

Week 3: John and Jude: Walking in the Light

Hook

TRUE FAITH

Main Point: Walking in the light means living differently.

Honing a useful skill takes time. Some might have natural talent at various skills, but at some point, you have to put in the work to hone a craft. It has been said that we must put in at least 10,000 hours into a skill before truly mastering it.¹ Whether it is playing a musical instrument, weightlifting or developing a professional talent, you must put in the work.

But once that threshold is passed, it is generally obvious to most observers when someone is an expert at something. If you put a master musician next to a novice, the difference is striking. In today's lesson, we'll be discussing what it means to be a distinguished member of God's kingdom. Just as a person can't easily lose or turn off musical prowess, it's clear that someone who spends time with God is of the kingdom of God.

RECAP: Last week we talked about how God is the light and those who love Him will walk in the light, not in darkness. Walking in the light doesn't mean we do everything perfectly, but just the opposite – when we sin, the light purifies us. Walking in the light means abiding in Jesus so that we live the way He did. This week, we will continue to unpack what it looks like to walk in the light. Those who walk in the light (abide in personal relationship with Jesus) will:

- Love others the way God loves
- Overcome the Evil One
- Not love the things of this world

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1 John 2:7–11 and John 13:34–35; 15:9–12 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Those who walk in the light will love others the way God loves.

Q: How is this commandment both old and new?

This section is a continuation of the verse before it, fleshing out what it looks like to “walk in the same way in which He walked” (2:6). The overarching commandment is to love (Matthew 22:34–40). John told his readers this wasn’t a new commandment but one they’d had from the beginning. This was not unique to Jesus’ teachings in the Bible. He continued to express and expound on things that were written in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 19:18).

And yet John said it’s also a new commandment. Jesus had also told His disciples it was a “new” commandment even though He had told them that the command to love God and love others is the very essence of the entire Mosaic Law. The “new” part was to love one another “just as I have loved you” (John 13:34). The command itself wasn’t new, but having the perfect example of love in Christ was. Because the “true light” is shining, we can see what it means to really love other people (2:8).

Later in this letter, John defined love by the love God showed us by sending Christ as a sacrifice for our sins (4:10), that Christ’s laying down His life for us is how we know what love is (3:16; Romans 5:8). The very definition of love was made manifest in Jesus, His life and ministry, and His death and Resurrection. Because Christ came and showed us what love really is, we can love other people the way God does.

Because God is light, the light has always been shining in the world. But when Christ came, that light was made manifest (1 John 1:5–10). In Christ, a new age of light began. John explained that the old age of darkness “is passing” away (2:8). The tense of that verb was very intentional. John was saying that the darkness will not be completely gone until the final kingdom in the consummation (Revelation 21:22–24). This is the theological idea of inaugurated eschatology – the kingdom of God is already here in Christ, but not yet here in all its fullness.²

Christ inaugurated the kingdom of light through His death and Resurrection. He conquered the power of sin over us, but the complete eradication of evil is still yet to come (Revelation 21:1–5). This allows each of us individually to be made new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), but the whole world has not yet been made new. That will happen in the consummation (Revelation 21:5). Those who know Christ are children of light, but

we still live in a world of darkness (Ephesians 5:8). This is the tension that creates spiritual warfare, our battle with the spiritual forces of darkness (Ephesians 6:10–18).

John addressed this law of love repeatedly in this letter (2:7–11; 3:10–12, 16–18; 4:7–11, 16–21; 5:1–3). If you read this letter all in one sitting, it may feel very repetitive; he says the same thing over and over in every chapter. We may feel like, “Okay, we get it already! Those who really love God will love others. If people don’t love others, they don’t really love God.” But repetition has always been a key strategy in education, and John was trying to teach his spiritual “little children.”

The law of love is the most essential, foundational part of walking in the light, living in abiding fellowship with Jesus. Those who hate others may claim that they are abiding in Jesus, walking in the light, but are “still in darkness”. Those who live in a posture of hate must remember that God is love and those who have really been born of the Spirit will love others. The “Christian” who is marked by a general heart-posture of hate would do well to evaluate if he is indeed a Christian.

Certainly, believers will sometimes struggle with people who are difficult to love. As a Fruit of the Spirit, love is something we will continue to grow in throughout our lives. Love is not just a feeling we have, it’s a choice that we make to love someone, even when it’s hard.

Hate is a stumbling block that leads to tragic falls. The believer who loves as Jesus does avoids these problems. The one who walks in the light can see, avoiding spiritual falls. This doesn’t mean they don’t have obstacles in their path (temptation to sin) but that they can see them clearly and see the way around them (1 Corinthians 10:13). Those who walk in the light can see the way to go. The opposite is true for the one who hates – this poor brother stumbles through life without direction and is prone to fall into dangerous snares. The imagery of blind, directionless stumbling is also a compelling picture of a lost person.

Q: Describe times when it is difficult for you to love someone the way Jesus loves him or her. How can you make the choice to love people even when it’s hard?

Q: How does Satan “blind the eyes” (deceive) of those who walk in darkness?

1 John 2:12–14 and Romans 7:21–25; 8:37 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Those who know God will overcome the Evil One.

Q: How does knowing God give us victory over evil? How are we delivered from sin?

This section is so highly structured that both the ESV and NIV write it in poetic lines. Numerous times in the letter, John called all his readers “little children” (2:28; 3:7, 18;

4:4; 5:21), and later he said all believers are “children of God” (3:1, 10; 5:2). So in some sense, every believer is a child. Yet here, he alternated between talking to “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers,” representing stages of spiritual maturity.

It doesn't go in ascending order as you may imagine but follows the pattern of addressing children, fathers, young men, and then repeats. It's not describing a faith in which only the most spiritually mature have an assurance of grace. Each level of spiritual maturity is given assurance. John was fighting a Gnostic belief that only those on some higher spiritual level really “know” God. Knowing Him isn't just knowledge about Him, it's having intimate fellowship with Him, abiding in Christ. In John's statement, even the little children know the Father. Even the children can be assured their sins are forgiven. The young men are strong, the Word of God abides in them, and they have overcome the Evil One.

Both lines about the “fathers” say the same thing – “You know him who is from the beginning.” This could refer to either God the Father or Christ (John 1:2), but in the context of this chapter, it most likely refers to Jesus. Even for the most spiritually mature, their assurance isn't found in what they do but only in abiding in Christ. Paul wrote that he counted everything else garbage compared to the “surpassing worth of knowing Christ” (Philippians 3:7–11). That was all that mattered to him.

John told the “young men” twice that they had overcome the Evil One. This doesn't mean we won't still struggle. We are in a constant battle with evil, no matter how spiritually mature we are (Ephesians 6:10–18). He was assuring his readers that they already had victory in Jesus. Toward the end of the letter, John repeated this idea, that *everyone* who has been born of God overcomes the world. Because our victory is based in our faith in Christ, not in our own maturity.

We still struggle with temptation, but Christ has already conquered sin (John 16:33; Romans 6:11–14; Colossians 2:15). It may feel hard for us to overcome evil, but we have the strength because we have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God abiding in us. The Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, is the best weapon against evil (Ephesians 6:17). We don't have to be afraid. We can stand firm and fight because, as John said later, He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (4:4).

Q: Why does it feel hard to fight personal temptation? What about evil in the world around us? How does knowing we have victory change the way we fight evil?

Q: If the Word of God gives us victory, what does this tell us about studying the Bible?

1 John 2:15–17 and Romans 12:1–2 and James 4:4 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Those who love the Father will not love the things of this world.

Q: What does John mean by “the world” in this passage?

Q: How is not loving the world connected to overcoming evil?

John was using the term “the world” in a specific way, like many other New Testament authors, to distinguish between the things of the world and the things of God (Colossians 3:5–10). This is not the same way he used the phrase in John 3:16, which describes how God loves all the *people* in the whole world, no matter what nation, tribe or tongue. Of course, we should love “the world” in the same way God loves the world, all people. But this use of “the world” refers to the kingdom of darkness that is in opposition to the kingdom of light (1:5–7). This world, over which Satan is the “ruler” (John 14:30), is passing away (2:17).

John, along with other New Testament authors, drew a clear line between these two kingdoms. Paul said the desires of the flesh are contrary to the desires of the Spirit; they are in conflict with each other (Galatians 5:16–26). Those who are part of the kingdom of light set their minds on things above, not the things of the world. He even described it as putting to death the things that belong to our earthly nature (Colossians 3:1–10). James said choosing to be a friend of the world makes you an enemy of God (James 4:4). The world competes for the affection of believers. What a pity for a rebellious Christian to grant his affection to the things of this world; it is impossible for someone to truly love God and love the world at the same time.

When we love God, we choose to live differently. We choose not to be conformed to the pattern of the world but to be transformed by His Spirit (Romans 12:1–2). We choose to crucify those earthly desires and set our minds on godly things (Colossians 3:5–17). We take off the old self and put on the new self. Just as you cannot serve two masters, you cannot live with one foot in each world (Matthew 6:24). But this doesn’t mean we separate ourselves from the rest of the world in a “holy huddle” somewhere. We learn to live “in” the world but not “of” it. And we influence the “world” God loves.

John was speaking logically here. The world is passing away, so don’t invest yourself in it. Don’t waste your life on these temporary pleasures that will never really satisfy you; invest your life in what will last into eternity. It’s the same message Jesus gave His disciples, to store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21). This isn’t just about trying not to succumb to the desires of our flesh. It’s a much bigger question: What we are investing our lives in, a world that is passing away or a kingdom that will last forever? When we think with an eternal perspective, choosing to follow Jesus is about choosing an abundant and eternal life, not just about following rules.

Q: Why is it tempting to cling to the things of this world, even though we know the world is passing away?

Q: What does it look like, practically, to store up our treasures in heaven? What are “treasures in heaven”?

Q: How can we live an abundant life here on this earth, physically “in the world,” but not live in a way that is “of the world”?

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When someone has spent more than 10,000 hours honing a skill, it is apparent in the way that person performs. When you take a novice and compare him or her to an expert, most people will be able to tell who the expert is at the task. We, too, should live in such a way that people have no issue seeing that we have grown in our relationship with Christ and have spent the time that it takes to know Him and to emulate His character.

Q: What would your life look like if you spent 10,000 hours reading the Scriptures?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on the idea of being “in the world, but not of the world.” What does that mean to you? What does it look like on a practical level, day-in-day-out? How is your life different from those around you who don’t follow Jesus? If someone looked in at your life from the outside, would that person be able to tell you are a Jesus follower? Why or why not? Why is it important not to separate ourselves from the world? Why is it important to influence the world around us even though the world is passing away? How can we love the world (the people) as God does but hate “the world” as John defined it here – the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life?

PRAY for God to give you His heart for loving others. Ask Him to give you His strength to overcome the Evil One and His wisdom to know how to walk in the light in your daily life.

ACT: WALK DIFFERENTLY. Ask God to reveal to you at least one way He is leading you to walk (live) differently as a reflection of these last few lessons. Are there any ways in which you are still living with one foot in the world? Any ways you are pursuing the desires of the flesh rather than the Fruit of the Spirit? Any ways you are living for yourself rather than Jesus or not loving others the way He would? Any ways you are struggling to overcome evil? Ask God to reveal those things to you and then make a CHOICE to WALK IN THE LIGHT.

NEXT TIME in 1–3 John and Jude: Next week we'll get into specifics of some of the false teachings John was refuting in this letter, specifically false teaching about the Second Coming of Christ.

¹ <https://strategiesforinfluence.com/malcolm-gladwell-10000-hour-rule/>

² George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1993).