, reverent awe of who He is. What she loses is terrified dread. What she keeps is awe appropriate to the creature before the Creator.

What about Christians who struggle with deep, persistent anxiety?

John's passage does not promise Christians will never experience anxiety. Anxiety is produced by many things — circumstances, temperament, trauma, health conditions, human finitude. What John addresses is specifically the fear of being condemned by God at the last day. Other fears and anxieties may continue in the Christian life, and dealing with them may involve pastoral care, medical help, counseling, and the ordinary means of grace. Do not allow students to hear this passage as a rebuke of ongoing anxiety struggles. That is not what John is addressing.

Is the assurance of confidence at the day of judgment presumption?

No, when grounded properly. Presumption is confidence based on our own performance — believing we will pass because we have been good enough. John's teaching is grounded not in our performance but in union with Christ. 'As He is, so also are we in this world.' The confidence is His. He has already passed through judgment on our behalf. He is the judge we will face. And He has made us His by grace through faith. Our confidence is Christ's own confidence, shared with us by union. This is not presumption; it is faith, resting in the one who has saved her.

How do I love a brother I find genuinely difficult?

You return to the love you have received. You remember that Christ loved you when you were far from Him, when you had not earned anything. The love He calls you to show is not based on the lovableness of the person; it is based on the love you have received. From this ground, practical steps become possible — prayer, patience, service, forgiveness, refusal to speak against. None of this requires warm feelings. It requires returning again to the love that first loved you and letting it flow through you. Over time, this often reshapes feelings as well. But feelings are not the prerequisite; they are sometimes the result.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. For classes with students who carry persistent fear of God that has not been fully released by the Gospel, the question on perfect love casting out fear is often the single most valuable in the entire volume — be prepared for tears. For classes more focused on applied Christian life, the questions on living from 'He first loved us' or on loving a specific difficult brother go deepest. The question on the cross defining love often produces honest reflection on what students have absorbed from the broader culture, and is valuable for recalibrating definitions. The Trinitarian question is best for theologically-inclined classes. The question on Christian community as the visible face of God is convicting and should be handled with care to avoid generalized complaint about the congregation.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- God is love, with the proper direction (not 'love is God') (vv. 7-8) — 6 minutes.
- The demonstration in sending the Son as propitiation (vv. 9-10) — 12 minutes. Do not cut.
- The invisible God made visible in Christian love (vv. 11-12) — 6 minutes.
- Perfect love casts out fear with full pastoral treatment (vv. 17-19) — 15 minutes. Do not cut.
- The final test briefly (vv. 20-21) — 4 minutes.
- Closing prayer and Session 8 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- Extended Trinitarian implications of 'God is love.' Mention briefly.
- Spirit and apostolic testimony section (vv. 13-16). Summarize in one or two sentences.
- Detailed teleioō treatment. The student book covers it.

The Single Non-Negotiable

Verses 9-10 (propitiation defining love) and verses 17-18 (perfect love casting out fear) are the paired anchors. These are the two pastoral payoffs that make this session work. Protect both at any cost.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **John 3:16.** The classic parallel on God sending the Son out of love for the world.
- **Romans 5:6-11.** Paul's treatment of God demonstrating His love while we were still sinners.
- **1 Corinthians 13.** Paul's love chapter. Different in tone and focus from John's, but a useful parallel on what love actually looks like in Christian community.
- **John 14-17.** The farewell discourse, where love, abiding, and the sending of the Spirit are developed at length.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Creed Articles I and III.** The Father's creating love and the Spirit's sanctifying work.
- **Athanasian Creed.** The Church's confession of the Trinity, foundation for 'God is love' in its Trinitarian fullness.
- **Luther, 'The Freedom of a Christian' (1520).** The classic treatment of the love that flows from faith into service of the neighbor.
- **Formula of Concord III.** On the righteousness of faith before God — foundation for the 'as He is, so also are we' confidence of verse 17.

Commentaries

- **Concordia Commentary: 1-3 John.** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment.
- **Karen Jobes, 1, 2, and 3 John (ZECNT).** Accessible and pastorally sensitive.

A Final Word

You have taught the great love chapter. If your students have come away with a recalibrated understanding of what love actually is — defined by the cross, not by the culture — and with the fear of God's judgment released because perfect love has cast it out, you have given them treasures that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

Pay particular attention to any student who may have responded with unexpected emotion during the session. Some of the pastoral territory here — particularly around fear of judgment — touches depths that cultural politeness usually keeps hidden. A private conversation after class may matter more than any content delivered in class. Be available.

Next week we move into 1 John 5:1-12, where the water, the blood, and the Spirit bear witness. This is where the sacramental theology of the letter becomes most direct — where Baptism and the Supper receive their clearest footing. For Lutheran readers, this is rich territory, and it deserves careful preparation.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the love that was demonstrated in the sending of the Son continue to cast out fear in you and your students, until the day you stand together before the judge who has loved you with an everlasting love.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know — Teacher's Guide, Session Eight

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Eight

Faith That Overcomes

1 John 5:1-12

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Eight. This is the session where the sacramental theology that has been implicit across the letter gets its most direct expression. The water and the blood of verses 6-8 are where Lutherans find the letter's clearest footing for Baptism and the Supper — both as historical references to Jesus' baptism and crucifixion, and as sacramental echoes pointing to the ongoing means of grace through which the Spirit continues to testify.

The session also brings to a head several themes that have run throughout: the new birth, the inseparability of faith and love, the keeping of commandments, and now — a new note — the overcoming of the world. Your task is to pull these threads together in a way that lets students feel the cumulative weight of John's argument. We are building toward next week's thesis verse, and the foundation is being laid now.

Two places require particular care. First, 'His commandments are not burdensome' (v. 3) will strike many students as overstated — they have found the commandments very burdensome at times. The key is explaining what the Greek word means (heavy/oppressive in the Pharisaic sense) and why Christ's commandments, though often difficult, are never ultimately crushing. Second, the three witnesses (vv. 6-8) deserve careful handling. Teach both levels — the historical (against docetism) and the sacramental (pointing to Baptism and the Supper). Both are present; both matter.

Be aware: some students may notice that verses 7-8 in older translations (KJV) contain additional Trinitarian material (the 'Johannine Comma') not present in the most reliable Greek manuscripts. If this comes up, handle it briefly and honestly — the manuscript evidence overwhelmingly supports the shorter reading of modern translations, and the Church's Trinitarian doctrine does not depend on this single disputed passage. Move on quickly.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The one born of God believes that Jesus is the Christ, loves God and His children, keeps commandments that are not burdensome, and overcomes the world by faith — and the Spirit, the water, and the blood testify together that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son, so that the one who has the Son has life.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Eight of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 5:1-12 multiple times. Notice the flow: faith-love-commandments-overcoming (vv. 1-5), the three witnesses (vv. 6-8), the testimony of God and its content (vv. 9-12).
- Read John 19:31-37 — the piercing of Jesus' side with the flow of water and blood. Background for verse 6.
- Read John 16:33 — 'I have overcome the world.' Foundation for the overcoming language in verses 4-5.
- Read Romans 8:31-39 — Paul's great passage on overcoming. Parallel theology expressed differently.
- Review the Small Catechism sections on Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The water and blood of verse 6 connect directly to the sacramental theology you have been teaching throughout the series.
- If you are familiar with the textual issue of the Johannine Comma (KJV additional material in vv. 7-8), review briefly so you can handle a question if it comes up. The quick answer: it is not in the earliest and best Greek manuscripts, it is rightly omitted by modern translations, and the Trinity does not depend on it.
- Pray, especially for students who have been feeling defeated by the world's pressures. 'Your faith is the victory' is medicine for them.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

- **The new birth precedes and produces faith.** Not faith producing the new birth, but the new birth marked by the faith it produces. Lutheran soteriology.
- **Commandments not burdensome.** Not because the Christian life is easy, but because the Spirit bears the weight with us. The contrast is with Pharisaic burdens, not with real difficulty.
- **Faith IS the victory.** Not a separate achievement following faith — the very act of continuing to believe is the overcoming of the world.

- **Water and blood — historical and sacramental.** Against docetism historically; pointing to Baptism and Supper sacramentally. Both readings true, both present.
- **Testimony of Spirit, water, and blood.** The ongoing witness in the Church through the means of grace, confirmed by the inner testimony of the Spirit in the believer.
- **Life in the Son, now.** Eternal life is a present possession, not a future reward. 'Whoever has the Son has life' — present tense.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Teach the water-and-blood passage with both layers intact. Start with the historical — John is defending against docetism, insisting that the Christ suffered at the cross in real flesh, not just appeared to. Then move to the sacramental — the water still testifies through Baptism, the blood still testifies through the Supper, the Spirit continues to bear witness through both. Do not reduce the passage to one layer or the other. Both are John; both serve the assurance that is the letter's heart.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review of Session 7
0:05–0:18	New birth, faith, love, commandments (vv. 1-3)
0:18–0:30	Commandments not burdensome; faith as victory (vv. 3-5)
0:30–0:47	The three witnesses — Spirit, water, blood (vv. 6-8)
0:47–0:55	The testimony of God; life in the Son (vv. 9-12)
0:55–0:58	Discussion (1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 9 assignment



Where to Slow Down

The three witnesses (vv. 6-8) is the sacramental high point of the whole letter for Lutheran readers. Give it the full 17 minutes. This is where the Baptism-and-Supper theology that has been implicit becomes explicit, and it deserves careful unfolding.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 1-3a: New Birth, Faith, and Love

The New Birth Precedes Faith

Key Lutheran teaching moment. Everyone who believes has BEEN born of God — past tense. The new birth precedes the faith, not the reverse. Faith is the evidence of a birth that has already occurred. This is pure grace soteriology. The Christian did not pull herself to faith; she was drawn by the Spirit's prior work.

Family Love

Love for the Father naturally extends to His children. The theme that has run throughout the letter. But note the reverse test John gives in verse 2 — we know we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments. Love for the brothers is not mere warm feeling; it is love that shares the Father's love for them, which means wanting what He wants for them.

Verses 3-5: Commandments and Overcoming

Not Burdensome — Qualified

Handle carefully. The Greek word *barys* means heavy/oppressive in the sense the Pharisees burdened people. Not 'never difficult' — often difficult. Not burdensome because the Spirit who commands is also the Spirit who enables. The commandments come with the power to keep them, given by the same Spirit. Hard sometimes; never crushing in the Pharisaic way.

Faith IS the Victory

The striking claim. Not 'faith produces victory' — faith IS the victory. Pastoral weight here. Many students feel they are not overcoming; John says the very act of continuing to believe IS the overcoming. The Christian on an ordinary hard day, still trusting Christ, is overcoming the world. The victory does not require dramatic visible triumph.

For the Defeated Christian

Some students feel defeated most days — by temptation, by cultural pressure, by the slow discouragement of ordinary Christian life in a hostile age. Verse 4-5 is medicine. Your faith — the faith that keeps holding on to Christ — IS the victory. You do not have to feel victorious. You do not have to look victorious. You are overcoming right now, because you are believing right now.

Verses 6-8: The Three Witnesses

The heart of the session. Teach in layers.

The Historical Layer: Against Docetism

The immediate context. Some of the false teachers taught that the divine Christ descended on the man Jesus at His baptism and departed before His crucifixion — came by water only, not by blood. John rejects this. Jesus Christ came by water AND blood. The same one. Divine Son at His baptism; divine Son at His cross. The atonement was real, not apparent.

The Sacramental Layer

Water and blood also have immediate sacramental resonance. Water = Baptism. Blood = Lord's Supper. The means of grace through which the Spirit continues to testify to Christ in the ongoing life of the Church.

Both Together

Do not pit these against each other. Historically, John is defending the full incarnation. Sacramentally, the Church continues to experience the witness through Baptism and the Supper. The Spirit testified at Jesus' baptism, testified at the cross, and continues to testify now through the sacramental means of grace. The witness is one, sustained across time.

The Sacramental Payoff of the Letter

This passage is where the Lutheran reading of 1 John gets its clearest footing. All the earlier language of abiding, of the seed of God abiding in us, of the Spirit given in us, of the anointing that teaches — all of this has been

pointing toward the reality of means of grace through which Christ continues to be present to His people. Here the language of water and blood makes the connection explicit. Baptism and the Supper are not afterthoughts added to Christian life; they are the ongoing places where the Spirit, the water, and the blood continue to testify to the Son.

A Brief Note on the Johannine Comma

If students notice that older KJV Bibles have additional material in these verses ('the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one'), address briefly: this material is not present in the earliest and best Greek manuscripts and is rightly omitted by modern translations. The Trinity is well-established throughout Scripture; this disputed passage is not needed. Move on.

Verses 9-12: The Testimony

A-Fortiori Argument

We accept human testimony routinely. The testimony of God is greater — cannot be biased, cannot deceive. To refuse it is to refuse a testimony more certain than any we ordinarily accept without question.

The Inner Testimony

'Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.' The Spirit's confirmation of the external witness. Outer (Word, sacraments, apostolic testimony) and inner (Spirit's confirmation in the heart) work together. Not two witnesses in competition but one witness confirmed externally and internally.

Unbelief as Calling God a Liar

Strong language John intends strongly. Refusing the Father's witness to the Son is not neutral; it is actively insisting God's testimony is untrustworthy. This is the gravity of unbelief.

Eternal Life in the Son, Now

Present tense. 'Whoever has the Son HAS life.' Not 'will have.' The eternal life is present possession for those in Christ. This sets up next week's thesis verse directly.

Anticipated Questions

If the new birth precedes faith, did I have any choice in becoming a Christian?

This is one of the longstanding theological questions, and Christian traditions have answered it somewhat differently. The Lutheran answer holds two truths together. First, salvation is entirely God's work — He draws us by His Spirit through the Word, we do not generate our own faith, and the initiative is His. Second, when He draws us, we freely respond; we do not experience ourselves as coerced. In Lutheran theology, we can resist the Spirit (and many do), but we cannot produce faith apart from His prior work. The mystery is real. What we can say for certain is that any Christian who has come to faith has been drawn by the Spirit, and her faith is the Spirit's gift rather than her own achievement. The emphasis in this passage — the new birth preceding faith — is on the giftedness of the Christian's standing, not on a denial of her real response.

How are the commandments not burdensome when I find them hard?

John's word is not that the commandments are always easy but that they are not ultimately crushing. The Greek word contrasts with Pharisaic burden — rules piled on people by those who would not lift them. Christ's commandments are different in kind. They come from the one who has already loved us, who has given His Spirit to work in us, who is Himself at work producing what He commands. When you find the commandments hard, you are not failing to have the Christian experience John describes; you are having it. What John is saying is that even in the hardness, they are not the crushing weight of a tyrant. They are the training of a Father who loves you, given with the help to keep them. Hard, yes. Crushing, no.

What are the three witnesses actually pointing to?

Probably all of these, in layers: the historical baptism and crucifixion of Jesus (against docetism); the ongoing sacraments of Baptism and the Supper (the means of grace); the Spirit's ongoing testimony through Word and sacrament. John's

language is compressed enough to include all of these. The Lutheran reading holds them together rather than choosing one. The same water that flowed from Christ's baptism now flows through Baptism; the same blood that flowed from the cross now is received in the Supper; the same Spirit who testified historically continues to testify now through both. The threefold witness is not a puzzle to be solved but a rich reality to be received.

How do I know I have the inner testimony?

Not primarily by feelings of spiritual experience, though feelings may accompany it. The inner testimony of the Spirit shows itself in the confession of Christ that remains true to you, in the continued trust in what you have believed, in the settled sense (sometimes quiet, sometimes strong) that the Gospel is true for you. If the confession of Jesus as Son of God is your confession — if you find yourself returning to it when other things shake — you are experiencing the inner testimony. It may not be dramatic. It does not need to be. The Spirit's confirmation of the apostolic witness in your heart is often a quiet but settled thing, and that quiet settledness is itself the testimony.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. For students with strong sense of failing to measure up, Question 2 (commandments not burdensome) often produces good reflection. For students feeling defeated by the world, Question 3 (faith as victory) is medicine. Question 4 (where you have experienced the witnesses) is accessible and formative, and often surfaces rich stories of Baptism and Supper. Question 6 (life as present possession) is the most pastorally forward-looking as we prepare for next week's thesis verse.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- New birth preceding faith briefly (v. 1) — 4 minutes.
- Commandments not burdensome with the qualification (v. 3) — 5 minutes.
- Faith as the victory (vv. 4-5) — 8 minutes.
- The three witnesses with both historical and sacramental layers (vv. 6-8) — 17 minutes. Do not cut.
- Life in the Son as present possession (v. 12) — 6 minutes.
- Closing prayer and Session 9 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- Extended family-love teaching (v. 2). The student book covers it.
- The testimony-of-God argument in detail (vv. 9-10). Mention briefly.
- The Johannine Comma discussion. Skip unless asked.

The Single Non-Negotiable

The three witnesses passage with the sacramental layer preserved. Cutting the sacramental reading or reducing the passage only to anti-docetic polemic would lose the theological payoff of the whole letter. Protect this at any cost.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **John 19:31-37.** The piercing of Jesus' side — blood and water flow. Direct background for verse 6.
- **John 16:33.** 'I have overcome the world.' Foundation for the overcoming of verses 4-5.
- **Romans 8:31-39.** Paul's great passage on overcoming and the love of Christ.
- **Matthew 11:28-30.** Christ's yoke is easy. Parallel to 'commandments not burdensome.'

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism on Baptism and the Lord's Supper.** The sacramental theology that the water-and-blood passage supports.
- **Large Catechism, Baptism and Sacrament of the Altar.** Luther's fuller teaching on the sacraments as means of grace.
- **Formula of Concord VII.** On the Lord's Supper — defending the real presence, which the Lutheran reading of this passage supports.

A Final Word

You have taught the session where the sacramental theology of the letter becomes explicit. The water, the blood, and the Spirit testify together — in Christ's historical baptism and cross, and in the ongoing Baptism and Supper through which the Church continues to receive what was given. Your students have been given the theological tools to see their participation in Word and sacrament as participation in the ongoing witness to Christ.

Next week we reach the thesis verse of the whole letter and the pastoral climax of the study. Prepare well. This is the verse around which the whole volume is organized, and it is the pastoral payoff students have been building toward since Session One.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood continue to confirm in your students the eternal life they already possess in the Son.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know — Teacher's Guide, Session Nine

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Nine

Confidence and Closing

1 John 5:13-21

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Nine — the pastoral climax of the entire letter and of our volume. This is the session where the thesis verse (5:13) is named directly and the whole study finds its settled center. Everything we have taught across eight previous sessions has been preparing for this verse. Your task this week is to bring the cumulative weight of the letter to rest on this single pastoral aim — that your students may know they have eternal life.

The session also brings the hardest passage in the closing — the sin leading to death (v. 16). Handle carefully. Do not let students leave with the impression that certain Christians are unprayerable-for, or that ordinary serious sins in the life of a fellow Christian fall into the 'sin leading to death' category. John's most defensible reading points to the final, decisive apostasy of the antichrists — the public rejection of Christ persisted in. Ordinary Christian sin, even serious, is emphatically NOT in this category. The pastoral rule remains: see a brother in sin, pray for him. The exception is narrow and does not cancel the rule.

The closing three 'we know' statements (vv. 18-20) deserve extended treatment. These are the settled confidences John wants his readers to carry away from the letter. Read them slowly. Let them land. The closing exhortation — 'keep yourselves from idols' — can seem surprisingly abrupt; make sure students see it is the fitting summary of the whole letter, not an afterthought. If Christ is the true God, then guarding against whatever competes with Him for ultimate loyalty is the practical upshot.

Pastorally, many students will be bringing the whole arc of nine sessions to a single point here. Some will have experienced significant growth in assurance across the study; others may still be wrestling. For both groups, the thesis verse speaks directly. You who believe may know — settled knowledge, not anxious hope. Give this verse the time it deserves.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

John's purpose in writing is that believers may know — with settled confidence, not anxious hope — that they have eternal life right now, because they have the Son; this assurance grounds confidence in prayer according to God's will, ordinary intercession for brothers in sin, settled knowledge that we are from God and protected by Christ from the evil one, and the closing practical vigilance to keep ourselves from every idol that would displace the true God we know in His Son.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Nine of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 1 John 5:13-21 multiple times. Notice the movements: thesis verse and prayer (vv. 13-15), sin leading to death (vv. 16-17), three 'we know' statements (vv. 18-20), closing exhortation (v. 21).
- Re-read the opening of the letter (1:1-4) and put it alongside the close (5:13-21). The arc of the whole letter becomes visible in this juxtaposition.
- Re-read 1 John 2:18-27 (the antichrist passage from Session Three). The sin-leading-to-death passage is best understood in light of the earlier antichrist treatment.
- Read John 17:9-19 — Jesus' high priestly prayer. The language of protection from the evil one echoes here.
- Review Augsburg Confession XX and Apology XX on faith and assurance. The Lutheran tradition of assurance is directly grounded in this verse.
- Review Luther's Galatians commentary on the promise of eternal life as present possession in Christ.
- Pray — especially for students whose assurance has not fully landed during the study, that this session might be the one where it does.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

- **Assurance as settled knowledge.** John writes so readers may KNOW, not hope. The Greek verb *oida* is strong — certainty, not anxious wondering. Perpetual spiritual uncertainty is not the normal Christian life.
- **Eternal life as present possession.** Not a future reward conditional on finishing well, but a current reality possessed now in Christ.
- **Prayer according to God's will.** Not a loophole but the recognition that mature Christian prayer is progressively shaped to want what the Father wants. Such prayer is heard and granted.
- **Sin leading to death as apostasy.** Best understood as the final decisive rejection of Christ — the sin of the antichrists. NOT ordinary serious sin in the Christian's life, which is always payable.

- **Protection of the born-of-God.** The evil one does not touch the Christian in the ultimate sense. Christ protects His own from decisive spiritual destruction.
- **Christ as the true God.** The closing statement 'He is the true God and eternal life' most likely refers to Christ — a crowning affirmation of His deity to close the letter.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Give verse 13 the weight it deserves. This is the verse that gives the whole volume its title, and your students should leave this session understanding that everything we have taught across nine sessions has been aiming at the single pastoral end named here. Let them know — and know that they know. 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.' Read it twice. Let it land.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review of Session 8
0:05–0:22	The thesis verse (v. 13) — extended
0:22–0:32	Confidence in prayer (vv. 14-15)
0:32–0:42	Sin leading to death (vv. 16-17)
0:42–0:54	Three 'we know' statements (vv. 18-20)
0:54–0:58	Keep yourselves from idols (v. 21)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 10 assignment



Where to Slow Down

Verse 13 is the pastoral climax of the whole letter. Give it the full extended segment. Do not compress this to get to other material. This is the payoff of everything you have been teaching for nine weeks.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verse 13: The Thesis Verse

I Write These Things

John is gathering the whole letter. Every teaching we have covered — fellowship, light, confession, the tests of life, children of God, love, propitiation, testing of spirits, witnesses — has been serving this aim. The letter is a single pastoral instrument, not a collection of separate teachings.

To You Who Believe

The address is to ordinary believers, not an elite class. If your students believe in the name of the Son of God, this verse is addressed directly to them. Assurance is not reserved for advanced Christians; it is available to every baptized believer.

That You May Know

The Greek verb is oida — settled knowledge, certainty. Not 'that you may hope,' not 'that you may probably have.' That you may KNOW. John is offering the settled confidence of those who know what is theirs, not the anxious wondering of those who never feel sure.

A Pastoral Reframe Worth Making

Many of your students live with ongoing uncertainty about their salvation — sometimes feeling secure, sometimes not, never quite settled. Tell them directly that this pattern of perpetual uncertainty is not the normal Christian life John is describing. Where Christians feel perpetually unsure, something has usually gone wrong — in their reception of the Gospel, in the teaching they have received, in the spiritual formation they have experienced. John's intended result is not ongoing anxiety but settled knowledge. If this study has moved them toward that knowledge, it has done the work it was meant to do.

That You Have Eternal Life

Present tense. They HAVE it now. Not 'will have' upon finishing well. This is the eternal life that is in the Son, possessed now by those who have Him. The assurance is not about future possibilities; it is about present reality in Christ.

Verses 14-15: Confidence in Prayer

Parrhesia Returns

The same confidence word we have met repeatedly. The Christian who knows she has eternal life also has a particular confidence in prayer — the confidence of a child with her Father who has already given her the greatest gift.

According to His Will

Not a loophole. The qualifier is the recognition that mature Christian prayer is progressively shaped to want what the Father wants. The young Christian prays mostly for her own comfort; the maturing Christian prays increasingly for God's purposes. The prayer aligned with His will is heard and granted.

Present-Tense Possession

'We have the requests we have asked.' Present tense. The Christian aligned with God's will can rest in the assurance that the prayer has been heard and granted, even before the visible outworking is complete. Faith's confidence does not require immediate visible confirmation.

Verses 16-17: Sin Leading to Death

The difficult passage. Teach carefully.

The Pastoral Context

Remember Session Three. False teachers have departed from the community into a teaching that denies Christ. John called them antichrists, said their departure showed they were never truly of the community. This background is essential for reading the sin-leading-to-death passage.

The Most Defensible Reading

The sin leading to death is the final, decisive rejection of Christ — the sin of the antichrists, persisted in to the end. This sin places the sinner outside the fellowship

where forgiveness is received, because the One who forgives is the One being rejected. This is not a pronouncement about any specific living individual's eternal state (which only God sees); it is a statement about the category.

The Pastoral Rule Remains

For the overwhelming majority of pastoral situations, the rule holds: see a brother in sin, pray for him, God will give him life. The exception about sin leading to death does NOT license Christians to refuse prayer for specific people — family members who have left the faith, friends persisting in serious sin, loved ones hostile to Christ. These are all still within the ordinary category of Christians praying for those whose spiritual state concerns them.

Critical Pastoral Note

Do not let this passage become a reason for Christians to give up praying for someone. John's exception is narrow and theological; it is not a blanket license for Christians to divide living people into 'prayable' and 'unprayable' categories. Teach this explicitly in class. If a student has a loved one whose spiritual state concerns them, the appropriate response is still to pray for them — trusting the outcome to God, but not abandoning the intercession. Only God sees the final state of any living person. Our task is to pray while there is breath.

Verses 18-20: Three Things We Know

We Know 1 — The Born-of-God Are Kept

The one born of God does not keep on sinning (Session Four's teaching returns) — and he is protected. Christ Himself protects the one born of God. The evil one does not touch him. Not that the Christian feels no spiritual pressure — but the ultimate destructive assault is excluded. Christ guards His own.

We Know 2 — We Are From God

The binary returns. We are from God; the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Blunt and theologically serious. The fallen human order is under alien occupation. The Christian is an outpost of a different kingdom. But her belonging is settled — 'we are from God.'

We Know 3 — The Son Has Come

The fullest of the three. The incarnation affirmed once more. Understanding given. Knowledge of the true God provided. Location of the Christian in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. And the striking closing — 'He is the true God and eternal life.' Most commentators take this as referring to Christ, making the close of the letter an explicit affirmation of Christ's deity. A fitting summit.

Verse 21: Keep Yourselves from Idols

Not Abrupt — Fitting

The ending can seem sudden. It is actually the fitting practical summary. If Christ is the true God, then anything competing for ultimate loyalty is an idol. The whole letter's argument reduces to this practical exhortation: stay with Him, guard against whatever would displace Him.

Modern Application

Idols in our day take many forms — spiritual alternatives, cultural values, personal ambitions, material securities, religious experiences treated as more important than Christ. Whatever form they take, the warning applies. Guard what you have. Do not let anything displace the Christ who is the true God and eternal life.

Anticipated Questions

How can I know for sure I have eternal life?

Through what John has been teaching across the whole letter. You know because you believe in the name of the Son of God (v. 13 itself names this). You know because the Spirit has given you the confession of Christ that cannot be made by those not from God (Session Six). You know because you love the brothers, however imperfectly (Sessions Five and Seven). You know because the testimony of Spirit, water, and blood is present in your Christian life (Session Eight). You know because the testimony of God concerning His Son is in you, and you believe it. These together give you the ground of assurance. It does not require that you feel certain every moment; it rests on what is objectively true of you in Christ, which remains true when your feelings fluctuate.

What if my sin is the sin leading to death?

If you are worried about it, you are almost certainly not committing it. The sin leading to death, in the most defensible reading, is the final decisive rejection of Christ — the sin of those who have apostatized and are persisting in the rejection. Christians who wrestle with specific sins, who grieve their failures, who continue to confess and receive forgiveness, are not in this category. Ordinary Christian sin, even serious sin, is always forgivable when confessed. The sin leading to death is characterized by its hardened refusal of Christ, not by its severity. If you are concerned about your sin and returning to Christ, John's entire letter addresses you — with confession and cleansing, with the advocate and the propitiation, with the forgiveness that remains available. Rest in that.

Does 'according to His will' mean I'll never get what I ask for?

Not at all. The qualifier is not restrictive but descriptive. It describes the kind of prayer that is characteristic of the mature Christian whose desires are being shaped by God — and such prayers are heard and granted. You may not immediately know what God's will is in every situation you pray about. That is fine. Pray honestly for

what concerns you, entrusting the outcome to God, and over time your prayer life will be shaped toward alignment with His purposes. Some of your prayers will receive what you asked; some will receive something different but better; some will receive no for reasons you may not understand. All of them are heard, all of them matter, and all of them contribute to the ongoing communion with the Father that prayer is.

What are modern idols?

Anything that competes with Christ for ultimate loyalty. Sometimes religious — alternative spiritualities, teachings that promise depth beyond ordinary Christian life, experiences treated as more important than the Gospel. Sometimes cultural — political movements, ideological commitments, identity markers that become more foundational than Christian identity. Sometimes personal — career, relationships, material security, comfort, social acceptance. Sometimes even 'Christian' things — a particular tradition, a particular teacher, a particular spiritual practice — that become more important than Christ Himself. John's warning is broad. Anything that displaces Christ from the center is an idol. The practical discipline is continual return to Him — in Word, in worship, in Sacrament, in prayer — so that whatever else might compete cannot establish itself as ultimate.

What happens when the feeling of assurance fades?

It often does. Christian assurance is not a constant feeling; it is a settled reality that sometimes is felt clearly and sometimes is obscured by circumstances, mental state, or spiritual assault. When the feeling fades, the reality does not change. You still have eternal life, because you still have the Son, because the Son has been given to you objectively. What you do in the fading of feeling is what Christians have always done — return to the means of grace, to Scripture, to worship, to the sacraments, to prayer, to the fellowship of believers. The feeling often returns through these. And when it does not immediately return, you can stand on the objective reality of what Christ has done for you, confident that your standing does not depend on your current emotional state. This is one of the most important Christian disciplines — resting on objective truth when subjective feeling is thin.

Leading the Discussion

Pick one question. Question 1 (what assurance has meant across the study) is the most fitting for this climactic session — letting students reflect on how the volume has shaped them. Question 4 (living with Christ's protection) and Question 6 (idols most tempting you now) are the most pastorally searching. Question 3 (sin leading to death in practical application) requires care but can produce needed clarity if students are worried about the passage. Question 5 (the world in the power of the evil one) is the starkest; reserve for classes ready to engage the claim seriously.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- The thesis verse with full extended treatment (v. 13) — 15 minutes. Do not cut.
- Confidence in prayer briefly (vv. 14-15) — 6 minutes.
- Sin leading to death with the pastoral rule preserved (vv. 16-17) — 8 minutes.
- Three 'we know' statements (vv. 18-20) — 12 minutes.
- Keep yourselves from idols briefly (v. 21) — 4 minutes.
- Closing prayer and Session 10 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- Extended treatment of each 'we know' statement. Present all three together.
- Detailed unpacking of 'according to His will.' Mention briefly.
- Discussion.

The Single Non-Negotiable

Verse 13 with the full extended treatment. This is the pastoral climax of the entire letter and the entire volume. Cutting this to make room for other material would be cutting the heart. Protect it at all costs.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **John 20:30-31.** The Gospel's thesis verse — 'these are written so that you may believe.' Parallel to the letter's thesis verse.
- **John 17.** Jesus' high priestly prayer. The protection of the disciples from the evil one echoes here.
- **Romans 8:28-39.** Paul's great assurance passage. Parallel theology expressed differently.
- **Matthew 12:31-32.** The sin against the Holy Spirit. Useful companion passage for the sin-leading-to-death question.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Augsburg Confession XX.** On faith and good works — including the assurance of faith.
- **Apology of the Augsburg Confession XX.** Melancthon's extended defense of the assurance of faith.
- **Luther, Galatians Commentary (1535).** Contains Luther's classic treatment of the assurance of faith.
- **Small Catechism on the Lord's Prayer.** The framework for prayer 'according to His will.'

A Final Word

You have reached the pastoral climax of the volume. If your students leave this session with settled confidence that they have eternal life — not anxious hope, but settled knowledge — you have given them what John aimed at when he wrote. This is one of the most important pastoral gifts any teacher can give.

Pay attention to students whose assurance has grown visibly across the study, and to students whose assurance is still thin. Both groups matter. For the former, celebrate quietly with them. For the latter, make yourself available for continued conversation. Sometimes the breakthrough comes in a private moment after a class, not in the class itself.

Next week we close the volume with the brief capstone on 2 and 3 John. The work is almost done. Prepare well for the final session. It has a different character than the ones that came before, but it has its own pastoral weight, and it gives us our last glimpse of the same apostle we have come to know across these nine sessions.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may your students carry with them, for the rest of their lives, the settled knowledge that they have eternal life in the Son who was given for them.



Soli Deo Gloria

That You May Know

Teacher's Guide

Session Ten

The Elder Writes

2 John and 3 John

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to the final session of *That You May Know*. You have walked your class through the long weight of 1 John, tracing the assurance theme from the prologue's apostolic witness through the thesis verse and closing exhortation. This capstone session brings the volume to a close by handling the two short letters — 2 John and 3 John — and by gathering the whole arc of the study into a final word.

The two short letters, though brief, repay careful attention. 2 John, written to a specific congregation (addressed as 'the elect lady'), insists on the inseparability of truth and love and warns against deceivers who deny Christ come in the flesh. 3 John, written to Gaius, contrasts two patterns of congregational life — the hospitality and faithfulness of Gaius and Demetrius with the domineering self-promotion of Diotrephes. Together these letters give a concentrated picture of the apostle's ongoing pastoral oversight of the churches of Asia Minor.

This session has a dual character. On one hand, it handles 2 and 3 John as biblical texts that deserve their own teaching. On the other hand, it gathers the whole nine-session study into a final pastoral word. Your time allocation should reflect both functions — enough time to actually teach 2 and 3 John, and enough time to give the volume a real close.

The pastoral opportunity this week is the opportunity to send your class forward. They have spent ten weeks with the apostle John. They have been formed by his pastoral voice. They have received the assurance he wrote to give. Now they go back into ordinary life. Your teaching this week should help them carry the work forward — into their reading of Scripture, into their participation in the Church, into the specific circumstances of their own lives.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The short letters of John show the apostle's pastoral voice in concrete application — insisting on truth and love held together (2 John), naming the faithful and the unfaithful in congregational life (3 John) — and in this final

session the nine-week arc of our study gathers into a final word: the assurance John wrote to give is now yours, and it goes with you from this study into the ordinary days of Christian life ahead.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Ten of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read 2 John and 3 John in their entirety — twice each. Both are short enough to read in a single sitting.
- Re-read 1 John 2:18-27 (Session Three) and 1 John 4:1-6 (Session Six). The 'deceivers who do not confess Christ come in the flesh' language in 2 John echoes these passages directly.
- Review Acts 18:24-28. The pattern of itinerant Christian teachers being received into congregations (Apollos arriving at Ephesus) is the backdrop for 3 John's teaching on hospitality.
- Review Romans 16:1-2. The commendation letter for Phoebe is another example of the kind of apostolic commendation Gaius is praised for honoring in 3 John.
- Think through the arc of the whole volume — how Sessions 1-9 have built the assurance theme. Coming into the final session with a clear sense of where your students have been will help you bring the study to a close well.
- Pray — particularly for the students who have been faithful through the whole study, and for the ones who have joined partway or who have struggled to engage. The last session is a chance to address all of them.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

- **Truth and love are inseparable.** 2 John grounds love in truth and truth in love. Neither can be separated without losing both. This is a useful correction to modern tendencies to pit them against each other.
- **Deceivers must be refused hospitality.** 2 John's strong teaching that those who deny Christ come in the flesh are not to be welcomed into the home as traveling teachers. This is specific to the situation of ancient itinerant teachers, but has implications for our own discernment.
- **Hospitality is a Christian calling.** 3 John's praise of Gaius for welcoming traveling brothers shows hospitality as essential to the Church's mission. The itinerant preachers depend on such welcome.

- **Church leadership that refuses apostolic oversight is dangerous.** Diotrephes provides the cautionary example. A church leader who 'loves to be first,' refuses to welcome apostolic messengers, and excommunicates those who do is functioning against the apostolic church.
- **The assurance remains.** As the volume closes, the settled knowing that the Christian has eternal life — the thesis of 1 John 5:13 — goes forward with the reader into ordinary life. This is not the end of assurance; it is the beginning of living out of it.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Hold the capstone function together with the actual teaching of 2 and 3 John. Some teachers, given a final session, either over-teach the short letters and lose the capstone, or over-teach the capstone and shortchange the letters. Aim for both. 2 and 3 John deserve genuine attention as biblical texts; the volume deserves a real close. The time plan below gives roughly 35 minutes to the two letters and 20 minutes to the capstone work — adjust if your class needs a different balance, but do not lose either function.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session 9
0:05–0:10	Introduction to the short letters
0:10–0:25	2 John — truth, love, and the deceivers
0:25–0:40	3 John — Gaius, Diotrephes, Demetrius
0:40–0:55	Capstone: gathering the nine-week arc
0:55–0:58	Discussion (1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and sending forth



Where to Slow Down

The capstone section (0:40-0:55) is where the whole volume gets its real close. Do not rush it even if the time is tight. This is the segment students will carry forward into the rest of their lives. The two letters are important; the capstone may matter more.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Introduction to the Short Letters

Why These Are in the New Testament

2 and 3 John are the two shortest books in the New Testament — 13 verses and 14 verses respectively. Some ancient Christians questioned whether they belonged in the canon because of their brevity and private character. But the Church's long witness is that they are apostolic, pastorally rich, and essential to the canonical picture of John's ministry.

The Voice of the Elder

Both letters open with 'The elder' — John identifying himself by his pastoral office rather than by his apostolic title. This is the voice of the aged apostle, the last of the Twelve, pastoring the churches of Asia Minor in his final years. The tone is warm, personal, and decisive. The concerns are specific. The pastoral care is direct.

The Historical Situation

Both letters come from the same congregations and circumstances as 1 John. The same false teachers are in view. The same concerns about truth, love, and church life dominate. These are not separate problems; they are the same situation seen from different angles. 1 John addresses the large pastoral issues theologically. 2 and 3 John address specific people and situations in concrete terms.

2 John — Truth, Love, and the Deceivers

The Address

To 'the elect lady and her children' — most likely a specific congregation personified as a lady, though some interpreters have read it as an individual woman. Either way, John writes as pastor to his flock. 'Elect' picks up the same theme we saw in 1 Peter — chosen by God, belonging to Him.

Truth and Love Held Together

The letter's heart. Verse 1 — 'whom I love in truth.' Verse 3 — 'grace, mercy and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.' Verse 4 — 'walking in truth.' Verse 5 — 'that we love one another.' Verse 6 — 'this is love, that we walk according to his commandments.' Truth and love interweave through the letter in a way that makes their inseparability unmistakable.

The Modern Inversion

Our cultural moment often pits truth and love against each other. Love is treated as acceptance without conviction; truth is treated as harsh without warmth. John rejects this inversion. For him, love that abandons truth is not love; truth that is delivered without love is not the truth Christ has given. The Christian stance toward the world holds both — truth with love, love with truth — as a single reality.

A Useful Teaching Formulation

Here is a formulation worth giving the class: 'Truth without love is not the truth Christ came to bear. Love without truth is not the love Christ came to show. The Christian life holds both, because Christ is Himself the truth and love of God — and to separate them is to lose Him.' This compact statement captures John's teaching and applies directly to the contemporary cultural challenge.

The Deceivers

Verses 7-11. The same false teachers from 1 John. Those who do not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh. John calls them deceivers and antichrists — strong language he has used before. And he gives specific pastoral counsel: do not receive them into the house, do not give them any greeting. Whoever greets such a one takes part in their wicked works.

Not Rudeness — Refusal of Hospitality

This passage has been misused to justify harsh or unloving treatment of non-Christians. That is not what John is saying. The specific cultural context involved itinerant Christian teachers who traveled from congregation to congregation,

staying in Christian homes, receiving support, and teaching in the churches they visited. To 'receive into the house' was specifically to sponsor such a teacher's ministry. John's counsel is that deceivers who deny Christ are not to be welcomed in this capacity — not to be sponsored, not to be platformed, not to be supported in their teaching ministry. This is specific to the reception of teachers, not a general rule against any kind of contact with non-Christians.

Modern Application

The modern application is about platforming. Christians are not called to invite those who deny Christ to teach in their churches, publish through their ministries, preach from their pulpits, or be sponsored by their resources. This is not hostility toward those teachers as individuals; it is refusal to give them the specific support that would extend their influence in the Church. The line is narrower than some modern applications of the passage, but it is real and it matters.

3 John — Gaius, Diotrephes, Demetrius

The Three Characters

3 John is structured around three named persons. Gaius, the beloved recipient, commended for his faithfulness and hospitality. Diotrephes, a church leader who has rejected John's authority and excommunicates those who welcome the traveling brothers. Demetrius, a person with a good reputation from all, commended by John. The letter moves from praise (Gaius) to warning (Diotrephes) to further commendation (Demetrius).

Gaius and Hospitality

Verses 1-8. John praises Gaius for welcoming traveling brothers — Christian teachers and missionaries moving between congregations. This was essential work in the early Church; such travelers could not stay in pagan inns for practical and moral reasons and depended on Christian hospitality. Gaius's welcome is part of the mission, not peripheral to it. 'We ought to support such people, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.' The one who welcomes advances the work.

Diotrephes and Domination

Verses 9-10. The dark contrast. Diotrephes 'loves to be first' among the congregation, does not acknowledge John's authority, refuses to welcome the

brothers, and excommunicates those who do. This is a portrait of congregational leadership gone wrong — a leader whose primary concern is his own position rather than the apostolic gospel, his own authority rather than submission to apostolic teaching, his control rather than welcome of the broader ministry of the Church.

A Pastoral Warning Across Centuries

The Diotrephes pattern recurs across church history. Pastors, elders, and lay leaders have at times cultivated control over their congregations that resists outside voices, excommunicates dissenters, and treats the church as their own rather than Christ's. John's warning is pointed. Diotrephes will answer for what he has done. The congregation suffers under such leadership. And the apostle names the problem openly rather than letting it continue unaddressed.

Demetrius and Good Witness

Verses 11-12. The positive closure. Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone, from the truth itself, and from the apostolic circle. A model of Christian faithfulness. 'Whoever does good is from God.' The Christian whose life bears the mark of good and whose witness is affirmed by the apostolic community is the person to imitate, in contrast to Diotrephes.

Capstone: Gathering the Nine-Week Arc

Now you come to the volume's real close. Spend the full time your plan allows on this segment.

What We Have Studied

Walk the class briefly through the arc. The prologue's apostolic grounding (Session 1). The tests of life (Session 2). The antichrist spirit and the anointing (Session 3). The children of God and the sin tension (Session 4). The love-of-brother teaching with the cross as the definition (Session 5). Testing the spirits (Session 6). The great love chapter with propitiation as love's fullest expression (Session 7). The water, blood, and Spirit — sacramental testimony (Session 8). The thesis verse and closing exhortation against idols (Session 9). This week — the short letters and the volume's close (Session 10).

The Assurance Theme

The theme that has driven the whole study. John wrote 'that you may know.' The Christian reader of 1 John can know, with settled confidence, that she has eternal life. This is not presumption; it is the gift John pressed into his readers' hands. And it is the gift that now, by the grace of the Lord, has been pressed into your students' hands through the weeks of your teaching.

What Goes Forward

Help your students understand that the study's end is not the assurance's end. The assurance they have received is a possession they carry forward into the rest of their lives. When their faith feels weak, they return to what they have learned. When their hearts condemn them, they remember that God is greater than their hearts. When the cultural pressure weighs heavy, they remember that greater is He who is in them. When fear of judgment rises, they remember that perfect love casts out fear. The apostle's voice has been heard for ten weeks; now it continues to speak in the settled understanding that has been worked into them.

A Word for Teachers

If you are teaching this session, you are yourself a Gaius or a Demetrius in John's sense — a person whose faithful service extends the apostolic Gospel to others. The volume ends by affirming your own work. You have taught well if your students have been helped to know they have eternal life. You have served the Lord you love. You have helped advance the truth. This is not small. It is exactly the work John commends.

A Final Pastoral Word Worth Saying Aloud

As the study closes, tell your students something like this: 'What you have received across these ten weeks goes with you. The assurance John wrote to give is now yours. When doubt comes, return to what you have learned. When fear comes, return to what you have learned. When the world presses against you, return to what you have learned. You have eternal life, right now, because you have the Son. And the Son is with you, through every ordinary day, until you see Him face to face. Go in peace.'

Anticipated Questions

Was 'the elect lady' in 2 John an individual woman or a congregation?

Most modern scholars and the majority of the interpretive tradition read 'the elect lady' as a congregation personified as a lady, with 'her children' being the members. Several reasons support this: the letter's concerns are congregational, not individual; the closing greeting from 'the children of your elect sister' fits best as greetings from one congregation to another; and addressing an individual woman as 'the elect lady' would be unusual in the Greco-Roman context. But some interpreters have read it as an individual, and the letter could work either way. The teaching of the letter does not depend on resolving this question.

How does the 'do not welcome them into the house' command apply today?

The specific historical situation involved itinerant Christian teachers who traveled from congregation to congregation, depending on Christian hospitality for their ministry. 'Welcoming into the house' meant specifically sponsoring their teaching work. The command is not a general rule against any contact with non-Christians; it is a refusal to sponsor, platform, or support the teaching ministry of those who deny Christ. In modern terms, this would apply to whether a Christian church hosts a speaker, publishes through a Christian ministry, preaches from a Christian pulpit, or is sponsored by Christian resources — not to ordinary friendly contact, neighborhood relationships, or even theological conversation with non-Christians. The line is narrower than some applications have suggested, but it is real.

What do we make of Diotrephes? Has his pattern continued in church history?

Yes, unfortunately. The Diotrephes pattern — a church leader who loves to be first, refuses accountability to broader Christian authority, and excommunicates those who question him — has recurred many times across church history. From medieval abuses of ecclesiastical power to modern examples of authoritarian

pastoral leadership, the pattern John describes is depressingly familiar. The value of 3 John for us is that it names the pattern clearly and places it within the apostolic witness. Christians are warned. Congregations are given tools to recognize the problem. And the broader apostolic church (in various forms across traditions) retains the authority to address such leadership when it arises.

The volume is ending. What comes next for me as a reader?

Several things. First, keep the book. Return to it across the years as needed. The sessions are written to be readable again and again, and the themes continue to yield fresh understanding on repeated readings. Second, pay attention to where 1 John's themes appear elsewhere in Scripture. Having worked through the letter carefully, you will notice its echoes in John's Gospel, in Peter's letters, in Paul's writings, and in Revelation. Third, carry the assurance forward into ordinary Christian life. The knowing that you have eternal life is meant to shape how you live, pray, love, and face the ordinary challenges of your days. Fourth, if you are teaching others, pass on what you have received. The Gospel has come to us through apostolic witness precisely to be passed on, and the teaching of Scripture to the next generation is essential Christian work. If you have been taught well, you have been equipped to teach.

What if I got to the end of this study and I'm still not sure I have eternal life?

This is worth addressing pastorally if any students raise it. First, the uncertainty itself may be evidence of a tender conscience — the kind of spiritual sensitivity John addresses when he says God is greater than our hearts. Second, the test John gives is not complex: do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh? If yes, you have the faith John says is the mark of the new birth, and the letter's promise is for you. Third, if you have particular sins you have not confessed, confess them — John has been clear that the blood of Christ cleanses. Fourth, if this is a persistent wrestling, talk with a pastor or trusted Christian friend. Some students carry long-term spiritual struggles that benefit from one-on-one care. None of this should be carried in isolation. And fifth, the knowing John describes is itself given by the Spirit — it is not a performance you achieve but a gift you receive. Keep asking for it. Keep walking in the Word and Sacraments.

The Spirit who has brought you this far is faithful to bring the knowing to completion in His time.

Leading the Discussion

Given the capstone character of this session, the discussion should serve the closing well. Consider one of the following approaches depending on your class.

For a reflective close, ask something like: 'As we end this study, what has most deepened in you across these ten weeks? What will you carry forward?' This is open-ended and lets students speak from where they actually are.

For a substantive theological close, ask something like: 'John's letter is about assurance. Where are you now in the knowing John wrote to give? What still needs to be worked in?' This keeps the theological content of the study in view.

For a forward-looking close, ask something like: 'John ends with keep yourselves from idols. As you go from this study, what particular idol do you most need to keep yourself from? What does that look like practically?' This connects the study to ordinary life.

For a community-focused close, ask something like: 'The short letters show truth and love inseparable, hospitality valued, and domination warned against. What does our congregation need to become to better reflect what John commends?' This brings the apostolic witness to bear on your specific community.

A Recommendation

Any of these will work. The key is to leave time for actual conversation rather than rushing through so you can get to the closing prayer. Students often say their most important things in the final minutes of a final session. Be available to hear them.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- Brief introduction to the short letters (3 minutes).
- 2 John — truth and love inseparable, deceivers refused platforming (12 minutes).
- 3 John — Gaius, Diotrephes contrast, Demetrius briefly (12 minutes).
- Capstone — gathering the nine-week arc, assurance as present possession (13 minutes). Do not cut.
- One discussion question.
- Closing prayer and sending.

Cut or Compress

- Detailed historical background on itinerant teachers. Mention briefly.
- Extended treatment of Demetrius. One sentence is enough.
- Detailed introduction to the short letters. Compress to one minute.

The Single Non-Negotiable

The capstone segment. If you reach the end of class without having closed the volume well, your students leave without the frame that integrates everything they have received. Protect the capstone at any cost. Even if you have to run 2 minutes over, make sure the sending is done.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Acts 18:24-28.** Apollos arriving at Ephesus — an example of the itinerant teacher pattern behind 3 John.
- **Romans 16:1-2.** Paul's commendation of Phoebe — another example of apostolic commendation letters.
- **1 Corinthians 16:10-11.** Paul's instructions about receiving Timothy — the kind of welcome 3 John commends.
- **Hebrews 13:1-2.** Show hospitality to strangers — the broader biblical theme behind 3 John's specific instruction.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Table of Duties.** The callings of pastors and hearers, relevant to 3 John's concerns about right congregational life.
- **Augsburg Confession VII-VIII.** On the Church and what makes a true church. Relevant to the Diotrephes warning.
- **Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope.** The Lutheran Reformers' treatment of church authority gone wrong. A deeper historical application of the Diotrephes warning.

For the Whole Volume

- **Concordia Commentary: 1-3 John.** The standard confessional Lutheran treatment of all three letters.
- **Karen Jobes, 1, 2, and 3 John (ZECNT).** Accessible, pastorally sensitive commentary covering all three letters.
- **Luther's sermons on the Epistles of John.** Available in the Weimar edition; selections in English in Luther's Works. Luther preached on John with deep warmth.

A Final Word

You have taught the full volume. Ten weeks with the apostle John. Your students have walked through the prologue, the tests of life, the antichrist spirit, the children of God, the love-of-brother teaching, the testing of spirits, the great love chapter, the sacramental testimony, the thesis verse, and now the short letters and the sending. They have been shaped by the apostolic voice. They have received the assurance John wrote to give. And now they go forward with what they have received.

Pay attention, in these final minutes, to any student who seems ready to say something. Some of the most important pastoral conversations in a long study come at the end, when the reflection of ten weeks has accumulated and something finally comes to the surface. Be available. Stay after class. Follow up in the days ahead. The ministry of teaching is not complete when the last session ends; it continues in the relationships that have been built across the weeks.

The volume now goes to press as part of a series. Grace Free Lutheran Church and churches like it will use it for Bible study, and Christians who may never meet you will be served by what you have prepared. This is the normal way the Church has always worked. Faithful teachers prepare faithful material, which serves students who become faithful themselves, who in turn serve others. You are part of that chain, and the chain continues.

Volume 3 is complete. The four-volume series — James on faith and works, 1 Peter on exile and hope, 1-3 John on assurance and love, and Hebrews on Christ and high priesthood — now stands three-quarters finished. Volume 4 awaits. But this volume is done. Rest in what has been accomplished. Be grateful for the gift. And let the Spirit continue what the written word has begun.

May the Lord bless you, the one teaching, and may the assurance the apostle John wrote to give be deepened in your students and in you, until the day we all see Him face to face.



Soli Deo Gloria