

Week 8: John and Jude: Jesus Is Life

Hook

TRUE FAITH

Main Point: Those who know Jesus will have life.

Congress will, at times, hold investigations in which subject matter experts are called to testify. These witnesses include celebrities such as John Denver (who testified during a debate over possible government regulation of song lyrics) and Smokey Robinson (who spoke in favor of closing a legal loophole that allowed digital radio companies to play songs recorded before February 15, 1972, without paying artists).¹

If you were to subpoena an expert witness to be the authority on the subjects listed below, whom would you call?

BBQ

Fashion

Football

Movies

Music

Transition: As we close our study on the book of 1 John today, the apostle will present undeniable testimony concerning Jesus, the testimony of God Himself.

RECAP: This is our last lesson in 1 John, the final chapter. After this lesson, we'll move on to 2 John, 3 John, then Jude. So far in 1 John, the letter has been cyclical and nonlinear, and very intentionally so. John used a well-known technique of ancient rhetoric called amplification, which talks about the same ideas in repetitive cycles, using a little different emphasis or angle on them each time. It may feel repetitive to us, but sometimes we are like "little children" who need repetition for a deep truth to really penetrate our hearts.

In the first four chapters, John has emphasized:

- We can have fellowship with God only through Jesus; anyone who says differently is a false teacher, or "antichrist."
- You don't need any special or extra knowledge, just a relationship with Jesus.

- Those who know Jesus will walk in light and love; if you continue to abide in evil or hatred of others, you don't really know the Father.
- True love shows itself in action, not just words.
- True love is loving self-sacrificially, the way Jesus loved.
- We can have confidence on the Day of Judgment because our righteousness is found in Christ; we need not fear the day of Christ's return.

As a conclusion to the letter, John repeated in this chapter that Jesus is the key to life, both eternal life and life in the here and now. Those who trust in Christ as Savior will have eternal life and can be confident on the Day of Judgment. Those who know Jesus will also have abundant life here on earth, life the way God meant for it to be.

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Book

Main Point: Those who know Jesus will have life.

1 John 5:1–5 and John 3:1–8 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Those who have been born of God want to keep His commandments.

Q: How does being “born of God” explain that following Jesus isn’t just a religion but a change that redefines who we are?

This chapter is a conclusion to all that has come before it. John was repeating the same themes and ideas he had already explored, consistent with the amplification technique he used throughout the letter, to repeat and emphasize the same ideas. He was making his final points as clear as possible so his readers could have confidence in the truth of the Gospel and know they were saved. This is one of the purposes of the letter – that his readers could know they had eternal life in Jesus and that He gives us whatever we need in this life, too (5:13–15).

The opening paragraph of chapter 5 is a follow-up to the end of the previous chapter. John had just told his readers (again!) that those who really love God will also love other people. This isn’t a legalistic “rule.” It is simply part of the heart change of those who have been made new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). When God makes us new through Jesus, He gives us a heart like His for other people (Ezekiel 36:26). We have been given His Spirit to love as He loves (1 John 4:13).

John continued this explanation by repeating what Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John’s Gospel, that followers of Jesus are born again of God (John 3:1–8). The Greek phrase in John 3:3 that is typically translated “born again” literally means “born from above,” similar to here in 1 John 5:1 (“born of God”) and later in John 3:8 (“born of the Spirit”). This new birth changes who we are, how we think, and what we want out of life (Romans 12:1–2; Colossians 3:1–4). Instead of desiring the things of the flesh, we desire the things of the Spirit (Galatians 5).

Therefore, God’s commandments are a joy for us, not a burden. If we love God and trust that He knows what is best for us, we will want the world and our lives to be the way God desires them to be. We will want to do what God says is right. In explaining this, John returned to what he said in 4:4, that we have already overcome the spirit of the antichrist that is in this world. Again, John set up two very clear sides, the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. Our faith in Jesus and being born again in Him give us victory over slavery to the desires of the flesh. We have freedom in Christ (Galatians 5).

We can walk in newness of life, in righteousness. We can walk in the light. We can overcome the world. Our faith is not only about gaining eternal life when we die but also about living the abundant life God designed for us in the here and now (John 10:10). This is why God's commandments are not burdensome for His children but rather a joy. This is what David meant when he wrote, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). This does not mean that God will give us what we want. It means He will change our desires. When God is our delight, His desires for us become our desires. We want to follow His ways, not the ways of the world, so He is delighted to give us the desires of our hearts because they are His desires.

This is the culmination of all John had been writing to these churches, so they could understand the difference between false teachers and people who have really been born again (1 John 2:26). Those who know Jesus have been born of the Spirit and made new creations, so their lives reflect the ways of the Spirit.

Q: How have your desires changed since you started following Jesus? Your life's purpose? Your goals and dreams? Your lifestyle? What else has changed?

Q: How can you grow so that your desires line up with God's desires more?

1 John 5:6–12 and John 1:1–14 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Those who have Jesus have life, both now and eternally.

Q: Who testifies that those who know Jesus have eternal life? Why is that testimony greater than the testimony of people?

The repeated word in this passage is "testimony" or "witness." Again, John was contrasting what these false teachers said with the truth. But he was not appealing to what the apostles had said was the truth; he was appealing to what God Himself says is true. It's not a contrast of this group of people with that group of people, but of what mankind says with what God says. The apostles' teaching of the Gospel is not true because it makes more sense, is a better argument, or is more appealing. It is true because it is what God says is true.

The evidence John gave for this was to say that there are three testimonies that all agree – the Spirit, the water and the blood. The water and the blood are both connected with Jesus, "he who came by water and blood" (5:6). This is something that must have been clear to John's original audience because he didn't explain to them what he meant by that, but it may seem a little obscure to us today. It helps when we study the historical context, what the false teachers of that day were teaching.

One of the false teachers of that time was Cerinthus, who taught that Jesus was born an ordinary human. He denied the incarnation, that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. Cerinthus taught that divinity came upon Jesus only at His baptism (water) and left Him

before His Crucifixion (blood), because he didn't believe God could die. As Paul wrote in Corinthians, the idea that God died on the Cross makes the Gospel seem like foolishness to those who considered themselves wise. According to the world's wisdom, it doesn't make sense (1 Corinthians 1:18–25).

But the belief that Jesus was fully God and fully human, and therefore that God died on the Cross, is integral to the Gospel. If Jesus had been just a human being, His atonement would not have accomplished eternal forgiveness of all sins of all people of all times (Hebrews 9:11–28). In the opening of his Gospel, John taught that Jesus was not merely a man; He was with God in the beginning and through Him all things were made (John 1:1–4). Jesus was the Word made flesh; God made flesh (John 1:14).

So when Jesus died on the Cross, it was God the Son sacrificing Himself for our sins (Galatians 1:4). God bore the punishment for our breaking the covenant, as He promised in the covenant-cutting ceremony way back at the beginning in His covenant with Abraham. As the suzerain of that covenant, God should have made Abraham, His vassal, walk through the pieces of the sacrificed animals. And by so doing, Abraham would have been saying, "If I break this covenant, may my body be broken like these animals." But in His covenant with Abraham, God Himself walked through the pieces (Genesis 15:17). The doctrine of atonement requires that God Himself bore our sins, God the Son, the Word made flesh.²

This is the testimony of God, that Jesus was not just a human being, but God made flesh. His baptism (water) proved He was sent by God as "my beloved Son" (Matthew 3:16–17). In His baptism, the Spirit of God descended on Jesus, but that wasn't divinity coming upon an ordinary human being. He already was God the Son, God made flesh at the incarnation (John 1:14). In the moment of His baptism, all three persons of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – were present together to declare Jesus as Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Not just a human being, but the Son of God (John 1:29–34).³

Old Testament law required that a matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). John gave three – the Spirit, the water and the blood. In the case of Jesus, we have the testimony of God the Father and God the Spirit that Jesus is truly God the Son. Even more than that of any human witnesses sharing what they saw about Jesus, we should believe God's own testimony about His Son (1 John 5:9–12). When we believe God's testimony, we will have eternal life.

But John wasn't talking only about a future promise of eternal life. John used a parallel structure to emphasize his point, that the one who has Jesus has life. When we are in true fellowship with God, the Spirit dwells in us and we have God in us (4:12–16). Because Christ is life, when we have Christ, we have life, both eternal life in heaven and abundant life now (John 14:6).

Q: How would you explain to someone who doesn't know the Gospel that Jesus was both fully God and fully human?

Q: How would you explain the effect that Jesus' complete deity and complete humanity has on our atonement from sin?

1 John 5:13–21 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Those who know Jesus know the truth.

Q: How is asking “according to His will” connected with believers’ wanting to keep God’s commandments?

In this concluding section, John explained why he had been writing to them – a two-fold reason – to know that they have eternal life and to know that whatever they ask according to His will, they would receive. At first, those things may not seem connected, but they are both about life. The first is confidence in our eternal life. The second is confidence that God will give us His best for us in this life.

John’s point about God’s answering our prayers is the same as what we said earlier about our desires. God gives us the desires of our heart when we delight ourselves in Him. God gives us whatever we ask in prayer when we ask according to His will. God wants us to share our deepest desires with Him in prayer as Jesus did the night before His Crucifixion (“Lord, if you are willing take this cup from me”), but our ultimate desire needs to be to do His will (“yet not my will, but Your will be done”).

John encouraged believers to pray for Christians who are sinning to repent. Among scholars there are many interpretations of “the sin that leads to death.” Our view is that there are some sins God judges with a physical death, like that of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).⁴ But it is up to the Lord to judge, not us. For any other sin, John told us earlier in the letter that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us (1 John 1:9). There is no sin too grievous to be forgiven when you truly repent; David was forgiven of adultery and murder. This means that as long as people are still alive, we can pray for them to repent, to turn from the kingdom of darkness to Jesus. If their sin leads to death, there is nothing we can do. That’s up to the Lord. But as long as they’re still alive, we can pray for them to repent.⁵

To conclude, John set up another stark contrast between those who are of the world and those who are born of God. The world is under Satan’s power, but we are under God’s protection. They keep sinning, but we repent. God has given us understanding of the truth, that Jesus is the Son of God and in Him we have life. This is the ultimate final truth John wanted his readers to walk away with. It all comes down to Jesus.

So he ended with “little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Anything that pulls us away from Jesus is an idol. Our faith isn’t a set of rules or a religion, it’s a relationship. All this theology stuff may feel complicated at times, and we may feel confused by false teachings, but it’s really that simple. Abide in Christ and you will have life.

Q: What “idols” in your life tend to pull you away from Jesus? How can you choose to abide in Him all day every day?

Q: What experiences in your life could you point to as evidence of the truth that “Jesus is life”?

Week 8: John and Jude: Jesus Is Life

Took

Main Point: Those who know Jesus will have life.

On April 23, 2002, the House Appropriations subcommittee heard from an expert who was testifying in support of federal funding for music education and research – Elmo. Elmo, as in Elmo from *Sesame Street*. The Muppet, dressed in a suit with a red power tie, spoke of himself in third person and even sang a song about which foods to buy at the grocery store.⁶

Don't allow the voices of "experts" to settle your opinion on salvation. Consider the full counsel of the book of 1 John, be assured of your salvation, and choose to live a life of abiding in Jesus. The abundant life is waiting for you.

Q: What is the danger on prioritizing "experts" over the Word of God?

Q: Describe your daily devotional strategy. What tools and practices have you found helpful in prioritizing the study God's Word in your life?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Consider what you have learned in 1 John. You may even choose to reread it in one sitting to remind yourself of all John wrote. What is the main focus of the letter? What did John want his readers to know, believe, and trust?

PRAY for the Lord to give you confidence in the truth of the Gospel – that you can know that in Christ you have life, both eternal life in the future and abundant life now. Pray to deepen your fellowship with Him so your life can be more abundant with the fruit of the Spirit. Ask God to give you wisdom to discern false teaching when you hear it and stand on the simple yet profound truth of the Gospel.

ACT: Share. Tell one person this week about what you have learned from 1 John. How has studying this book deepened your faith? How has it helped your understanding of the Gospel? How has it changed the way you will live?

NEXT TIME in 1–3 John and Jude: Next week, we will move into 2 John, a much shorter book with the same main themes as 1 John:

- Those who know Jesus will love others.

- Those who do not acknowledge Jesus as the Savior are false teachers.
- Those who abide in Christ will be saved.

¹ <https://www.insider.com/celebrities-actors-singers-testified-congress#john-denver-defended-artistic-freedom-at-a-senate-committee-hearing-in-1985-debating-the-possible-government-regulation-of-objectionable-lyrics-1>

² I. Howard Marshall, *Epistles of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

³ Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

⁴ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary, [*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 902.

⁵ This comes from the document you sent me; I don't have a reference for this view.

⁶ https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/2000-/hh_2002_April_23_Elmo/