

War of the World

November 26 – 1 John 2:15-29

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 329 – 36 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

John introduced his next test for discipleship — worldliness. **Those who say that they follow Christ are engaged in a war with the world. How they respond to its attraction is either evidence for or against their profession of faith.**

The *world* refers to the views and values of this present age, all of which oppose God's will and ways. Why? Remember, Lucifer was cast down to earth at the beginning. His influence here brought sin into the world. Thus, the world is broken, evil, and opposed to God. Therefore, to love the world, or the things of the world, is to love the devil's ungodly system (v.15, 16).

Thus, a love for this world will not be a characteristic of a true follower of Christ.

A second reason not to love the world is that it is passing away (v.17). Because the world is broken and wicked, God will destroy and replace it one day with a new one. **Why would we attach our affections to something so worthless and short-lived, when we are destined for eternity?**

A third reason not to love the world is that it is antichristian (v.18-23). **Under Satan's influence, the world denies Christ's identity and despises anyone who believes or follows Him.** Thus, this antichristian world is constantly attempting to pull people away from the church, away from God's Word, and away from the gospel; and, unfortunately, the enemy is often successful.

But those who are genuine followers of Christ, who have His Spirit within them, will not abandon the Lord. But he who is still controlled by the spirit of the world will, in time, admit his pretense and deny the Father and the Son (v.22). Christ and the Holy Spirit are one and the same. One would not reject the other. Therefore, someone who claims to be a Christian, but turns his back on Christ, was never a child of God. "Those who go out from us were not really of us" (v.19). The Gnostics were unsaved pretenders bent on ungodly mischief.

What was John's point in addressing this topic? He wrote, "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you" (v.26). John was warning Christians to steer clear of the Gnostics and other false teachers who would lead them astray; and he was encouraging them to remain faithful to the true gospel "which they had heard from the beginning (v.24). For you have no need for someone to teach you. Just abide in Him in confidence so that you will not have to shrink away in shame at Christ's coming" (v.28).

Daily Reflection

We are caught in a war of two loves — the love of God and the love of the world. Every day, we make decisions that move us one step in either direction. We must be intentional to deepen our love for God, or we will fall more in love with the things of this world. There is no such thing as middle ground. If we do nothing to deepen our love for God, our fleshly tendencies will move us in the opposite direction.

But those who surrender to worldliness give evidence that they or are not in Christ, and Christ is not in them. **Those who have been redeemed by Christ will show signs of resistance to the world. In time, the temptations of this world will slowly lose their effectiveness to distract our attention.** This world has everything humans would want, but for followers of Christ, it has nothing that we need. Why would we cling to a system that will one day fail and fall, when we have a true, everlasting treasure in Christ?

Evaluate your love of the world. Does it have a hold on you, your attention, your affections?

Children of God

November 27 – 1 John 3:1-24

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 330 – 35 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Before John transitioned to the next phase of his letter, he paused in amazement at the great love that God has lavished on us (v.1). **He was specifically astonished at the thought that we have been made His children, included as part of His family** (v.1). However, because we are part of God's family, "the world does not know us, just as it did not know Christ" (v.1). As a result, we are set apart from unbelievers, as though we are living in a strange land.

Even still, though we have a new nature and new desires, John reminded us that we are "not yet what we will be" (v.2). We are currently trapped in our sinful flesh, and so our redeemed spirit struggles against its human restraints. Though God is at work in us, continuously molding us into the image of His Son, He cannot complete His work here on earth, until our body of sin is done away with. That day will be when Jesus returns, and we will get to see Him "as He is" (v.2). The image of God, which was intended for us from the beginning, will be restored in us, and we will finally be like Christ — sinless.

But for now, the Holy Spirit is working to move us toward that image. Therefore, the longer that we live, the more like Christ we should become. Though we long for that day when Christ returns, we should be allowing the Spirit to purify us as Christ was pure (v.3). Part of the purification process is to exhibit righteousness and love, which John addressed next.

Evidently, while the Gnostics claimed to be Christians, they lived loose personal lives, participating in sinful acts on a regular basis. Thus, John pointed out the inconsistencies of such a lifestyle with Christ's teaching. It is true that Christians still sin. We are not perfect people. While we have been forgiven of our sin, we are still bound by the prison of our sinful flesh. While our spiritual desire is to do what's right, our flesh desires to do wrong. Thus, at times, Christians succumb to sin.

However, while Christians may temporarily yield to sinful bents, they will not practice sin or allow it to become habitual (v.7-9). Why not? First, true Christians will not exhibit lawless lives, but one in obedience to God (v.4-6). Second, practicing sin defies the nature and purpose of the One who saved us (v.7, 8). Why would we who have been delivered from the darkness continue to live in it? Third, Christ's seed is in us (v.9). Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, His seed will grow and produce good fruit. Thus, someone who claims to be a Christian, yet is known by habitual sin (bad fruit), how can his salvation be genuine?

Finally, John wrote that genuine believers can be identified by their love (v.10-24). They will not take from others, as Cain did, but rather give to them (v.12-16). Cain offered sacrifices to God (pretending), but he harbored a deep hatred toward his brother, Abel. In fact, his hatred exhibited itself through murder. Vengeful jealousy and hatred are not of God, but Satan.

Furthermore, true Christians will care for people and desire to meet their needs (v.16-18). The existence of *agape* love in our lives is evidence that we are "of the truth," children of God (v.19). The children of God keep the commandments of God, one of which is to love people the way He loves them (v.21-24). With God's Spirit in us (who is love Himself), how can we refrain from loving others?

Daily Reflection

Just as there are similarities between all members of a family, so do Christians exhibit similarities to Christ, as part of the family of God. To look at a family photo, in which all members have similar qualities, and then to spot one who has no semblance to the others, causes one to wonder if he or she truly belongs to the family. The same is true for God's family photo. Do you look and act like a member of God's family, or do people observe your actions and words and wonder whether you belong?

Testing the Spirits

November 28 – 1 John 4:1-6

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 331 – 34 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

John interrupted his train of thought regarding love for a brief tangent regarding false spirits. It seems that when he mentioned the Holy Spirit at the tail end of the previous passage (3:24b), it prompted him to include some thoughts about the other spirits in the world. Therefore, this section is a “by the way” moment in John’s letter. When someone says, “by the way,” he is going to pause from his current train of thought and interject some other (sometimes unrelated) ideas to consider. In his tangent, John provided us with a warning, two simple tests, and a word of encouragement, before he continued his lesson on love (4:7-21).

Here is John’s warning: **many false prophets (teachers) exist, so do not believe them without first testing them** (4:1).

As Christians, we are expected to love and accept all people. **However, we are not to be gullible or naïve, but to practice discernment.** To be discerning is to have the wisdom to understand that not everything is what it seems on the surface. To be discerning is to separate or distinguish one thing from another. While discernment, in general, is a quality for which all should aspire, in the case of one’s spiritual life, discernment is essential.

By using the word *spirits*, John indicated that there are many spirits that exist (v.1). However, by saying, “Do not believe every spirit” (v.1), he also indicated that many (if not most) of them are false. They exist to distract Christians from following the true Spirit of God. We must remember that behind our physical world is a spiritual one, and every issue, activity, or person that we encounter has a spiritual element to consider. While we are expected to be pure and righteous, we are never to be unaware of the spiritual dangers that surround us. **Thus, John warned that there are many antichrists in the world (people who oppose Jesus). We must learn to discern them.**

John offered two tests for discerning spirits (v.2, 3). **First, does the person believe that Jesus is who He said He was?** For example, was Jesus born of a virgin? Was He sinless? Was He fully God and fully man (a question aimed at the Gnostics)? Is Jesus the only way to have eternal life? Was His death on the cross sufficient to cover our sins? Was He resurrected? A negative answer to any of these questions could reveal a false teacher. One who has God’s Spirit within him would never knowingly deny these claims.

Second, **is the message being propagated full of man-centered (humanistic) or God-centered (biblical) ideas?** One can claim to believe in Jesus (passing Test 1) yet teach false doctrine. Christians should be skeptical of all teaching, measuring it against Scripture. Popularity, for example, is not a good test of sound doctrine. Messages that are popular are most likely full of humanistic rhetoric that “tickles ears,” which is why people are attracted to it (v.5, 6).

Daily Reflection

With his two tests for discerning spirits, John included a word of encouragement, **“Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world”** (v.4). Though there are many spirits in the world, we can have confidence that they are puny when compared to the Spirit of God. We are not powerless before worldly spirits. Rather we have what we need to discern their validity, as well as the power to overcome them.

Are you actively practicing discernment, comparing everything you read, hear, and see to God’s Word? Predict what would happen if you do not effectively “test these spirits.”

Up, Down, and All Around

November 29 – 1 John 4:7-5:3

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 332 – 33 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

John has already provided several “tests” to identify genuine faith, but his favorite was love. Thus, love is the most prevalent topic in this letter. **Today, John provided the flow of love, that love is up, down, and all around.** What does that mean? Let me explain.

First, **love is down.** Before we ever loved God, He first loved us (4:7, 10, 19). We were born into sin, as enemies of God who did not naturally love Him. However, because God loved us (even in our sin), He chose to reconcile us to Himself by sending His Son to pay sin’s penalty on the cross (a propitiation, 4:10). No greater love has ever been demonstrated! Thus, love first came down to us through Jesus (4:9).

Second, **love is up.** Because of what Christ did on the cross, we have been given new life in Him. Because of our new life, we also have a new love, and we freely express our love towards Him for what He’s done. Also, because we have God’s Spirit residing in us, we now love Him (5:1-3). Thus, our love is up.

Third, **love is all around.** Because the Spirit of God the Father (who is love) and God the Son (who was the greatest demonstration of love) is in us, we cannot help but to love those around us (4:7, 8, 11). Love is a sign of our conversion (4:13-16, 19-21).

While all people can demonstrate love for others, Christians cannot help but to love others. The love that we exhibit is a supernatural love (*agape*), a love that is unconditional, unselfish, and marked by patience and forgiveness.

As Christians, we also follow Christ’s example, and Jesus loved people (4:9-11). “Even as I have loved you,” He said, “so also you should have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). Besides, we love others so that they can see what our heavenly Father is like (1 Jn. 4:12).

Notice that John did not say that God simply loves, but rather that “God *is* love” (4:8). Love is part of God’s nature, and it influences all that God is and does. But, if God is an invisible spirit and no one has ever seen Him, how will people know what He is like? We can know what God is like by looking to Jesus’ life. But now that Jesus is no longer on earth, people can see God’s love through us. **The Church is now the physical demonstration of God’s love.**

Finally, understanding God’s love gives us confidence in the day of judgment (4:16-18). When we begin to comprehend what Christ has done for us on the cross, that our sins have been completely wiped away, and we have been made right with God because of Him, we lose our fear of the future judgment. Because of Christ, we will not bear the penalty for our sins. Therefore, we will not be condemned when we stand before God in the afterlife. **Thus, “perfect love casts out fear” (4:18).** We no longer worry about God’s wrath or the punishment that awaited us before salvation. God’s wrath has abated because of Christ’s sacrifice.

John also wrote, “As He (Christ) is, so also are we in this world” (4:17). Christ is sitting next to the Father, in complete confidence, having done all that He was instructed, defeating the power of sin by His death. The judgment for sin has passed away for those who are in Him. Therefore, we can have confidence that God sees us as He sees Christ, without sin.

Daily Reflection

Do you have a supernatural (God-given) love for the Lord, or is it forced? Can you recognize a genuine, God-given love for others? Is God’s love pouring out of you and spilling over into the lives of those around you?

If you are truly saved and part of the family of God, and His Spirit resides in you, you will not be able to contain His love. Rather, like God, love will permeate all that you say and do.

The Spirit, the Water, and the Blood

November 30 – 1 John 5:4-12

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 333 – 32 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

So far, John's letter has been simple and straightforward, but these verses are difficult and controversial. But first, John introduced another test to determine true followers of Christ — they will overcome the world through faith (v.4, 5). To overcome means to conquer or to gain victory over. Of course, as redeemed sinners, we are not overcomers on our own. We are overcomers through Him who conquered sin and death for us.

Through Christ, we can overcome sin and temptation. We can overcome the demonic forces. We can overcome the perverted world system in which we live, and we can overcome the trials and tribulations that we face. Our God-given ability to overcome is evidence of our salvation. Thus, John wrote that the overcomer is "he who believes in the Son of God," which was another shot at the Gnostics (v.5).

Remember, Gnostics believed that matter (or the material world) is evil. Therefore, Jesus could not have been fully human, or He would've been tainted by sin. Furthermore, they believed the God part settled on Jesus, the man, at His baptism, but it departed from Jesus before His death. In essence, Gnostics discounted Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. Thus, John wrote, "**Jesus is the One who came by water and blood**" (v.6). In other words, John confirmed that **Jesus was the Messiah both at baptism (water) and on the cross (blood)**. He was exposing the Gnostics' false teaching.

Another interesting note here is that the water and the blood could be references to the Old Testament ceremonial system of tabernacle sacrifice. The priests were purified externally by the water laver, and they were purified internally by the blood on the Mercy Seat. As the Priest of the New Testament, instituting a new covenant through Himself, **Jesus also came by water through His baptism (laver) and by blood at the cross (Mercy Seat)**.

The second difficult issue in this passage is regarding the "missing" verse. Evidently, there are certain ancient manuscripts of this letter that have extra words added to Verse 7. The words refer to the trinity, which would make sense because "there are three that testify." However, because of the controversy of whether to include them in modern passages, some translators have excluded them from their versions. Either way, the interpretation of the passage is the same.

To continue his refutation, John reminded us that true believers have the Holy Spirit residing in them, and the Spirit confirms that Jesus is the Messiah. If one has the Spirit within him, he will not deny the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. Thus, a believer would profess that Jesus was the Messiah for His entire earthly ministry. John said it this way, "**The Spirit, the water, and the blood are all in agreement**" (v.8).

Finally, John referred to the requirements of the law, which needed two or three witnesses to support a truth claim (Spirit, water, and blood). If we receive truth claims from human witnesses, he said, then how could we not receive the witness of the Holy Spirit? His witness is greater than any man's (v.9). John called this witness (Spirit) "the testimony," and said that those who believe in the Son of God have "the testimony" (Spirit) in them (v.10).

Daily Reflection

The testimony of these three witnesses — the Spirit, the water, and the blood — is that Jesus is the only way to be saved (v.11, 12). To claim any other way to salvation is to make Him out to be a liar (v.10). This doctrine is called the exclusivity of Christianity, that Christ is the only means to salvation (*Jn. 14:6*), which the world has difficulty accepting. People have rejected Christ from the beginning. It should be no surprise that they reject Him today. Those who claim to be Christian but reject these important doctrines are not fooling us, but themselves.

That You May Know

December 1 – 1 John 5:13-21

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 334 – 31 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We read the conclusion of John's first letter. He ended with a summary (as any good teacher would) so that his readers would catch what was most important. Thus, this passage is full of truths that we've already discussed. But if John's letter had a thesis statement or a leading idea, then it would be the first verse, "**These things I have written to you so that you may know that you have eternal life**" (v.13).

Because of the doctrinal confusion produced by the Gnostic teachers and the subsequent fallout of false converts, the early church was shaken. Therefore, John confronted the heresy and confirmed the faith of those who were genuine believers. **He wanted them to know for sure that they were saved and that they could have confidence in Christ and His promised gift of eternal life** (v.13).

Here are John's closing reminders. First, when we seek God's will, we should have confidence in our prayers (v.14, 15). The problem is that we tend to seek to impose our will, seek our interests, and pursue our purposes, not His (see 3:19-24). Second, God's children are obvious because they do not practice sin (5:17, 18a). Remember, although Christians make mistakes, but they will not exhibit a lifestyle of habitual sin (see 3:4-10).

Third, the power of Christ's blood and the presence of God's Spirit in our lives overwhelm the spiritual forces of the devil (5:18b, 19). While Satan has influence on earth, he cannot thwart God's Church or His purposes (see 4:4). Fourth, Christ was a real person who lived a sinless life so that He could pay the debt for our sins (v.20). John's eye-witness account verified this truth, so we can have confidence that Jesus was (and is) the true God (see 1:1-4).

Amid these reminders, John mentioned a new topic — "the sin leading to death" (5:16, 17). This phrase is difficult to interpret and widely

debated. But there are things we know for sure. First, all sin leads to spiritual death, "for the wages of sin is death" (*Rom. 6:23*). Second, spiritual death is not the subject here. The subject is physical death. Third, all sins have consequences, and God punishes or disciplines us accordingly.

Fourth, there are some sins in the New Testament that God has chosen to punish by death. Though John did not disclose them in his letter, there are examples in other letters. Ananias and Sapphira died after lying to the Holy Spirit (*Acts 5:1-11*), so did the one who committed incest in Corinth (*1 Cor. 5:1-5*). There were also those who died because they abused the Lord's Supper (*1 Cor. 11:27-30*). The sin leading to death may even be connected to the unpardonable sin that Jesus mentioned (*Matt. 12:22-32*). Simply put, we are not sure.

However, we shouldn't miss the bigger picture. John wanted us to pray for others, even those who are errant in their theology (i.e., Gnostics), living in ungodly ways, or being intentionally deceptive and divisive.

Daily Reflection

Finally, John closed his letter by affirming his readers' faith (*1 Jn. 5:20, 21*). They were being confused by false teachers and competing doctrines. After all his teaching, John ended his letter with a thunderous affirmation, "**Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life**" is in Him! John put Jesus and Christianity in a league of their own. Everything else is idolatry (v.21).

Although Christians are not perfect, by any means, Christianity is set apart from the other religions of the world. Every person is responsible for his assessment of the claims of Jesus. Either He was a crazy kook, or He was the Christ, the only way to God. If so, then everything else is an idol, a distraction. What will you decide? Choose wisely, for your decision is one of life and death. Choose Christ!

Love and Truth

December 2 – 2 John 1:1-13

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 335 – 30 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to John's short second letter, which was written between 65-67 AD. It is addressed to "the chosen lady and her children" (v.1), which may have been to an individual and her family or to a local church and its members. In this letter, **John emphasized two significant basics — our commitment to love and truth.**

The words *love* and *truth* are mentioned a total of nine times in the first six verses. Love, of course, was one of John's favorite subjects. It is prevalent in his gospel (*Jn. 13:34, 35*) and in his first letter (*1 Jn. 4:7, 8*). Even in this letter, John encouraged his readers (and us) to love one another (*2 Jn. 1:5, 6*). He also encouraged us to know and love the truth (v.1, 3). **Our love for Christ is a common bond between us, but we also have a common responsibility — to know, love, obey, and protect the truth.** Why? John said, "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus as coming in the flesh..." (v.7).

While John was certainly referring to the Gnostics, he would include a longer list today — Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, Universalists, New Agers, Christian Scientists, the Emergent Church, the Health and Wealth Movement, Name It and Claim It Preachers, Muslims, and many more. Anyone who is not for Christ as being God's Son coming in the flesh is against Christ and should be avoided.

In fact, John warned, "Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we've accomplished, but that we may receive our full reward" (v.8). There is a discrepancy here in the translations regarding those who may lose their reward (v.8). Some versions use the word *we*, as in John may lose his reward, while other versions use the word *you*, as in believers may lose their reward. In light of John's warning, it makes more sense that John would stand to lose his reward. For he would not get to see the seeds that he planted come to fruition. They would

have been stolen by the enemy. Thus, John "would've lost all that he accomplished" (v.8).

There is another translation discrepancy over whose "joy will be made full" (v.12). Some translations use the words *your joy*, meaning the joy of the readers, while other translations use the words *our joy*, referring to John and his associates. Again, in the context, it makes sense that John's joy would be made full by visiting. We might say it this way, "I would like nothing better than to come and see you. That would make me very happy."

Next, John addressed the fact that believers were inviting false teachers into their homes or churches (v.10). He provided the standard for identifying deceivers — "those who go too far and do not abide in the teaching of Christ" (v.9). Once they have been identified, they should be kept away from God's people. False teachers are wolves in sheep's clothing and should not be allowed near the flock (v.10, 11).

Daily Reflection

At first, there seems to be a contradiction here. If we are to befriend unbelievers and share the gospel with them, how can we shun them? Where is the line between actively sharing our faith and jealously protecting it?

There is a difference between an unbeliever and a false teacher. Unbelievers are lost sheep that need to be rescued, while false teachers are thieves looking to steal sheep that are in the fold. Why would we invite a thief into our home? **John's command is not a contradiction to the Great Commission, but rather it is a warning against those who wish to do us harm.** False teachers are intentional in causing damage to the Christian faith. We must protect ourselves against them. For Christians to invite a false teacher into their home or church, to provide him with the opportunity to deceive believers, is foolish. **We must watch ourselves and welcome only those who love the truth.**