

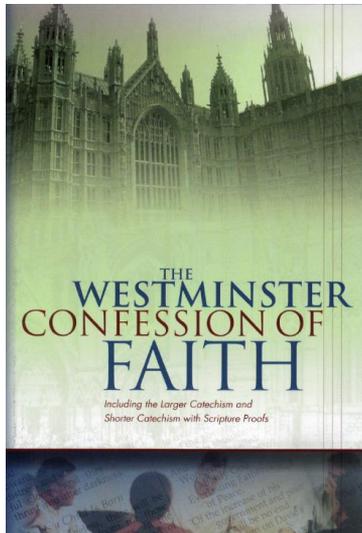
April 2018 Bible Reading Plan

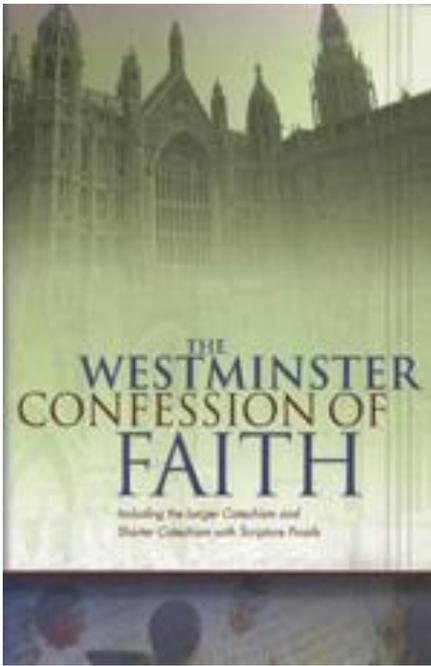
1, 2 & 3 John and Jude

And the Westminster Standards

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Jude 1:1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: ² May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. ³ Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.





The Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms are perhaps the finest confessional statements of Biblical Teaching available to us. They were developed by some of the godliest men who lived at that time. Yet they remain unfamiliar to many of us even though they are in most of our homes. My hope is that over the next number of months, that will change, and each of us will realize the rich resource we have in our Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger & Shorter Catechisms.

From the Pastor:

This month we will cover 1, 2, & 3 John and Jude, books which reflect the necessity to address false teaching that was encroaching upon the Church. The Church has always battled false teaching, even in the Old Testament era, both from the world without, and the from false teachers within. It is not really surprising, considering that we do not get beyond the 3rd chapter of Genesis before man's first encounter with the lies of the evil one.

My intent has been to encourage us to take our Westminster Confession/Catechisms off the shelf, and actually use them in our daily Bible reading. They are very rich and doctrinally solid statements. In a day when doctrine is not greatly appreciated by many, and when precision is considered unnecessary, we are deeply in need of a concise and accurate statement of doctrine that is rooted solidly in that revelation that God has given by his Spirit to the Church to be the only infallible rule of faith (what we believe) and practice (how we are to live).

Our great Enemy and the destroyer of souls, the one who has brought us under a curse through his temptations and lies, would like nothing better than to keep us from the truth God has given us in the Scriptures. And because he holds sway over "the sons of disobedience," whose thinking and ways have such incredible influence over "the course of this world" (Ephesians 2:1-3), we desperately need a word from our Creator! And we

have it in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (*Timothy 3:16-17*)

However, although we possess this treasure freely, it is not given us in a manner to spoon feed us. It is given in a manner that challenges us to dig and labor to bring together its teachings in a coherent manner that satisfies the demands of our finite minds for clear and fairly comprehensive systematic statements, rather than scattered fragments that do not allow us – or most of us – to gain an adequate understanding to undermine the subtleties of our Enemy and of the world through which he works.

For that reason, we are most privileged that some of the godliest and most Biblically astute men of a great era have given to us -- through long hours and days over several years – the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms to aid us in understanding the whole counsel of God.

We have been so influenced by our culture, that we have often neglected these treasures and fallen prey to the fuzziness of head that enables the forces of evil to prevail all too much in our minds and hearts. We are exhorted by the apostle Paul to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds” (Romans 12:2) by that “truth [that] is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21).

I know of no better way to help you do that than to encourage you to read the Scriptures, and to stimulate you to use the Westminster Confession and Catechisms to aid you in understand the teachings scattered over the pages of those Scriptures.

That is a legacy I would like to leave behind!

Bill Tyson, pastor

PRAYING FOR OUR MISSIONARIES

1. Apologetics Resource Center (ARC); Partners in Asian Ministries (PAM/India). Rev Clete Hux, Director. Great salary shortfall for several months, office relocation expenses, remodeling expenses to create library and study/research area.
2. Ronda Coon Women's Home/Family Life Ministries, FWB. Long-term persistence, assistance and support for women in crisis pregnancy, protection of unborn and newborn babies. Wishes to speak to WPC congregation.
3. Good News Jail & Prison Ministry. Chaplains John Lennon & Josiah Allredge, Okaloosa County Jail. Praise for WPC graders of inmates' Bible Studies. Will you help? To become a grader, *e-mail* ablacks657@aol.com.
4. Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF), Cyprus, Pastor Victor Atallah. Teaching bush-pastors, using free Internet in multi-language broadcasts, reaching places where Christian pastors cannot go. Prayer: Safety for new believers.
5. Presbyterian & Reformed Commission on Chaplains (PRCC). Pray for fruitful Spiritual counseling. Praise for the men in new assignments, support for deployed military and their families.
6. Brenda Carter, MTW, San Yi, Taiwan. Brenda had a 'welcome home' at a ladies weekend at a Hot Springs Retreat. Pray for God's leading in her decisions about where can serve.
7. Rev. Chuck & Wyema, MTW, church planting and growth in Europe. Chuck spent several months traveling and filling the gap left by a couple on HMA. Pray for improved Farsi language skills.
8. Rev Clay and Darlene Quarterman, MTW/Kiev, Ukraine. President, Evangelical Reformed Seminary. On HMA. They will be at WPC on April 22 to speak and have lunch after service. Pray for the end to Russian aggression. Return to Ukraine late 2018.
9. David & Jan, Enterprise/MTW/Europe. Supports new church plants across the Atlantic. Praise for whole family who was able to celebrate Holidays for David & Jan's 40th anniversary.
10. David and Jill Martin, MTW/Odessa, Ukraine. Teaches missionary kid and some local children. Praise for the school's progress, the dedicated students. Pray for end to Russian aggression.

11. David & Marcia, MTW/Europe. HMA through May 2018. They are speakers for WPC Missions Conference 9-11 March. Praying for their finances and return to the field. Likes to visit local Mosques.
12. Manila, Philippines, pastoral support for church plants and outreach in depressed areas. Pray for Grace, humility, friendship, warm relations, safety and teachable hearts.
13. OneChild Ministry, Ang Bahay Parola (The Lighthouse), Manila, Philippines. children Leah Andaya and Marvin Evangelista are in the care of ABP Hom. Pray for loving house parents and safety.
14. Kiev, Ukraine Seminary/MTW. Seminary students' support. Pray for greatly needed facility for seminary/dormitory/library.
15. Perry & Betty, MTW/Mediterranean. Perry lectures at nearby universities. They battle papal comments like: "*There are those who believe they can have a personal, direct relationship with Jesus Christ outside of the communion and mediation of the church. These temptations are dangerous and harmful.*" Pray for this ministry.
16. Robert & Lisa Stewart, MTW/church planting, Tokyo, Japan. Praise for a growing congregation, larger church site and new seekers, for Youth Group growth.
17. Joel and Stephanie Swanson, son Pascal. MTW/Toulouse, France. Church planting. Pray for Pascal's healthy growth, Joel's emersion in the study of French, the French pastor and his family, and for fruitful neighborhood contacts.
18. Dr. Tom and Connie Edwards. Hope Health Center, Fairfield (Birmingham) AL. Quarterly medical trips to Haiti, semiannual medical trips to Ivory Coast. Pray for the clinic staff, volunteers, and patients. Pray for humility and for protection against pride.
19. Verne & Alina Marshall, MTW, Santiago, Chile & Cuba. Pray for ongoing persecution in Cuba. Pray for God's solution to a Chilean problem pastor who is divisive, without compassion or love, uses social media to criticize people/doctrines, which greatly affects our small presbytery. Also pray for our needed financial support!
20. Franklin & Beth, MTW/Europe/Enterprise. Media Production, Videographers. Sensitive ministry. Pray for continued fruitful contacts, good health, church plants, growing ministry and funds for needed recording equipment.

21. RUF/Univ. of Florida. Rev. Brian and Jessica Thomas, children Noah and Evelyn. Settled in as new Pastor in June 2017. As the only campus ministry with ordained pastors, RUF Pastors are frequently called on for pre-wedding counseling and perform weddings!
22. RUF/Florida State University. Rev. Kelly and Caroline Jackson. and their family as they settle into their second semester at FSU. Praise their support is increasing, good stewardship of resources to reach students for Christ.
23. Dr. Barrett and Bryanne Jones and children. Their support dropped dramatically greatly, since their stay in Malawi extended many months than originally planned. They now seek funds to help with adoption fees. for little Chisomo. The costly adoption process for Grace is slow, with final papers coming early summer.
24. Pastor John and Sarah Ellen Carson. Pastor Carson recently retired from World Witness, yet he and Sarah Ellen continue to volunteer at Uganda Bible College, Africa and Leith APC church in Scotland. Praise for their many family members who continue the legacy in missions.
25. Rev. Scott and Katie Moore and five children. Trinity Family Ministries, Mobile, AL. This church plant by Grace PCA in Mobile, a good possibility for periodic mission trips. Faithful and effective prayer in a dangerous, depressed community. Violence and deaths are not uncommon.
26. Matt Elder/Arizona State University - Hope4ASU.org is a fruitful evangelism. Pray for faithful in friendships and student training to share the good news of Jesus. Praise for Matt's recent marriage. Pray for the new off-Campus site for Hope Church.
27. SALAMA, at risk children's ministry/George Crook, Nashville, TN. Pray for spiritual and physical nurturing, and protection for the ministry, and growing trust in the Lord Jesus Christ!
28. Dr. Lloyd Kim, MTW Coordinator. Pray for an effective prayer and emerging vision focus for each region, team and country for newly planted churches and teams.
29. Pray for the Missions Ministry Team and the Strategic Planning Team in revising a new strategic plan for support decisions. Pray as the team identifies mission trips for 2018.

30. John Rakshith and Kelly Beth Prabhakar in their new mission in Bangalore, India. They left the US January 10, and that their monthly support and one time moving needs are met.
31. Pray for 1% of WPC members with the desire to go, long term or short term, to the mission field. Pray for more members to join the Missions Ministry Team – Treasurer, someone to develop and maintain a data base, and pray-ers!.
32. Pray for our WPC Missions Conference 9-11 March, 2018 speakers Rev David and Marcia Jones MTW Europe, and Matthew and Diana Soerens, US Director of Church Mobilization, World Relief National Coordinator, Evangelical Immigration Table. Watch for itinerary.

Prayer for Our Candidating Weekend (April 13-15)

- Pray that our upcoming candidating weekend would provide for our congregation an accurate and insightful glimpse of Chad Watkins and his family.
- Pray for the Watkins to get a sense of our congregation as they fellowship with our church family and that God would continue to guide the Watkins as they seek to confirm the Lord's will from their visit with us.

Prayer for Bill and Mary Ann Tyson

- Pray for Bill and Mary Ann as they have recently put their house in FWB on the market and as they make plans for moving to Nashville.
- That Bill would be able to complete their moving plans without interruption to the ministry at WPC.
- For safety in their travels back and forth to Nashville.
- That they would find welcoming neighbors and quickly develop meaningful relationships.
- For God's timely provisions to be supplied in a way that will build faith in him for all their needs

Prayer for the Congregation

- For spiritual discernment and unity as we go through the candidating process
- For excitement and hope as we consider what God would work through us in the future
- That we would be devoted to seeking the will of God through the Word and prayer
- Protection from discouragement, impatience, and division

Prayer for Knox and Mary and Their Family

- Thankfulness for the ministry the Whites have had among us, showing us an example of the transforming love of Christ
- That God would strengthen them as a family in the unity of the spirit
- That Knox would continue to grow in his pastoral gifts under the ministry of a new pastor
- That Knox and Mary would be a great help to our future pastor and his wife in both fellowship and ministry
- For the White family to be nurtured and blessed under the ministry and shepherding of our future pastor

Normally I group Saturday and Sunday, which I did at the end of March, so that March 31-April 1 was included in the March Bible Reading Plan. But in case some are beginning the Bible Reading Plan for the first time, I have included April 1 with April 2 to begin the month.

1 John was written by the apostle John late in the first century, most likely after virtually all of the rest of the apostles had died, most by martyrdom. We are not given information directly in a greeting at the first of the letter like most of the New Testament letters. John launches immediately into his subject with no greeting whatsoever. But he was likely writing to the church in Ephesus, or the area around Ephesus. True to Paul's prediction to the Ephesian elders years before, false teachers are spreading false teaching in Ephesus, and perhaps in the area surrounding Ephesus. John's letter reflects his interactions with that false teaching and practice, as we'll see as we go along.

In the *Reformed Expository Commentary of 1-3 John*, Douglas Sean O'Donnell speaks of "Robert Law's classic thesis that John presents us **with 'three cardinal tests' by which we may judge whether we possess eternal life or not.** The **first** test is theological: **we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God** (1 John 3:23; 5:5, 10, 13; 2 John 3, 9 cf. 3 John 1-4), the Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). The **second** test is moral: **we must obey God's commandments** (e.g., 1 John 2:1-6; 2 John 6). The **third** test is social: **we must love others** (e.g., 1 John 2:10; 2 Joh 5; 3 Jo 5)" (page xv).

What I want you to do in this reading is to read quickly through the entire letter. Don't stop because you don't understand something. It is more important today to simply read the entire book to get an overview of it. You will see the tests mentioned in the paragraph above. We will come back and look at the book section by section, so the idea today is just overview.

Pray briefly for spiritual enlightenment, and then Read 1 John 1-5.

For your Meditation and Prayer: As you read through, there were probably things that stood out to you that suggest things you need to reflect on and pray about. Pick one of those, and focus on it as you close your time today.

Read 1 John 1:1-4 and John 1:1-14.

1. What ties do you see between these two passages? _____

It will become obvious as the letter progresses that John is writing against a false teaching that denies that Jesus had come in the flesh (1 John 4:2), the very thing John affirmed in John 1:1-2 & 14, and which I believe he is affirming here in 1 John 1:1-3 and elsewhere.

2. Why is what John affirms in 1 John 1:1-2 so important? _____

3. We have just celebrated our Lord’s resurrection from the dead. Suppose that had not really happened. Would it have made any difference with respect to the Christian Faith? Explain: _____

4. Read John 14:6 and 17:3. How do those verses relate to John’s statement in 1 John 1:2 that we “proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us”? _____

5. Have you ever been to a large gathering of worshipping Christians from various places all over the United States and beyond, and felt a significant bond with them? Perhaps you sat and talked with some freely because of that common bond. What do you think accounted for that bond? How might 1 John 1:3 relate to that? _____

How might it relate to John 17:3 that we read in # 4 above? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Read Westminster Confession of Faith (hereafter WCF), chapter 26 “Of the Communion of Saints,” and reflect on that prayerfully. 1 John 1:3f and WCF 26 make clear that the Christian Faith is not “just you and me, God, just you and me.” Do you value “fellowship” with God? with other believers? If so, give thanks. If not, you need to confess it and seek it.

Read 1 John 1:1-10.

Central to vss 5-10, which are our focus today, is verse 5b – “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Consistently throughout the New Testament, “light” is identified with God and with good, and “darkness” is identified with Satan and evil.

Look up the following text and write down any insights from each:

1. John 3:19-21 _____

2. John 8:12 _____

3. John 12:46 _____

4. Acts 26:18 of Paul’s commission _____

5. 2 Corinthians 6:14 _____

6. Ephesians 5:8-15 _____

7. 1 Peter 2:9 _____

8. 1 John 1:5 & 6 _____

9. 1 John 2:9-11 _____

For Your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect on the above, and on how what you noted relates to 1 John 1:3 & 6-7. Pray for wisdom to understand the relationships of all of these statements, and ask the Lord to so work in you that they bear fruit in you leading to more consistently walking in the light.

Read 1 John 1:5-2:2.

1. Does walking in the light mean that we do not sin? Explain: _____

2. What does walking in the light mean? _____

3. Read Psalm 32:1-6. How does that relate to 1 John 1:5-9? _____

4. 1 John 1:9 is a tremendous promise! But how can it be “just” to forgive our sins? Is there any help in comparing Romans 3:21-26 with 1 John 2:1-2? If so, what? _____

5. 1 John 2:1 makes clear that John is not encouraging sin. Do we take that as seriously as we take 1:9? Do you ever find it difficult to not let a passage like 1:9 enable you to follow sinful desires because you expect there will be forgiveness after you do? How can we use the truths of the Gospel – like 2:2-3 – to help us not sin, rather than just helping us *when* we sin? _____

“Propitiation” involves satisfying the justice of God in order to turn away the wrath of God. **Read WCF 8.5.** Note the reference to Jesus having “satisfied the justice of his Father.”

For your Meditation and Prayer: Look ahead to 1 John 4:9-10. How might reflecting on those verses help us in the battle with sin? Thomas Chalmers once preached a sermon entitled “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” Does that give any hint how these truths we are dealing with might help us in our own battle with sins we love? Pray over these truths.

Read 1 John 2:3-6.

As we noted earlier, John gives several tests by which we may be certain we know the Lord and have been born of him. It is not enough to profess to know the Lord, or to claim such. There are many who claim to be Christians who aren't, and Jesus made that clear in multiple passages, one being: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven..." (Matthew 7:21)

Neither Jesus nor John means perfectly "keeping his commandments" or "word." He has already made that clear in 1:8-2:2. Rather, he had in view one who loves God and therefore wants to keep his commandments in order to honor and please him.

1. Did you notice in Psalm 32:2, which we read yesterday, that as David spoke of confessing his sin and being pardoned, he described the man "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," and "against whom the Lord counts no iniquity," with one further phrase: "and in whose spirit there is no deceit." What do you think he meant by that? _____

2. "Deceit" can be intentional, or not. In the latter case, one may be self-deceived. **Read Matthew 7:21-23.** Which do you think is the case in that passage: intentional deceit, or unintentional self-deceit? Explain: _____

3. John's statements in 1 John 2:3-4 may seem blunt, but they serve two different but related purposes, depending on whether a person is deceived intentionally or unintentionally. What would be the difference in purpose with each? Intentional deceit: _____

Unintentional self-deceit: _____

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 commissioned the Church to "make disciples" of the nations. Jesus said: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." The goal of evangelization of the world is not to get "professions of faith"; it is to make disciples, those who genuinely follow Christ and keep his word. John is making that clear.

Read John 14:15, 21, 23.

Notice "commandments" in vss 15 & 21, and "word" in vs 23, just like the transition from "commandments" in 1 John 2:3-4 to "word" in 2:5.

Read John 16:12-15. This was spoken to the 11 disciples (Judas had already left to betray Jesus) on the night of Jesus' arrest – in fact, shortly before. Jesus is speaking of what he will do through the Spirit whom he will send at Pentecost some 50 days after his resurrection. Paul can refer to this sort of teaching in a

passage like Ephesians 3:3-5. Jesus was speaking of things he would communicate through the Spirit to the apostles and those through whom he would complete his revelation to the Church as embodied in our New Testament Scriptures. This was that which the writer to the Hebrews referred when he said: *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (1:1-2)* There is an evident finality in those verses. God could speak through no higher or better representative than his Son, and Jesus had spoken of what he would teach subsequent to his death through his Spirit.

4. Having said all of that, what implications does that have for what John means when he speaks of obeying the commandments or word of Christ? What word is that? _____

5. **Finally, read John 15:1-13.** How does that relate to 1 John 5:6? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: 1 John 2:3-6 is a passage that clearly invites serious thought and prayer. John expects that these tests will be employed by us to determine whether or not our profession is genuine. Do we really “know” Christ, or is it an empty profession? It is a very important matter, because it has eternal consequences. So reflect back on what we have explored in this day’s reading, and make that a subject of prayer.

I am having us overlap our reading from yesterday because in verse 7 John speaks of a “commandment,” as did 2:3-4. You may have noted when you read John 15, that verses 12-13 spoke of the command to love one another as Christ loved us. John now begins to focus on that.

Read 1 John 2:3-14.

1. John speaks of a commandment that was both old and new. What was the basic commandment of which he speaks? _____

2. John introduced light and darkness back in 1:5 with respect to God himself. We also saw on April 4th that darkness was associated with Satan and his kingdom. So here in 2:7ff, _____ is associated with Darkness, and _____ is associated with Light.

3. What do you think is John’s point when he says that the person who walks in darkness does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes? What is he blind to? What can he not see? _____

Verses 12-14 are rather hard to interpret precisely. What is meant by “little children,” “young men”, and “fathers”? Some take them of different age groups, some of different levels of spiritual maturity. I haven’t fully evaluated that, so will leave that to the side for now. But it is good for us to note what John identified with each in any case.

4. What two things are identified with those designated “little children” or “children” (two different Greek words)? _____

5. What is twice identified with “fathers”? _____

6. What two things are identified with “young men”? _____

7. What in particular has contributed to “young men” being strong and overcoming the evil one? _____

If you think about it, the way the “fathers” and “children” know what they know is substantially for the same reason, whether speaking of age groups or levels of spiritual maturity.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect back on vss 7-11. The “newness” of the commandment may well tie in with Jesus’ change from “Love your neighbor as yourself” to “love one another ... as I have loved you” (John 13:34f). 1 John 2:6 mentions “whoever says he abides in him [Jesus] ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” Spend some time thinking about the way Jesus loved, and reflect on your own love for others, on your patience with them, the graciousness of that love, the perseverance of that love, the breadth of people Jesus loved, and pray.

Read 1 John 2:15-17, and flip back three books and read James 4:4-5.

These could be a very confusing texts to some, especially in our eco-friendly culture. Should we not love the world God created? Ought we not to take care of it, and appreciate the beauty of it, even if it is marred by the Fall? Is John negative toward physical matter, like the Gnostics and some Greek philosophy?

Words have different connotations and meanings, and one has to carefully observe the context in which they are used to determine precisely how they *are* being used. So let’s look at the way the word “world” is used in John’s writings. Look up the following passages write down what you think “world” means in that context. Keep in mind that the word can have two meanings when used more than once in the same verse:

1. John 9:32 _____
2. John 13:1 _____
3. John 14:30 _____
4. John 15:18-19 _____
5. John 16:20 _____
6. John 17:5 _____
7. John 17:9 _____
8. John 17:14 _____
9. 1 John 3:1 & 13 _____
10. 1 John 4:1,3,4,5 _____
11. 1 John 4:9,14 _____
12. 1 John 5:4,5 _____
13. 1 John 5:19 _____

You may think that is a lot to look up. Perhaps. But there are some 102 or so occurrences of the word “world” in John and 1,2,3 John alone, scattered over 75 verses. It is not always easy to determine the precise meaning, but it is clear that sometimes it refers merely to the created world in which we live, and sometimes carries a negative connotation as being hostile to God and specifically to Jesus. Did you pick that up in the above?

14. So which meaning(s) do you think John had in mind in 1 John 2:15-17 and James in James 4:4-5? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: In Romans 12:2 Paul said: “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*” What do you think he meant? And what do you think John had in mind in 1 John 2:15-17? Think about and pray over those matters. Ask the Lord to help you see where you may love the world wrongly, or trust its opinion over God’s.

Read 1 John 2:18-27.

We often hear talk about the “end times” or “last days.” Often people think in terms of those occurring just prior to the return of Christ. However, the New Testament indicates that the “last days” or “last hour” began with the death and resurrection of Christ, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (see vs 18 and Hebrews 1:1-2, for example). We also hear a lot about “the antichrist,” and John makes the point that there are many antichrists present even in his day.

1. 1 John 2:19 is a very important verse theologically -- why do you think that is the case? _____

2. *Read WCF, chapter 17, and take time to read a number of the footnoted references. You will see 1 John 2:19 footnoted in paragraph 2d. Write down some notes from reading this chapter and footnotes that stand out to you:*

3. How are they to judge whether those whom he calls antichrists are teaching truth or not? _____

4. 1 John 2:22-24 is a very important passage, and especially in our day, although it is clear that many of the same problems have been around all throughout the history of the Church. Verse 23 is a hated truth in our day! Why? _____

5. The truths in these verses are ones that if we ignore them, and they prove true (which they will, I assure you), will have eternal and devastating consequences! Why do I say that? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: John does not mean in vs 27 that they, and we, have no need of teachers. He is teaching even by his letter. But they are not in need of others to teach them contrary to what they have received from the apostle, as though apostolic teaching (which we have in the New Testament) was incomplete or insufficient, and needed to be supplemented or corrected by others. Think about the treasure God has given you in his Word. Re-read WCF 1.1 & 6, and thank God.

Read 1 John 2:24-25 and 2:28-3:3.

John exhorted his readers to let what they had been taught in the beginning abide in them, and in that manner they would abide in the Son and in the Father. Remember 1:3-4? Now in 2:28 he picks up the thought of abiding in Christ, urging us to do so.

1. Why does he press us to abide in Christ? _____

2. What is the result of being born of God (2:29)? Why? What happens when one is born of God? **Read WCF 10.1 and 13.1-3.** _____

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, part of which included that they were created holy and without sin. When they sinned, they lost their moral likeness to God. God’s redemptive purpose is not limited to forgiveness of sins, but includes transformation and restoration to holiness and righteousness (cf Ephesians 2:10 and 4:20-24). Being “born of God” includes an internal transformation of heart – see and read Ezekiel 36:25-28, which seems to be the basis of Jesus’ comments to Nicodemus in John 3 about being born of water and Spirit, and internal cleansing and transformation of heart.

I have said before to the congregation that God does not love us “just the way we are” (assuming that we have become followers of Christ now); “he has loved us in spite of the way we are,” and with full purpose to make us what we are not, children who reflect his holy and righteous character in our lives.

3. In light of that, why is John so amazed that we should be called children of God? (3:1) _____

4. Compare 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 1 John 3:1b. Is there a relationship in the concepts? Explain: _____

5. Compare 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 1 John 3:2. 2 Cor 3:18 speaks of our beholding the glory of God in the Gospel of Christ now. 1 John 3:2 is the ultimate experience of beholding the glory of God in the Son at his return. What effect does it have now, and what effect will it have then? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect on 1 John 3:3. Is that a reality in our lives? We need to ask that question of ourselves, and make it a matter of prayer.

Read 1 John 3:1-10.

This is a passage that can unsettle many Christians, because all of us are aware that we keep on sinning in this life. 1 John 3:6 can really concern the sincere Christian, precisely because he IS aware of his continued battle with sin. So how do we understand 1 John 3:1-10?

First, we must be aware that we interpret Scripture by Scripture, so we must carefully note the immediate context of a passage, its broader context within the book where a text appears, and yet broader to the rest of Scripture. And it is clear in the rest of Scripture, and here in 1 John as well, that believers are not perfect and without sin. So we should not interpret John to mean that a Christian doesn't sin at all.

A key is probably found in 1 John 3:4 in the word "lawlessness." It reflects a spirit, an internal disposition, to not walk in the ways of God according to his law. It is what one observes in Paul's statement in Romans 2:6-11 -- *[God] will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.* Paul is speaking of the course of one's life, the direction of it. The context is whether or not "repentance" has taken place, that fundamental "repentance" that occurs when a person is born of God and receives a "new heart," whose disposition is to obey God, even though not perfectly achieved in this life. Paul says later in Romans 6:17-19 -- *But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

Can you see the fundamental change that has occurred, even though not complete? So let's return to 1 John 3. What Paul described in Rom 6:17-19 fits well with 1 John 2:29 and 3:4ff, and that fundamental change occurs when a person is "born of God."

1. In light of all of that, describe what you understand John to be saying in 3:4-10. _____

2. Compare the self-deception of 1 John 3:7-8 with Ephesians 5:3-6 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Why do you think both of these apostles includes such passages in their letters? _____

3. What do you learn about the purpose of God's redemptive plan in 1 John 3:1-10? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Work through 1 John 3:1-10 in prayer. Assuming you are a genuine believer, begin by thanking God for his sovereign work of regeneration which re-oriented your life and set you on a course of obedience and the pursuit of holiness in your life.

Thank him for the promise that one day he will complete that work when Christ comes and we see him as he is, and are transformed to be like him.

Pray that God will help you purify yourself (3:3) as you look forward to Christ's return, and that he will make you and the rest of us more sensitive to the sin remaining in our lives, and more determined to overcome it.

Read 1 John 3:10-15.

I had you back up to verse 10 of chp 3 because of its mention of not loving. “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, **nor is the one who does not love his brother,**” which leads into vss 11-15 dealing with love vs hate. John had already addressed this somewhat back in 2:7-11. Now he returns and again mentions the message they had heard from the beginning regarding loving one another (3:11). Now he offers the example of Cain and Abel.

Read Genesis 4:1-10.

1. Why did Cain kill Abel? _____

2. What was his underlying emotion that led to his murder of Abel? _____
3. **Read Matthew 5:21-26 and Ephesians 4:26-27 & 4:31-5:2.** How seriously do Jesus and Paul see that emotion, and others like it, to be? Why? _____

4. Have you ever heard, or said: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9) What does that attitude convey towards our “brother” or “sister”? _____

5. Why should we not be surprised if the “world” hates us? (1 Jo 3:13) (This is an instance where “world” clearly means fallen mankind.) Why do they hate us and what we stand for if we hold firmly to the Scriptures? _____

6. 1 John 3:14-15 speaks of death and life. Which comes first? Explain: _____

7. In light of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-26, which I asked you to read under # 3 above, how important is it that we deal with anger and bitterness, not merely to let them subside in intensity with time and lie latent in the heart, but to deal with it in our hearts well, freeing us from the bondage of a bitter spirit? Why is it so important? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Dealing with a passage like this provides good reason for us to prayerfully review our lives, seeking God’s help to identify latent anger and bitterness issues that are inconsistent with our commitment to the Lord. Use the prayer in Psalm 139:23-24 to begin your reflections.

Read 1 John 3:16-24.

A small child may sometimes say something like “I love everybody in the whole world!” They don’t, though. Why do they think they do? Is it not that they don’t yet have enough life experience to *not* love everybody, and they assume that without negative feelings of hatred, the *do* love everybody?

1. What do verses 16-18 teach us about the nature of genuine love? _____

2. Vss 19ff tie in with what has just been said in two ways, one is the tie between vs 18 and vs 19 – do you see what that connection is? Explain: _____

3. The second tie between is the major subject of love for others. But note how he does that. What is the main thrust of vss 19-24? _____

Vs 20 is a difficult verse, and one commentators have struggled over. It is easy to read it as upsetting, rather than comforting, like this: “Whenever our heart condemns us who don’t know everything, worse is the fact that God is greater and does know everything.” But that seems to fly in the face of the reassurance John seems to want to encourage. So the idea may be that whenever our heart condemns us, we need to be mindful that we haven’t learned anything about ourselves that God didn’t already know, and yet he loved us and sent his Son to deal with our sins wholly – which he knew better than we.

4. If that relieves our self-condemnation, then we have confidence before God in prayer. What is it that gives us confidence in prayer? _____

5. Is it possible that we can put so much emphasis on grace that we downplay the important place keeping the commandments plays, especially the commandments to believe in the name of God’s Son Jesus Christ and to love one another? What place does keeping these commandments have in our lives? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: 1 John 3:18 is a good verse for us to reflect upon, because it is far easier for all of us to talk better than we live. So how do we evaluate how well we really love? Pray about that.

Read 1 John 3:24-4:6.

Again we began at the end of the previous passage, because the end of the previous passage leads into the next, moving from “by the Spirit whom he has given us” to not believing every spirit. As John had told before that there were many antichrists already, he now mentions that there are many false prophets who have gone out into the world. It is good for us to remember that in our day, as in his. One of the characteristics of the false prophets was often their accommodation to the culture in which they lived.

1. What sort of test does John propose to judge whether or not a spirit and false prophet are from God? _____

2. John had opened his Gospel with a prologue that spoke of Jesus as the Word having become flesh, and the prologue to this book implies the same when it speaks of that which “we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...” How important is it that we affirm that what we read in the gospels is historical, and speaks of Jesus as actually having entered our history? _____

But note that the criteria involved theology, or doctrine, not merely a vague belief in some “Jesus.” Jesus coming from God the Father is a theological truth based on revelation. Otherwise he would have just been regarded as a remarkable man.

4. Who are the two “he’s” in 4:4? _____

(Hint: 3:24; 4:2; and 4:3).

5. John affirms that those to whom he writes are from God, and have overcome them (the false prophets and spirits). How did they overcome? _____

(Hint: 4:4b & 2:14b)

6. 1 John 4:6 is an important affirmation. It is very similar to 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 in terms of content. **Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 and 3:6-7.** In a day when people embrace strange teachings, these verses can both explain and comfort us as we face the reality of the success and apparently broad acceptance of ways of thinking that fly in the face of Biblical teaching and of sound reasoning. They make evident why what seems so clear to many of us, is rejected outright, and why what seems so clearly wrong and misguided is embraced readily! But there is a comfort in what we have read. God will accomplish his purposes, and the Church will not die, for God’s power can open the eyes of the blind to see, and the ears to hear, and remove the heart of stone that is altogether unresponsive to God, and replace it with a heart of flesh, alive and receptive to the Word of God brought to us by the Spirit of God through faithful servants.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Are you ready to despair at times when you hear the News, or can you embrace the truth of 1 John 4:4? Pray about it.

Read 1 John 4:7-12.

Once again John returns to what is clearly central to his letter, the command to love one another.

1. Here he exhorts his readers, and us, to love one another, and roots it solidly in God’s love towards us. Why is it that having been born of God leads to one loving other brothers and sisters in the Lord? _____

2. Jesus made the point in the prayer prayed the night of his arrest, that eternal life is to know the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he had sent. To “know” obviously is more than just information about; it involves personal relationship with, and delight in. Paul expressed in Philippians 3:8 that knowing Christ was of such value as to make it worthwhile to count everything loss!!! How does all of that relate to loving others? _____

3. Let’s think about the character of the love of God for us. What characterizes that love according to John? _____

The word “propitiation” involves satisfying the justice of God in order to turn away the wrath due the sinner, rather than merely standing on one’s rights and punishing. God the Father took the initiative to satisfy his own justice in a manner that preserved his integrity, and yet extended mercy.

4. What does 4:9 emphasize about the love of God? _____

5. What is the emphasis of 4:10? _____

6. What is the emphasis of 4:11, keeping in mind what we were like when God set his love upon us? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Think about whether vs 12, which affirms that no one has ever seen God as he actually is, is saying that if we love one another others see God living in us – he is made known through us, through our loving one another in the midst of this fallen world (see and compare John 1:18). So what happens if we don’t love one another as he has loved us? What happens when the world sees Christians not getting along, or sees people just living for themselves individualistically rather than finding joy in one another? Pray!

Read 1 John 4:7-21.

Our focus is on vs 13-21. If you look back to 3:23-24, and compare those verses with 4:13-21, we can see John pick up the same themes and develop them. John seems to often finish a section with an allusion that he plans to develop or pick up in the next section. Notice the references in these passages to believing in Jesus, loving one another, and knowing God abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us.

How do we know that God abides in us by his Spirit? Look back to 3:23-24. The two aspects of that commandment in vs 23 are developed in chp 4: (1) believing “in the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (3:23) in 4:1-6, and (2) loving one another (3:23) in 4:7-12. Now 4:13-21 picks these points up, and shows how they assure our hearts before God (3:19ff) by stating that “we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” by the fact that God has brought us to confess his Son and love one another.

1. So, what is the doctrinal test that John gives his readers to judge whether or not they know they are of the truth so they can reassure their hearts before him (3:19)? Review 4:1-6 and now 4:14-15 to see John’s answer: _____

2. And what is the “social” test by which we can assure our hearts and have confidence in the day of judgment (4:16-21)? _____

I have always taken 4:19 – “We love because he first loved us” – to mean “we love God (or him) because he first loved us,” perhaps because the King James Version has the word “him” as the object of our love. However, the best Greek manuscripts indicate that it was later copyists who added “God” or “him” because they apparently thought “we love” had to have an object. But as I reflect on this passage and context, it appears to me that John is saying that because we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us, and to know that God is love, it has caused us, or been used by the Spirit to work in us, to love one another. We certainly love God because he has first loved us. But the passage seems to indicate that he has so worked in us that our realization of the nature of his love towards us has so transformed us that we love one another as he has loved us. We “abide” in the sphere of his love, and that love is working in and through us toward others of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

3. But there is another side to that: if we “say” we love God, and yet hate our brother, what does that tell us about ourselves? (see 4:19-21) _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Think about whether your understanding of the love of God has caused you to love his people, to love to be with them, to love them graciously as he has loved us. Pray for that kind of love to abound among us.

Read 1 John 5:1-5.

1. Do we believe in Jesus Christ in order to be born again, or are we born again in order to believe in Jesus Christ? (1 Jo 5:1) _____

Read WCF 10.1,2 regarding Effectual Calling. The WCF doesn't mention being "born of God," specifically, but it describes it as part of the Effectual Call. Note in WCF 10.2 "being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit," and "**enabled to answer this call**, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it." Notice that WCF 10.2 references 1 John 5:1 in footnote "1".

2. But notice the latter part of verse 1: "...and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him." [In actuality, although the ESV has "the Father," in the Greek it is "the one who begat," who is, in fact, the Father, but I say that in case you have a translation different from the ESV which has it differently.] How does what the latter part of this verse says show us why John uses as one of his three tests whether we love one another? _____

3. The word for being "begotten" or "born" of God occurs in 6 passages in 1 John. Below are the references. Read each and list the result of being born of God. I say "result," because in each the Greek word is in the perfect passive tense, which indicates a past action of God within the person, with continuing results:

1 Jo 2:29 _____

1 Jo 3:9 _____

1 Jo 4:7 _____

1 Jo 5:1 _____

1 Jo 5:4 _____

1 Jo 5:18 _____

WLC 32 affirms that in order to save a people from the fallen mass of mankind in Adam, God established a Covenant of Grace, which "freely provides and offers to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promises and gives his Holy Spirit to all his elect, **to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces**; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he has appointed them to salvation."

That captures some of what is represented in the above texts. Faith, love, and obedience are all the result of a sovereign work of God in us by his Holy Spirit.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect on God's sovereignty in your own life, and upon the gratitude we ought to reflect toward him for his gracious invasion.

Read 1 John 5:1-5 again.

I have to admit that I have found the flow of these verses, especially vss 1-2 difficult. My take on it is something like this:

- (1) Vs 1a states that “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God,”
- (2) Vs 1b states that “everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him”
- (3) Vs 2a states that “By this we know that we love the children of God [2b] when we love God and obey his commandments.”

My difficulty has been to understand what “By this” refers to in 2a. If it referred to 1b, how would that contribute to our knowing “that we love the children of God”?

It appears to me that “By this” of 2a may refer back to 1a, so that the idea is something like this: 1b “Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.” The question then arises: 2b “when we love God and [want to] obey his commandments [especially to love one another], how do we know who *is* a child of God? Answer: 1a “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God,” and is therefore a child of God whom we are to love.

Verse 3 then continues to affirm that ‘this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, which are not burdensome to us, because “everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world, and gains the victory over the world by faith. And who is it who overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (which brings us back to verse 1a), and, 1b because we love the Father we love the one begotten by the Father (1b). That’s how we know who the children of God are as over against the “world” that stands in opposition to God and his people.

Now, if I have thoroughly confused you, or you aren’t concerned about the flow of the passage or see a better alternative that makes sense of it, just move on!

What IS important to note in this passage is that all three of the major tests John gives us are found here. In case you have forgotten what those are from April 1-2, our first reading of the month, here they are again:

In the *Reformed Expository Commentary of 1-3 John*, Douglas Sean O’Donnell speaks of “Robert Law’s classic thesis that John presents us with ‘**three cardinal tests**’ by which we may judge whether we possess eternal life or not. The **first** test is theological: **we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God** (1 John 3:23; 5:5, 10, 13; 2 John 3, 9 cf. 3 John 1-4), the Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). The **second**

test is moral: **we must obey God’s commandments** (e.g., 1 John 2:1-6; 2 John 6). The **third** test is social: **we must love others** (e.g., 1 John 2:10; 2 Joh 5; 3 Jo 5)” (page xv).

1. See if you can pick out all three tests from 1 John 5:1-5. _____

2. “Obeying God’s Commandments” was introduced back in 2:3, although in 1:6 “practicing the truth,” and 1:7 “walking in the light,” are virtually the same thing for the most part. Review 2:3-6. Who is the model of how we ought to live? _____
3. The third test is spelled out in 2:7ff and again in 3:1ff and 4:7ff. It is part of the larger category of “God’s Commandments,” but is singled out because Jesus himself pointed to just how critical it is. See John 13:34-35 – what reason is given here for its importance? _____

The first test is stated in more than one way because it is addressing false teaching that the church has encountered, perhaps from one Cerinthus, although it is difficult to say for certain. What becomes crystal clear, however, is that the Church encountered various false teachings about Jesus Christ that would eventually necessitate the councils that developed creeds to carefully express what the Scriptures taught about Jesus.

4. Do you think that the creeds were necessary? If not, why? If so, why? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Consider for a moment that there are many churches that have no Confessional statement of doctrine like we have in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Sometimes they have a brief, one-page or less, statement of basic beliefs. Such allows a pastor or teachers to teach a wide variety of views and opinions, many of which may sound very persuasive from a given text, but which are inconsistent with other teachings in the Scripture. If every member were dependent only upon their Bibles (the one I use most has 1252 pages of text) to evaluate the teachings of any man (or woman), how many could do so capably? May I again suggest that we have much to be thankful for in our Westminster Confession and Catechisms, documents hammered out carefully and over an rather extensive time by some of the godliest and most knowledgeable men in England and Scotland in their day!

Read 1 John 5:5-12 first.

1 Jo 5:5 affirmed that faith that Jesus is the Son of God overcomes the world, and 5:1 makes it clear that such faith is the result of one having been born of God, what we call “regeneration.” 1 Jo 5:6-10 seems to be said in reference to false teachings that were troubling the church, and it is difficult to know precisely what those were, although the original readers knew. I’m not going to go into that.

1. But 1 Jo 5:11-12 is clear enough, but is a hated doctrine in our culture today, and, indeed, has likely been that way throughout the centuries. It is very exclusive, as faith in Christ – as he has been revealed – is absolutely necessary if one is to receive and possess eternal life. Have you ever encountered opposition to the teaching that we receive eternal life only by faith in Christ alone? _____

Now Read 1 John 5:13-21.

1 John 5:13 is often quoted in an effort to assure a person that he can “know that [he] has eternal life,” often telling him that believing in Jesus assures him of eternal life. I doubt seriously that that was John’s intent in vs 13. More likely, he is speaking of all he has written in this letter, and especially of the tests he has given: doctrinal, moral, and social, as specified on pp 1 & 19-20 above. It involves more than a mere *profession* of faith.

2. But if one uses the 3 major tests, and finds that he matches the criteria imperfectly, but substantially, it leads to 5:14-15, which is _____

3. 1 Jo 5:16-17 are tough verses. They may reflect teaching the church had received about sin not now accessible to us. But for the most part, I would suggest that we pray for people we see going astray, if perhaps God may bring them back. Can you think of some people you should pray for? _____

Verses 18-21 contain 3 affirmations, each of which begins with “we know.”

4. Verse 18 makes two related statements, the first is closely related to 3:9. 1 Jo 3:9-10 affirmed that being born of God had created a fundamental change in the way a person lives. What three things are said or implied about the person who has been born of God? _____

The latter part of 5:18 affirms that we are protected by “he who was born of God,” which seems to refer to Jesus. You might like to look back at John 10:28, a tremendously comforting verse. I love one of the newer songs we sing, introduced to us by the Gettys, though written by others: “He Will Hold Me Fast.”

When I fear my faith will fail
Christ will hold me fast
When the tempter would prevail
He will hold me fast
I could never keep my hold
Through life’s fearful path
For my love is often cold
He must hold me fast
Chorus:
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast

Those He saves are His delight
Christ will hold me fast
Precious in His holy sight
He will hold me fast
He’ll not let my soul be lost
His promises shall last
Bought by Him at such a cost
He will hold me fast
Chorus

For my life He bled and died
Christ will hold me fast
Justice has been satisfied
He will hold me fast
Raised with Him to endless life
He will hold me fast
Till our faith is turned to sight
When he comes at last
Chorus

1 Jo 5:19 affirms the state of all outside of Christ – see Ephesians 2:1-3, Col 1:13 and 2 Cor 4:4, for example.

1 Jo 5:20 affirms that “the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.” My take is that it is speaking of Jesus having made the Father known as the true God (see John 1:18 & 17:3), since the verse says “in **his** Son Jesus Christ.” John 17:3 sounds like “He is the true God and eternal life.”

For your Meditation and Prayer: 1 Jo 5:21 tells us to “Keep [ourselves] from idols.” Many people choose to think of “Jesus” or “God” generically in their own way, rather than as revealed in Scripture – that is an “idol.” Think about “idols” we might have in what we live for, what has 1st place in our hearts and minds. Pray for wisdom and insight.

2 John is a brief letter, likely written to a local church congregation. One can see some common themes running through 2 John as we found in 1 John. But there is a particular issue that he addresses.

Read 2 John, which along with 3 John, are the shortest books in the New Testament, and watch for the main matter that John addresses.

1. What do you think is his main immediate concern? _____

2. Read back through 2 John and list some common themes that occurred in 1 John. _____

3. In the opening two verses there is an emphasis on “truth,” and in vs 4 “walking in [or according to] the truth.” That is common to the other apostles as well. Go back and *read Ephesians 4:17-24*, and note Paul’s emphasis on “truth as it is in Jesus.” How does that concept relate to our particular culture in America today? Explain: _____

4. Verse 9 is also very relevant to our day. We hear the term “progressive” at times. In and of itself neither “progressive” or “conservative” is an altogether good term. Either can go wrong. John may be reacting to some who consider themselves “progressive” in the sense of going on ahead and beyond what has been revealed to the apostles. We are to build off the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, but not to extend the foundation! How would John’s statement be regarding today in America? _____

5. Vss 10-11 are probably the main item that John wants to get across in the letter itself. Christians are encouraged to show hospitality. Remember Hebrews 13:1-2 – “Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” This often involved traveling ministers or evangelists. Inns were not often good places to stay in that day. But John draws a line as to when hospitality is to be shown. Where is that line? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Christians often tend to be compassionate and kind people. And people take advantage of that – witness how many people come to the church for financial help who never darken the door of the church otherwise! But the New Testament does not obligate the church to help everyone. Pray that the Lord will give us understanding about how to discern when to help.

Read 3 John, and again look for a central issue that is addressed.

1. What appears to be the central concern that has sparked the letter? _____

2. What evidences do you find in 3 John of the importance of “truth”? _____

If 2 John warned of extending hospitality to those who led people astray with their claim to be “going on ahead” rather than abiding in the apostolic truths that had been taught, 3 John commends and encourages Gaius for extending hospitality to others who “have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.” These are missionaries.

3. How does John regard those who support missionaries? _____

4. Do you support world missions? Do you do it significantly? How do you do it? Or if you don't, why don't you? _____

5. John describes one Diotrephes. What characterizes him? _____

Vs 11 encourages Gaius to be quite a different leader than Diotrephes, but also seems to bring to mind a Demetrius, whom John commends as doing good and being well thought of.

For your Meditation and Prayer: It is clear in the person of Diotrephes that the early church sometimes experienced major problems in leadership, as is true today. It becomes detrimental to the church when such occurs. Since I am preparing this primarily for our congregation here at WPC, I want to reaffirm that you presently have a really good Session (elected elders), and *that* is something worth giving thanks to the Lord for over and over. This passage is also a reminder that you should pray for your leaders, and ask the Lord to continue to work in those who lead, and to raise up others to lead, who have humble spirits and who are concerned for the interests of Christ in your midst (see the example of Timothy in Philippians 2:19-22). May the Lord continue to bless your leaders, and also those who serve the congregation so well in our Diaconate. Pray for them today!

Jude, the author of this book, is agreed by most solid Biblical scholars to have been the half-brother of Jesus, as was James, whom Jude mentions as his own brother. In that light, it is highly significant that both Jude and James open their letters affirming they are “servants” of Jesus Christ, especially since his own brothers had apparently not really believed in him prior to his death and resurrection. Now they acknowledge him for who he really was and is.

Read the Book of Jude, and again, like 2nd and 3rd John, try to get a sense of the thrust of the book, and what is the occasion of the author’s writing.

In this case, Jude seems to express that his original intention was necessarily set aside in order to address a situation that has occurred which demands more immediate attention.

1. What does Jude seem to be doing in this letter? _____

2. Note the way he addresses them in vs 1. Although by a different author – Paul – look back at 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. Can you see some of the same concepts: “beloved by the Lord . . . called through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” compared to “called, beloved in [or by] God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.”

Read WLC 67 about Effectual Calling. Notice the connection between God’s gracious and sovereign love and calling. Reading other portions of the WCF or WLC would point to the fact that God keeps those whom he chooses out of his gracious and free love, and powerfully calls unto Christ, for the inheritance he has planned for them.

Note that he writes to Christians, probably in a particular area or church, urging them to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (vs 3). One major Greek Lexicon (similar to a dictionary) indicates that the word used for “contend,” which is not used elsewhere in the Scripture, means “to exert intense effort on behalf of something.”

3. We live in a day when that is badly needed, and his address implies that you have a responsibility along with other Christians to do this. So what must you do to be able to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: For some time we have been working through the New Testament epistles or letters written to churches, and along with reading our Bibles, I have referred you to the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), because I want you to appreciate that you have one of the finest statements of the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” that is available to us in a creedal form, and a rather compact and precise statement. Thank the Lord for it, and ask for grace to study it carefully.

If one is reading straight through the New Testament, shortly before Jude one reads 2 Peter, and once one comes to Jude, he likely will feel like he has read almost all of this before, because 2 Peter and Jude cover a lot of very similar territory Biblically, and the concerns both reflect are very similar. Today I want you to read a portion of these two letters again to get a feel for the similarity, both of content and concern. These are not irrelevant concerns. We face some of the same challenges, even if they are dressed a little differently.

Read 2 Peter 2. If you don't remember yesterday's reading well, you may need to at least skim Jude 3-16 to see the similarity between the two.

Satanic and demonic activity were rather intense during the ministry of Jesus, and though perhaps often more behind the scenes and subtle, they continue in the world today. Jesus called Satan the father of lies (John 8:44), because from the very beginning of human history, he had used lies to lead people astray. The very first temptation in all of human history challenged the love and authority of God in his Word. That has not changed!

2 Peter and Jude both address the issue of false teachers in the church, as did Paul and John.

1. What do Hebrews 1:1-2 and Jude 3 convey about the revelation given the Church through Christ and his apostles? _____

2. Jude 4 and 2 Peter 2:1-3 both speak of the reality and nature of false teachers who have infiltrated the church. What is it that they attack? _____

3. Jude 4 is referenced in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism. Read WCF 3.7, and note the footnoted references in "r" where you will find several references, including Jude 4. What is the purpose of God in withholding his mercy and passing by some men and angels, and so ordaining them to dishonor and wrath for their sin? _____

4. One of the more sobering verses in Jude is verse 5. It is very similar to Hebrews 3:16-4:2. Why do these writers include these rather sobering examples in the New Testament age? _____

It is very important for us to see that the New Testament writers and believers did not dismiss the Old Testament and God's dealings with the "church" of the Old Testament. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 spoke first of the Old Testament Scriptures!

For your Meditation and Prayer: In our day there are vast numbers of professing Christians who don't care to focus on the things 2 Peter 2 & 3 and Jude deal with freely. Has that reticence impacted you? ... the PCA? Pray about that danger.

Read again Jude 4-19.

1. Write down various characteristics of these people whom Jude and Peter both describe, noting that they are often inside the church. _____

2. Go back now and jot down descriptions of what happens to those people whom he describes? _____

I think it is important that we realize that not every characteristic which Jude or Peter mentions is equally characteristic of every one of those who fall into these categories. There are some things that do characterize all. All are at enmity with God, although that enmity may manifest itself in a wide variety of ways.

What IS troubling about these descriptions is that they are speaking of people who inhabit our churches. We have an infiltrating enemy!

I am reminded of Jeremiah 6. Jeremiah spoke of the prophets and priests of his day who dealt falsely with the people. "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. ¹⁵ Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown," says the LORD.

Then Jeremiah records: ¹⁶ Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' ¹⁷ I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not pay attention.' ¹⁸ Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what will happen to them. ¹⁹ Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it." Sound familiar? The "ancient paths" were the paths of God's *revealed* revelation, especially of the Mosaic law.

For your Meditation and Prayer: The nature of man hasn't changed over the years in spite of all the advancements of technology and such. God's word is as relevant now as ever. We need to hold and contend for the "faith once for all delivered to the saints." Make that a matter of prayer, for yourself, for your church, for the PCA, lest we go the way so many have gone before us.

Read Jude 17-25. Our focus today is upon vss 20-25 as we close out the month.

1. In light of all Jude has said, he brings his letter to a close with exhortations to us: **first**, to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. He is returning to where he started, when he spoke of “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (vs 3). Our **first responsibility** is to grow in our knowledge and application of that faith once for all delivered to the saints. May I encourage you to do two things:

- a. Devote yourself to reading and hearing the Word of God in the manner set forth in **WLC 156-160 – read those questions/answers now, please.**
- b. Devote yourself to studying the Westminster Confession of Faith and Westminster Larger Catechism, reading the footnoted Scriptures, and working through it patiently and persistently. It will pay enormous rewards in knowing “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”

Secondly, he tells us to pray in the Holy Spirit. I have not emphasized prayer as I ought, partly or largely because I am not as strong in it as I ought to be myself. Again, I want to encourage you to do two things:

- a. Study WLC 178-196 regarding Prayer, and specifically the Lord’s Prayer.
- b. If you have not read *Praying the Bible* by Donald S. Whitney, which we gave to each family in the church in the Spring of 2016, read it, and if you don’t have a copy, purchase one. They run about \$ 12 on Amazon, and it is well worth it. Whether you use Whitney’s method of praying through the Psalms or not, learn to pray the Scriptures as you read. It will add variety and freshness to your prayers, and will be in accord with the will of the Holy Spirit who inspired that Word.

Thirdly, he tells us to “keep ourselves in the love of God.” Read John 15:9-11 to understand how.

Fourthly, he tells us to “wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (Jude 21). **Read 1 Peter 1:13** for another way of saying this.

2. Jude then tells us how to deal with others we see going astray in vss 22-23. So, in keeping with our glance at Cain back in 1 John on April 13 above, question # 4, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” What *ought to be* our answer to that question lest we be like Cain? And what does our answer mean, practically? _____

3. Jude 24-25 is a doxology. A “doxology” is an ascription of praise to God, declaring his glory. What more comforting statement could be made than this?! We have a responsibility to not stumble, to do all we can to walk faithfully in the light of God’s Word. But often we feel our own weaknesses, and ultimately must fall back upon the Lord to keep us. Look back to April 21-22 above, to the hymn “He Will Hold Me Fast,” and re-read it carefully.
4. Reflect on what these two verses say: God will present us blameless before the presence of his glory. Only God could do that! He may have in view the fact that we are cleansed of our sin completely through the atoning work of

our Savior, Jesus Christ. But he likely is carrying it even further. He is speaking of what God will do in us to transform us wholly into the moral likeness of his Son.

But what are we to make of “with great joy”? Can you imagine that? It is hard for me to conceive of the fact that God can take such delight in the likes of me, the sinner that I am. What about you? I have said before: God does not love us “just the way we are”; he loves us “in spite of the way we are!” But the wonderful good news is this: having loved us in spite of the way we are, he will so transform us to be like his Son, that he will love us then “just the way we are,” because he will have made us lovely! And because of that, he will be able to “present us before the presence of his glory with great joy.” He will SING over us!

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect back over the things mentioned under # 1 above, and then to encourage you, over what is below, and pray about all of these matters, asking for grace to respond to Jude’s exhortation dealt with in # 1 above, and giving thanks and praise for what you read below!

The LORD your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.
(Zephaniah 3:17)

I have often turned Jude’s Doxology partly into a Benediction,
which is a pronouncing blessing upon God’s people.

So,

Now may he who is able
keep you from stumbling
that he may present you blameless
before the presence of his glory with great joy;
and
to the only God, our Savior,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority,
before all time and now and forever.

Amen.

(adapted from Jude 1:24-25)

