



The Live Love(d)
Thematic & Scriptural Study:
A Primer of First John
with commentary and discussion questions

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*In this is love,
not that we have loved God
but that he loved us
and sent his Son to be the propitiation
for our sins.
Beloved, if God so loved us,
we also ought to love one another.
(I John 4:10-11 ESV)*

*This is love:
not that we loved God,
but that he loved us
and sent his Son as an atoning
sacrifice for our sins.
Dear friends, since God so loved us,
we also ought to love one another.
(I John 4:10-11 NIV)*

Introduction

Maybe you've heard these poignant lyrics from gravelly-voiced Lucinda Williams' song "Born To Be Loved" (from her acclaimed 2011 album *Blessed*):

You weren't born to be abandoned
And you weren't born to be forsaken
You were born to be loved
You were born to be loved

You weren't born to be abused
You weren't born to lose
You were born to be loved
You were born to be loved

You weren't born to be mistreated
And you weren't born to be misguided
You were born to be loved
You were born to be loved

You weren't born to suffer
And you weren't born for nothin'
You were born to be loved
You were born to be loved

You were born to be loved
And you weren't born to be disgraced
You were born to be loved
You were born to be loved

Although the love envisioned in these lyrics is most likely some form of human love that the author believes all human beings need (and perhaps even deserve), these words undoubtedly strike a chord deep within every human heart. Our deepest human need is to be loved—and not only to be loved, but to believe that somehow this is the very purpose for which we were created and brought into this world.

John agrees. He is often called "the apostle of love," for reasons which quickly become clear when reading his Gospel and his letters. Greek words translated "love" occur 291 times in the New Testament; 57 of these words occur in the Gospel of John (21 chapters), and 52 of them occur in the three letters of John (7 chapters). Forty-six of those 52 occur in the five short chapters of First John.



No wonder First John was chosen as the primary Scriptural foundation for developing the theme of the 2013 National Youth Gathering, “Live Love(d).” This theme is multi-dimensional, as we will begin to see in this introductory study and will continue to see in additional resources made available as the Gathering draws nearer—culminating in the various presentations of this theme at the Gathering itself. What is crucial to recognize from the start is that in the theme “Live Love(d),” the “(d)” makes all the difference. We cannot even begin to know what it means to love others in the Biblical sense of the term until and unless we know and trust God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. “We love,” says John, “because he first loved us” (4:19). By the same token, once we know God’s love in Christ we cannot help but love God *and* others; “whoever loves God must also love his brother” (4:21).

Like Lucinda Williams, John wants his readers to know that they were “born to be loved.” God’s ultimate purpose for each of us is not to be forsaken, mistreated, abandoned to a life of misery and suffering—but to be loved. For John, however, this is not a matter of vague human sentiment or emotion. The love that we were born to know is rooted not in a human emotion or experience, but in a human (and divine) person, Jesus Christ. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, was *born* so that we might be loved. He was abandoned, forsaken, mistreated, subjected to unspeakable misery and suffering on the cross (by God himself!) so that we could know and have unshakeable confidence in God’s love for us in Christ. Knowing *that* love is what makes life worth living, and only that love can enable and empower us to love others in ways that please God and meet people’s deepest needs.

Obviously, “love” is a major theme in many other books of the Bible and in Scripture as a whole—some of these key portions of Scripture will be referenced in this study, and others in materials yet to come. But when pondering the theme “Live Love(d), there is no better place to start than with the “apostle of love” and with the letter that—in terms of verbal density—has more to say about what “real love” is than any other book of the Bible...and other book in human history. God’s rich blessings as you open your heart and soul to this life-giving, life-changing Word of God!

What follows is a basic, introductory study of First John that is designed primarily to unpack and stimulate thinking about the 2013 Gathering theme “Live Love(d).”

How to Use This Study and Prepare for “Live Love(d)”:

- As will be expressed elsewhere in this paper, spend time in I John. Read through this short letter a couple of times before you read this paper. Write down words and concepts that stick out to you or questions you may have.
- Spend time with this paper:
 - Perhaps read through the paper in sections
 - Take time looking up the Scripture references
 - This paper includes
 - Background information on I John
 - Exploring the “spirals” of I John
 - Comments by the author and quotes from various commentators, writers, and theologians
 - Reflection and Discussion Questions
 - Selected Martin Luther quotes on “love”
- Don’t be limited by this study. After you read this study, go back and read I John again and again (it is refreshingly and welcomingly brief!). Wrestle with it and discuss it with others—prayerfully, meditatively, humbly, earnestly.
- This is not a verse-by-verse commentary on First John. It does not take up every theological point or issue raised in this letter, some of which are very challenging and even troubling from a human perspective.
- Rather, this is a *theme* study of First John, meant to stimulate thinking on the theme “Live Love(d)” by drawing on key truths set forth by John in this letter. It is deliberately selective, focused on truths relevant to this theme and (from the author’s perspective) particularly relevant to communicating the Gospel to Lutheran young people whose lives and thinking are shaped (and distorted) in many ways by today’s cultural worldviews, priorities, and religious views.



Helpful Commentaries

As you read and study, you are encouraged to make use of one or more theologically sound commentaries or study Bibles that will help answer questions that are not taken up in this study. Recommended and referred to in this study are the following resources:

The Lutheran Study Bible: English Standard Version (ed. Edward A. Engelbrecht [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009]) (hereafter *TLSB*).

The Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version (ed. Robert G. Hoerber [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986]) (hereafter *CSSB*).

Martin Luther's *Lectures on the First Epistle of John* in *Luther's Works, American Edition* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967]) (hereafter, Luther).

R. C. H. Lenski's *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945) (hereafter Lenski).

Martin H. Franzmann's *The Word of the Lord Grows* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961) (hereafter Franzmann).

J. R. W. Stott's *The Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1964) (hereafter Stott)

Also highly recommended:

LifeLight study of 1, 2, 3 John (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012).

Bible Study *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* by Albert B. Collver III (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011).

Basic Background Questions about First John

- 1) **Who wrote it?** While this letter is not specifically “signed” by John, and although some modern commentators have questioned its authorship, the evidence (witness of early church fathers, stylistic and thematic similarities to the Gospel of John, self-testimony to apostolic authority) overwhelmingly supports the view that the author of John’s Gospel also wrote this and the other two letters traditionally ascribed to John.
- 2) **When and where did he write it?** While these questions cannot be answered with absolute certainty, it seems likely that John wrote this letter toward the end of his long period of service (30 years?) as “pastor-elder” (see 2 and 3 John 1) of the church of Ephesus (and perhaps other churches) in Asia Minor.
- 3) **To whom did he write it?**
 - a) This is a “catholic epistle”: Like several other New Testament letters (e.g., 1-2 Peter, James, Jude), John’s letters were “catholic” or “general” in nature—they were not written to a single congregation, but circulated among a number of congregations that were facing similar circumstances and challenges and would benefit from a common message and word of encouragement.
 - b) My little children...”: This phrase, used repeatedly in 1 John, means primarily “children in *faith*”—i.e., fellow *Christians*. This letter *assumes* a real and substantial knowledge of the basics of the Christian faith on the part of its readers. Its purpose is not so much *catechesis* as it is reminder, reaffirmation, warning and encouragement. At the same time, there are places in his letter (e.g., 2:13-14) where John shows a special concern for people of various specific age groups (including young people), and it is clear that (in view John’s long ministry) he considers all of his readers as his “children” in a spiritual and pastoral sense.
- 4) **Why did he write it? 1 John is...**
 - a) *Highly personal*: As we will see, and as any cursory reading of the letter shows, John is writing because of his deep *personal* concern for the spiritual welfare of these congregations and their members.
 - b) *Deeply pastoral*: John writes not just as an “apostle” or church leader but as a *pastor*, a caretaker of *souls*. He knows these readers from many years of pastoral service and care, and feels a deep pastoral responsibility for them.
 - c) *Pointedly Polemical*: “The Gospel of John was to some degree polemical...The First Letter of John is wholly and vigorously polemical” (Franzmann, 261). This—as we will see—makes First John difficult to read, digest, and apply at times. Its strong words and warnings, however, are still crucial and extremely relevant, especially in

today's culture in which "polemics" (at least in theory, and especially in the context of religious views and discussion) is generally viewed quite negatively.

5) How did he write it? 1 John is...

- a) *Sublimely simple*: The theology of 1 John is both "simple and sublime" at the same time. The deepest and most profound truths of the Christian faith are set forth here, but in terms so simple that even a child can understand them (e.g., "God is love," 4:8).
- b) *Magnificently monotonous*: John's frequent repetition of words and themes may strike some as monotonous, but—because of the depth and significance of these terms and themes and because of the way that he develops and amplifies them throughout the letter— it is a magnificent monotony that strengthens the reader's Spirit-given faith in Christ and in the certainty of divine truth.
- c) *Apostolically authoritative* : John writes as one of the chosen few who were privileged to "have seen with our eyes" and "touched with our hands" the "Word of life," Jesus Christ. He knows whereof he speaks, and he is bold and unapologetic in his witness to Christ and his defense of the truth of the Gospel. Those who oppose him by preaching a different Gospel oppose Christ; they are not just "mistaken," they are "liars" (4:1-6; 5:10).
- d) *Structurally strange: a spiral "stairway from/to heaven"*: John's letter is difficult to outline, because it is not written in a linear, point-by-point fashion. Rather, it unfolds like an expanding, widening spiral, returning to the same points and themes again and again, but "thickening" and expanding them with new insights and applications in combination with other truths. For this reason, says Franzmann, this letter "is, in the last analysis, best grasped and appropriated *meditatively* by giving oneself to its movement with energetic sympathy and without too much concern for grasping it structurally" (263-4; emphasis added). Try this "meditative," reflective approach when reading this letter personally and discussing it in a group setting.

6) Who cares? Is John's message still relevant in today's world?

- a) Satan cares (see 1 John 5: 19)
- b) Jesus cares (see 1 John 5:20)
- c) Most people don't care much (or at all) about the things that are so vitally important to John. This, in fact, is what makes John's letter so remarkably relevant today. John Stott and Martin Franzmann (respectively) express this well, even if (from a narrow historical standpoint) their voices come from "out of the past" rather than from the (immediate) present:

“The mid-twentieth century [cf. the early 21st century!] is an epoch of fundamental insecurity. Everything is changing; nothing is stable. New nations are constantly coming to birth. New social and political patterns are continually evolving. The very survival of civilization is in doubt before the threat of a nuclear war. These external insecurities are reflected in the world of the mind and of the spirit. Even the Christian Church, which has received ‘a kingdom which cannot be moved’ and is charged to proclaim Him who is ‘the same yesterday, and today, and forever’ (Heb. xii.28, xiii. 8) now speaks its message softly, shyly, and without conviction. There is a widespread distrust of dogmatism and a preference for agnosticism or free thought. Many Christians are filled with uncertainty and confusion.

Against this background, to read the Epistles of John is to enter another world altogether, whose marks are assurance, knowledge, confidence, and boldness. The predominant theme of these Epistles is Christian certainty. Their characteristic verbs are *ginōskein*, ‘to perceive’ (15 times), and *eidēnai*, ‘to know’ (25 times), while the characteristic noun is *parrēsia*, ‘confidence of attitude’ or ‘boldness of speech.’ The Christian’s certainty is twofold—objective (that the Christian religion is true) and subjective (that he himself has been born of God and possesses eternal life). Both are expounded by John, who takes it for granted that this double assurance is right and healthy in all Christian people. His teaching about these certainties, their nature and the grounds on which they are built, urgently needs to be heard and heeded today.” (Stott, 50).

“The First letter of John is a letter written to Christians, to men whose faith is being endangered by heresy and is being tried by temptation. Although the usual letter forms (salutation, close, etc.) are missing, it is nevertheless a genuine letter, written for a specific situation by a father in Christ to his ‘children,’ and it is pervaded by an intense personal and pastoral concern for these ‘children.’ In its white-hot passion for the truth, for a Christian Gospel and a Christian life that is genuine, whole, and uncompromised, it remains a tonic and bracing word for the church always. It summons a church grown easy and comfortable to bethink itself penitently of the basic facts and the basic laws of its existence. Nowhere is black so black and white so white as in this letter; the antithesis of truth-life, Christ-antichrist, God-devil leaves the church no possibility of doubt as to where she must stand. And the letter likewise leaves no doubt that the church *can* stand where she must stand; the greatness of God’s enabling gift is lettered out in pithy statements which are as profound as they are brief and pointed. Perhaps no New Testament book of like compass has furnished so many brief sayings, sayings that Christian men can lay up in their hearts, to live by and to die on, as this First Letter of John.” (Franzmann, 266-7).

A Non-Divinely Inspired Outline of First John

- The Foundational Statement: “The Word of Life” (1:1-4)
- Five Fact-Based Spirals:
 - The Fellowship (1:5-2:2)
 - The Commandment (2:3-17)
 - Excursus #1: antichrists (2:18-28)
 - The New Birth (2:29-3:24)
 - Excursus #2: spirits (4:1-6)
 - The Love (4:7-5:3)
 - The Testimony (5:4-17)
- The Concluding Statement: “We Know” (5:18-21)

Exploring John's Christ-Centered Spirals

The Foundational Statement: "The Word of Life" (1:1-4)

- This is a strange way to begin a letter: no epistolary greeting, preface, preamble...why? (Possible answers: the letter was intended to be read by and shared with a variety of churches; the rather "abrupt" beginning introduces a tone of sobriety appropriate to the purpose of the letter; intentional parallel to the beginning of John's Gospel; other ideas?)
- The letter begins instead with a pivotal, foundational *theological* statement. It should look familiar: compare John 1:1-14. What common words, themes, and stylistic forms do you see?
- "The Word of Life." Note John's use of the definite article here and consistently throughout the letter. There is no room for "abstractions" in his theology, especially considering what he is likely up against: a deadly and pervasive type of 1st-century heresy that seeks to "spiritualize" the Gospel and even Christ himself. John is most likely battling an early form of Gnosticism (championed, perhaps, by a Gnostic leader named Cerinthus) that denied both the full divinity of the man Jesus and the full humanity of Christ as the Son of God. (For a helpful summary, see the introduction to 1 John in *CSSB*). One of the most important theological terms in 1 John is the little word "the." Pay attention to this word as you read and study!
- Note the "piling on" in the first few verses: "we heard...we saw...we gazed upon...we [even] touched..." John's opponents, as non-apostles, cannot claim this. Don't forget who the "we" is in this verses: strictly speaking, it does *not* include the readers of John's letters (then or now). It refers to the apostles themselves. Foundational heresies need foundational (apostolic) refutation. Creeds (as yet unwritten) and catholicism (these are "catholic" epistles meant to preserve the theological unity of the church) are on the line here—not to mention the (as yet not formally "canonized") New Testament itself. If heresy wins out here, it will have an impact on the entire future history of Christianity.
- The Word of *Life*. This is a matter of life and death. Compare John 1:4, 3:16, 5:26, 6:35, 8:12, 11:25, 14:6, etc. Also see 1 John 4:9 (a key theme verse!) and John's (almost) "last word" in 1 John 5:20. Don't miss, mess up or minimize the "Live" in "Live Love(d)." The purpose of God's LOVE (and ours) is so that we (and others) may LIVE. Love is not an end in itself: the "telos" (ultimate goal) is LIFE. When it comes to life, John deals in either-ors: 1 John 5:12. We need to deal with this head-on, and help others (including young people) come to grips with this as well. There is no "real life" that is not rooted in God's love (John 10:10), and the alternative is death: spiritual, physical, eternal.
- John's opening message in a nutshell is this: The Son of God *asarkos* (without flesh) from all eternity was manifested *ensarkos* (in the flesh) in the fullness of time so that we could have fellowship (*koinonia*: LIFE together) with the one true God and with other believers. Lenski: "John puts this infinite fact into the simplest words...only an inspired mind could do this" (376). Also note that "witness" [*martyria*], "mercy" [in First John, *agape*], and life together [*koinonia*]

are all HUGE words in First John—see the Bible Study *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* by Albert B. Collver III (CPH, 2011).

- “Make *our* joy complete”: compare John 3:29; 15:11; 16:24; Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:1-2. John’s letter seeks to joy to its readers, but the joy he has in mind here is primarily a *father’s* joy in knowing that his *children* are safe in the hands of their heavenly Father—1 John 2:1, etc.

First Spiral of Facts: The Fellowship (1:5-2:2)

- Fellowship (*koinonia*) = “to share something in common.” The fellowship John describes here is primarily fellowship with the true God and (as a result) fellowship with others who believe in the true God. (See vv. 6-7, and note the order, which is reversed for rhetorical effect in v. 3—you can’t have one without the other, but the one depends on the other.)
- So, what do we have “in common” with God? More importantly (since *koinonia* is always a two way street), what does the infinite, eternal, all-holy God have in common with us? Says John: what we have “in common” with God (and vice-versa) is Jesus Christ. Like God, Jesus is true God. Like us, Jesus is true man. Jesus bridges the God-man gap with his flesh, through the incarnation (denied by the false teachers). But there is another huge gap to bridge: human sin. So with the flesh comes “the *blood* of Jesus, His Son, [which] cleanses us from all sin” (1:7). Like us—through Jesus and his cross—God is now (astoundingly and incomprehensibly) a sinner. Like God—through Jesus—we are now righteous. Luther: “On our side there are nothing but sins. We share His good things; He shares our wretchedness. I believe in Christ. Therefore my sin is in Christ” (225). This is why Luther could call Jesus, true man and true God, “the greatest sinner who ever lived”—because he took the sins of the world upon himself.

This is an astounding, miraculous truth that regularly bores us to death because of our sinful obsession with finding something “new and exciting.” (“Yawn,” says the life-long church-goer all too often, “I’ve heard this a million times.”) If this message bores me, I need to beware (2 John 8; 1 Cor. 10:12). This incredible Christ-centered reality is the only thing that makes life worth living: *koinonia* with God resulting in *koinonia* with each other because of what we hold in common with God and with other believers. That “thing in common” is a person: Jesus Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, glorified, returning soon to judge the living and the dead.

- “Blood, atoning sacrifice, liar”—these are strong and even grisly words. They are direct attacks on all forms of Gnosticism and docetism (early heresies denying that the God, in Christ, actually took on human flesh, suffered, and died a human death). “We heard, saw, gazed upon, touched...and proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.” Gnosticism (ancient and modern) is always seeking to “get closer to God” through self-initiated knowledge, experience, ritual, super-spirituality. The Christian Gospel says that there is *nothing* we can do to get closer to God; God took the initiative, and got closer—became one with!—us through the incarnation, and bodily suffering, death and resurrection of the God-man Jesus Christ. Gnosticism is always looking for a “ladder to heaven;” the Gospel shows us a ladder *from* heaven to earth, revealed by God himself in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Your sin can’t be in Christ if you don’t have any (1:8, 10). Denial = death. It’s bad enough to *be* a liar—it’s far worse to call God (who calls you a sinner) a liar. But “if we *keep on* confessing our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). Compare Thesis 1 of Luther’s 95: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” “Forgive” (v. 9) has (unfortunately) become a fairly weak word in English, partly because we’ve worn it out both culturally and even

in much watered-down religious usage. The Greek means: “sent away never to be seen or heard from again.” This is what God has done with our sin through the cross of Christ.

- Note John’s effective use of stark contrasts, here and throughout the letter: light-darkness, truth-lies, claims-certainties, life-death, etc. But John can speak in “both-and’s” as well (sinner-saint, God-man, the world as God’s and the devil’s). “Either-or” and “both-and” formulations *each* have an essential place in Christian doctrine and life—the trick is to know which is which and to keep them clearly and sharply distinguished (like Law and Gospel). Keep this in mind and discuss it as you work through this letter. What happens when you turn an “either-or” into a “both-and”—or vice-versa?
- “My little children” (2:1): apparently John is so old by now that everybody seems like a youngster to him. ☺ But he really does love them all—young and old—with all his heart. And (Lenski) “all that John writes has as its purpose that we may *not* sin” (397). One common manifestation of Gnostic heresies (past and present)—religious views rooted in “superior” intellectual knowledge or “enlightened” self-conceived spirituality (what I believe is between “me and God”)—is a lack of concern for moral behavior and standards. (“What *really* matters is...” blah, blah, blah. “Oh, come on, nobody’s perfect.” “God is love!” “Chill out, man—we’re just having some fun.”) Lutherans too can easily fall into this trap, precisely because of Lutheranism’s strong (and proper) emphasis on the Gospel. So, we need to hear from the man himself:
- Luther: “The remission of sins has not been instituted in order that we may have permission to sin” (245). Not only that, says Luther, but don’t you (you people who are looking for an easy excuse to sin) go talking to me about your “baptism”: “There are Christians who think that they are Christians because they have been baptized. They relax the reins. They are not concerned about conquering sins, but they follow their lusts....they do not want to repent or rise again...He who does not purify himself, who does not battle against himself every day, yields to sin and is guilty of lawlessness...(and) he who is guilty of lawlessness does not have love.” (269) Luther, of course, constantly pointed people who were horrified and terrified by their sin to their baptism for assurance of God’s love and forgiveness. But he was also fully aware that baptism could be viewed and used wrongly, as a “blank check” for doing whatever I want to do “because I know God will forgive me.” Do you see evidence of that temptation and misunderstanding today—in your life and elsewhere?

Second Spiral of Facts: The Commandment (2:3-17)

- “We know” (2:3): this one of John’s favorite assertions. (Since the Gnostics typically boasted about their superior and exclusive “knowledge” of spiritual truth, John may be “turning on its ear” here a common Gnostic catch-phrase.) But... how do we know that we know? Lenski (404) says: “John takes up the question that troubles the minds of so many young people. Is our certainty better than the certainty of men in other religions? Are we Christians merely because we are born into Christian families? If we had been born Jews or Mohammedans would we not feel just as certain and be just as right in feeling that we truly know God? Or is the certainty of the skeptic not as good as the one we claim? Is the whole of religion not a mere subjective matter, unproved, unprovable, especially to a real thinking, scientific mind?”
- Good questions! But John’s answer is potentially troubling: “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments: (2:3). Gulp. As any good Lutheran would ask, what does this mean? Here there are some honest differences of opinion even among faithful Lutheran Bible scholars. Some (like the authors and editors of *CSSB* and *TLSB*) take John’s words as a reference to the Biblical and Lutheran teaching that “faith without works is dead.” We do not look to our keeping of the commandments as the ultimate assurance that we truly “know” Jesus as our Savior, but our sincere efforts to follow Jesus and to do what is pleasing to him offer “proof” or at least evidence that our faith is real. One classic Lutheran hymn puts it this way:

Faith clings to Jesus’ cross alone
And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known,
With love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify;
Works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living. (*LSB* 555:9)

- Others, however, like the venerable Lutheran commentator R. C. H. Lenski (and, arguably, Luther himself in his commentary on 1 John) find it very strange that John would raise such a decisive question about the nature of our Christian certainty and then point to our “good works” as the grounds for that assurance. Lenski notes that the words used here for “keeping” and for “commandment(s)” are used in a broader sense in John’s letter, John’s Gospel, and elsewhere in Scripture (see 1 John 2:5; John 17: 7-8, 18; Matt. 28:20). He also notes John’s fondness—especially in this letter—for using a variety of terms that essentially mean the same thing (e.g., truth, light, word). So, concludes Lenski:

“These ‘commandments’ (‘words’) or the singular ‘commandment’ (‘Word’) are ‘the truth,’ ‘the light’ mentioned in 1:6-8. See how in John 17:6-8 God’s *giving*, Christ’s *giving*, the disciples’ *receiving*, their *knowing*, and their *keeping* ‘the Word’ go together. The substance of this truth, light, Word, words, commandment, commandments consist of *all the divine verities* regarding God, and they produce actual fellowship with him in which we know him and know that we have known and know him. These verities, which are revealed and then received (John 17:8) by us

and kept by us in heart and life, give us the ultimate certainty so that we know that we have, indeed, been known by the light. Only when we leave this light and go back into the darkness will doubt revive and self-deception and lying set in again" (405).

- According to Lenski's way of reading John in this section, the only way that we can "know that we know" Christ and know for sure that His Word has truly had its way in our hearts is by continuing to "keep" that Word ("commandment") at the center of our lives, "treasuring it up in our hearts" as Mary did (see Luke 2:19—which uses this same word for "keep"). Rather than looking (subjectively) to the fruits of our faith for assurance of that faith, we look (objectively) to the Word itself, which creates and sustains faith. "The commandment" (*entole*) in 1 John, Lenski argues compellingly, is "the word, the truth, the light"—all the divine facts revealed to us by God's Spirit through the Word centering in Jesus Christ. It is both an "old commandment" (cf. "The Old Testament!") and a "new commandment" ("The New Testament!") (2:7-8). This "commandment" can be summed up in two words: (first), **believe**, (then) **love** (1 John 3:23).

Luther: "These are the two messages of the entire Gospel: the message of faith and the message of love—through faith before God [*coram Deo*], through love before or toward one's neighbor [*coram mundo*] (274). " "The principal commandment is this, that we should believe in the name of His Son. The second part of this is that we should love. Accordingly the sum and substance is belief in the name of the Son of God and love for one's brother" (282). "You see that the apostle always goes back to faith and love" (306). "Everything is stated very simply, in order that he may keep you in the Word...whether he tells you to remain in the Word or in Christ, this is one and the same thing" (262). Don't be fooled by this simplicity, but don't be afraid to embrace it either. Luther is completely serious here when he says that true Christianity can be summed up in these two words or realities: faith and love. Sometimes we can *overcomplicate* the simple truth of the Gospel.

- "Doctrine" and "doctrines" go together, as do "Christian faith" and "Christian life." We need to distinguish them (like Law and Gospel), but not separate them. For this reason Lutherans, too (especially?) need to spend time in First John, as a corrective to our tendency to *separate* what should be *distinguished* (faith and life, Law and Gospel, doctrine and practice). (This letter—unlike James, for example—certainly didn't bother Luther. He prized and cherished it, as his commentary shows.)
- What's "The Secret" to survival in a crazy, messed-up, dangerous world (see 2:15-17)? Don't ask Rhonda Byrne or James Arthur Ray or...whoever. According to John, the answer is pretty simple (which doesn't mean it's easy): "Abide" (2:17, 27; cf. John 15:4-11; 12ff!).
- It's "the last hour" (2:18). John wrote this 1900 years ago. We must be getting closer ☺. What are we to do? Abide (repeated six times in 2:18-28). Abide in your "anointing"—your baptismal grace and teaching. "You have no need for anyone to teach you" (v. 27). Is this really true? It is (properly understood) if pastors and parents and teachers are doing their job with God's Word, through which the Spirit's "anointing" continues. This doesn't mean that any of us ever "graduate" from the need to receive teaching from others. It does mean, however, that if we are rightly catechized we can "stand our ground" when confronted with false teaching and bear

witness boldly to the truth without having to depend on someone else to speak for us. That's what the rite of confirmation is supposed to signify—getting that rite “right” (and, more importantly, the process that leads up to it) is a continuing but critical challenge.

- Note John's special concern for the young: e.g., 2:12-14. There is “no more blessed work” than to help young people “remain” and “grow strong” in God's Word (Lenski, 422). See Luther (if you can handle it!) on the special temptations faced by young people: “no age is more prone to sin;” “young people are driven by passions; they do not have much judgment” (246). But, “a youth who believes in Christ has victory over everything” (247). And Jesus gives young people “a special invitation” (Matthew 19:14). Whoever comes to him will *not* be turned away.
- Note also that true love always involves *not* loving (2:15-16), just as true believing always involves *not* believing (4:1). John rejects abstractions: *which* love, *which* faith, *which* fellowship, *which* truth, *which* life, *which* hope, *which* God are you talking about? John insists on the definite (and genuine!) article.

Third Spiral of Facts: The New Birth (2:29-3:24)

- The chapter divisions in the Bible are not divinely inspired. It should at least be noted that 1 John 2:29 introduces a new topic: the new birth. The point made in 2:29 is carried through chapter 3 and starkly summarized in 3:9: “No one born of God keeps on sinning.” Uh-oh. What does that say about you and me? Now is the time to sing LSB 555:9 (see above), and to repeat Luther’s words about a *false* reliance on baptism apart from the new life in Christ which it creates (see Rom. 6:1-4). “No one who has become a Christian can go on living like a non-Christian” (Lenski, 458). John is not advocating perfectionism, obviously (see 1:8-10, 2:1), but he is warning against the Gnostic view that if you’re a truly “enlightened” Christian you won’t “obsess” about all those “restrictive” and “legalistic” “do’s and don’ts.” God *cares* about how we *live* as Christians, not just about what we “believe.”
- If our understanding of “Lutheranism” causes John’s words here to stick in our throats, then we need to spend some quality time with Luther...and the catechism...and John...and Jesus. With the new birth comes a new life—otherwise we mock the new birth. Just because you were born (or born again) doesn’t mean you can’t die (or die again). And when we minimize the Spirit’s work of sanctification in our lives, we mock the Father’s love for his children: who could know—really know— this love and not be awed and overwhelmed and *transformed* by it? (3:1).
- Claus Harms offers this pithy comment about the so-called “progress” we’ve made since the Reformation: “People used to pay for the forgiveness of their sins, but now they have advanced: every sinner just forgives his own sins” (Lenski, 447). The Bible does not teach “self-forgiveness,” any more than it teaches “works righteousness.” You do not have the authority to “forgive yourself.” “Only God can forgive sins,” said Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:9). (This is not to deny the great harm that results—spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, relationally, and even physically— when people are unable or unwilling to *accept* God’s forgiveness personally and wholeheartedly.)
- Keep the spirals (various sections and themes of John’s letter) connected. It bears repeating: John is not teaching “perfectionism” here, or else he is contradicting himself. But the stated or implied teaching that “I can be a Christian and live however I want” is deadly and devilish false doctrine. Those who teach this (like John’s opponents and many forms pseudo-Christianity today) actually hate their brothers and are “murderers” (3:15).
- True love means “walking the walk,” not just “talking the talk,” from the most extreme sacrifice (3:16) to the simplest one (3:17—love as “mercy,” helping a neighbor in need). According to John, this starts with the members of one’s own “family”—the household of faith. We might as well forget about “loving the world” (those who don’t even “know” us in Christ) if we can’t even love those with whom we are one in Jesus Christ, much less those with whom we are “one” in confession (i.e., fellow members of our congregation or church body) .
- Verses 19-20: After all those much-needed words of warning about the need to take the Christian life seriously, John apparently thinks it’s time for some “pure and precious Gospel.” Bring it on! Good news: God is greater than our self-condemning hearts. His omniscience is not

bad news (“He sees and knows all the bad stuff I do!”) but good news for his children, since he is a *loving* and *forgiving* Father—he wants to comfort and console, not to judge and condemn. Don’t mess up the Gospel message by forgetting the broader sense in which John uses the word “commandments” (22; see discussion above). Just in case, John reminds us (23-24), with a nice closing “baptismal” reference. John is a Law-Gospel expert. The Spirit obviously helped him write this. 😊

- The excursus in 4:1-6 (“spirits”) is strikingly parallel to 2:18-28 (“antichrists”). For John, false spirits, prophets, antichrists (note the plural) are all those (people, philosophies, religious views, institutions, etc.) who or which deny what God has revealed about Jesus, especially (in his particular context) the fact that Jesus is God’s true Son *in human flesh*. John keeps hammering away at the reality of the incarnation: the “doctrine” of the Gospel is made up of many “doctrines,” all of which are inseparable from “the truth” and “the life.” You can’t say “I believe in Jesus” while denying basic Biblical teachings about who Jesus is and what he did. John speaks with amazing apostolic authority: “We are from God. They are not” (4:6). This is said without an ounce of arrogance, out of sheer love.
- First John is filled with great, pithy, Satan-defying “memory verses”: “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (4:4). Is there any chance for a memorization revival in the church? First John would be a great place to start.

Fourth Spiral of Facts: The Love [4:7-5:3]

- Lovers of the “Live Love(d)” theme have probably been waiting breathlessly to arrive at this climactic section of 1 John. Ironically, here there is (perhaps) the least to say by way of commentary—not because this section is *not* climactic but because here we have John at his most “sublimely simple” and “simply sublime.” If you have been paying attention up until now, you simply “get it.” All you have to do here is bask in it. Even Luther says: “This is an easy text” (292). Not easy for everyone, of course: “Surely the whole world does not grasp the tiniest syllable of the statement that God is love” (302). “Show me a religion,” says Luther, which can proclaim a God of “inestimable love” like this (294). “No human religion can hold its own in the face of judgment, but it is solely in the blood of Christ that we have confidence on the Day of Judgment” (302).
- Lenski: “The fact that love, infinite love, is one of God’s attributes staggers us sinners most of all. No mind and heart can fathom John 3:16 or what John reveals about love. Love is an energetic and not a quiescent attribute. God’s love reveals itself in wondrous acts of love and reaches out to its object...When we contemplate only [this] one side of God we are overwhelmed and bow in the dust and worship” (497).
- “God is love.” “Even though the words are brief,” says Luther, “yet they have an exceedingly profound meaning.” “They are “simple words, but they are words that require faith in the highest degree—faith against everything that is not of the Spirit of God fights. Conscience, the devil, hell, the judgment of God, and everything resist, in order that we may not believe that God is love but may believe that God is an Executioner and a Judge” (301).
- Luther on 1 John 4:11: “John always proceeds from faith to love for one’s neighbor, and from here he returns to faith and demonstrates it on the basis of this fruit. Others may do what they please; we should love one another...We derive the greatest joy from the fact that we have people to love, either a wife or children, and we thank God, who gives us people to love” (296). “The world loves in a different way. ‘The crowd judges friendships by their usefulness’ [Cicero]. No one wants to associate with those who are deaf, weak, unlearned, and ungrateful. Christ loved all without making a distinction—even His enemies. Therefore we, too, should love as brothers even those who are not worthy of love” (304).
- The point of 1 John 4:11 probably *seems* obvious to us because we’re so familiar with this passage. But it is really quite odd and unexpected when you think about it. “Since I love you so much, you should also love...”—who? Me, right? But what does God say? “Since I have loved you, you should also love *others*.” This is a jolting reminder of God’s utter unselfishness—and how completely *unlike us* he is by nature.
- Try writing your own personal “commentary” on this section. There is no need for a “theologian” here (cf. 2:27). Do remember, however, that:
 - John is not talking here about “love,” but about “*the* love.” He *always* uses the definite article (except when he says that “God is love”—because while God is love, he is also

even more and greater than love). “Love” detached from the specific (Christ-centered) realities set forth in this letter may (or may not) be some sort of “love,” but it is not “the love” apart from which there is no life, no peace, no joy, no truth, no purpose, no light, no victory, no point, no God. John repeats “God” **11 times** in vv. 7-12.

- John says “God is love,” not “Love is God.” And when he says “God is love,” he defines what this love is and how it has been revealed. We don’t get to make up our own definition of love and then hold God’s feet to the fire (“A loving God would never...could never...”. Oh, yes he could—and he will. Loving your children means protecting them from dangerous and murderous enemies. See John 10:10.
- When John talks about “loving your brother,” he is talking primarily (at least in this letter) about loving your brother/sister *in Christ*. “Neighbor” in a wider sense is another subject, and it is certainly not excluded; but that’s not John’s primary concern here. When threatened by deadly enemies, *the family* needs to stick together. A father does not (cannot) love other children like he loves his own children; a husband does not (better not!) love the waitress at Denny’s like he loves his own wife.
- Don’t lose sight of John’s continuing “spiraling” here—all the key verbs, words, concepts keep coming back: the fellowship, the commandment, the new birth, the need to “abide,” etc. Luther compared “the Gospel and all its articles” to a golden ring: which part of the ring do you like best? Which part don’t you like? Which part do you want to separate from the other parts? John’s golden ring has many rings, and they are all interconnected, inseparable, and beautiful.
- What John says here about love should be read together with everything else that the Bible teaches about love, including such classic passages as 1 Cor. 13, Romans 12-13, John 13, John 17, Galatians 5, James 2—not to mention the many Old Testament books and passages (e.g., Psalms, Hosea, Isaiah) that help us distinguish what the Bible teaches about love—the love God has for us and works in us—from the world’s distorted, limited, self-centered views of love. When it comes to love, we must constantly “unlearn” what we have been taught by the world even as we learn what God has to teach us.

Fifth Spiral of Facts: The Testimony (5:4-17)

- After all this glorious talk about “the love” which gives life and meaning to life, we move back to the battlefield (v. 4). This may seem an odd place to suggest a new section break, but this letter is difficult to “divide” no matter how you choose to do it. Verses 3 and 4 are definitely connected (grammatically and thematically), but you can hear the “battle hymn” rising in verse 4. Luther: “We are engaged in a battle, not with one prince or emperor but with the whole world. Everywhere the devil has weapons with which he attacks the ministers of the Word on the right and on the left...Who will overcome all these adversaries? He, says John, who is born of God. This must happen through faith in Christ, which is the victory. For what could this fragile vessel accomplish against Satan, the god of the world (2 Cor. 4:4)? But God is greater. He always triumphs in us through Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 2;14).” (311). We have victory (*nike*, in Greek), but certainly not through our works or efforts. We have victory *in Christ*, through faith *in Christ*.
- Specific and significant words are repeated frequently in these few verses: “Son” (6), “God” (7), and a new word: “the testimony” (8 times!). The Greek word is *martyria*, from which we get the word “martyr” and which is receiving well-deserved attention in LCMS circles these days. This fits the “church militant” theme of this section well. Verses 6-9 are not as complicated as they may seem: water (Christ’s baptism—and ours), blood (Christ’s cross—his blood shed for us and truly received in the wine of the Lord’s Supper), Spirit (sent by Christ and the Father for us and to us through Word and Sacrament). Ultimately, it’s *God’s* testimony, not mine or yours. If it’s not true, then God is a liar. I think I’ll stake my claim on him and take my chances. John circles back to the main point in verses 11-12: life. You can’t get much more “bottom line” than that, or much clearer about who has it (and who doesn’t) and how.
- Lenski: “John binds everything together. God’s testimony brings us his Son; eternal life is in his Son, is in him for us; it is given in and by this testimony; to believe it is to have the Son, and to have him is to have this life; not to believe it is not to have the Son and this life. It is all as simple and as lucid as these brief statements can make it” (531). Again, sometimes we make things too complicated. “K-I-S-S,” especially for KIDS (“children”) like us.
- Although it’s easy to miss with everything else going on in this letter, prayer—bold and confident prayer—is also an important theme in 1 John (see 5:14-17; 1:9; 2:1; 3:21-22). John returns to it here again at the end of his letter—so obviously he doesn’t want us to miss it. On vv. 16-17, see the helpful excursus in *TLSB* (2181).

The Concluding Statement: “We Know” (5:18-21)

- John uses two Greek words for “know” in this letter, and he likes to throw them repeatedly in the face of the “all-knowing” Gnostics. He prefers *ginosko*, which is personal, heartfelt comprehension (it can even come close to “love”), but interestingly he switches back to *oida* in closing his letter, which has more emphasis on “head knowledge.” No one knows exactly why, but perhaps he wants to make sure he’s not giving away anything to the Gnostic “intellectuals.” We Christians don’t just “know this in our hearts” (subjectively), we know it factually (objectively) because it is based on God’s own testimony. God does not lie.
- What exactly do we know with such certainty? Franzmann sums it up nicely: “Over against these [heretics] John asserts, with all the concentrated power that this inspired Son of Thunder can command, the full reality of the incarnation, the fact that life and communion with God are to be found in Jesus, the Christ who came and died for man’s sin in the flesh, or they will not be found at all; that any claim to know and love God which does not produce a life of righteousness and love is a blank lie; that the child of God cannot ever, without denying himself and his God, be at home in the world which is in the power of the Evil One.” (263)
- Anybody can have a “God.” In fact, everybody does have a “God,” and most people probably have many more than one. Jesus is “the true God and eternal life.” There’s no more succinct summary of the Good News—and the bad.
- In light of this, verse 21 is not a “throw away” line. The spiral doesn’t just go up, it goes down. We are still in the world (the world into which Jesus came in the flesh), and the world is full of idols—in fact, the world itself can be an idol (2:15-17). Good works can be an idol. “Fun” can be an idol. Sex can be an idol. Money can be an idol. Good looks can be an idol. Success can be an idol. Religion can be an idol. Suffering can be an idol. People can be idols. Love can be an idol. *Anything* can be an idol. Luther: “Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it. It is primarily in the heart, which pursues other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils” rather than from the true God” (Large Catechism 1, 21; cf. LC 1, 1-4). If the Christian life is summarized in the ten commandments and the ten commandments are summed up in the first commandment, then the whole of the Christian life can be summed up in one exhortation: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” John closes not with a “throw-away” line, but with the biggest challenge faced by every Christian every moment of his or her life. “And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:4).
- “Faith comes by hearing” (Paul). Jesus agrees: “I do not pray for these only but also for those who are to believe in Me *through their Word*” (John 17:20). Luther: “Above all, therefore, one must listen to and read the Word, which is the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. When the Word is read, the Holy Spirit is present; and this it is impossible either to listen to or read Scripture without profit” (321). Amen! Go back and read 1 John again...and again.

Probing Further: Questions for Reflection and Discussion

As Gathering planners met to read and discuss First John and to reflect on questions and insights such as those raised in this study, five sub-themes emerged which were envisioned as potential focal points for each of the five days of the Gathering. While the issue of “daily themes” at the Gathering (what, when, how) is still very much in process, it may be helpful to reflect on these sub-themes as originally conceived as a way of “processing” your own reading of First John and this study and further probing the facets of the “Live Love(d) theme.

➤ **Beloved; Be-loved**

- 1) How often does John address his readers as “beloved?” Has anyone ever addressed you in that way? How did it make you feel? What other terms of endearment does John use when addressing his readers?
- 2) Do you think that the young people you know are confident that they are “beloved” by God and others? Explain, and discuss. How does knowing that we are God’s “beloved” affect our perspective on life and life’s challenges?
- 3) Discuss the play on words in the two “theme words” above. Does the hyphenated term help unpack or personalize the meaning and impact of the term “Beloved?”
- 4) Reflecting on your study of First John, why do you think the Gathering planners would consider beginning the Gathering by focusing on this sub-theme?
- 5) If you asked an “average” young person in your congregation, “What is love?”, how do you think they would respond? How would *you* define this term? Try asking a few young people (and others) and compare the answers they give to the way John defines love.

➤ **De-loved**

- 1) What do you think the Gathering planners had in mind in devising the word “de-loved?” What does this have to do with the message of First John?
- 2) Discuss some of the ways that our understanding of love is twisted and distorted by the world, the devil, and our sinful desires and cravings. Does false love always *look* ugly and disgusting, or can it look extremely attractive and seductive?
- 3) Read 1 John 2:15-16. How does this speak to the ways in which we get love wrong?
- 4) Read 1 John 1:8-10. How is this passage relevant to the problem of being deceived, tempted, and distracted by deceitful forms of love?
- 5) How did Jesus deal with people who were mixed up about love? Think of specific encounters that Jesus had with such people in the Gospels, and discuss what we can learn from his example about reaching out to “de-loved” people today with the love of Christ.

➤ **Love LIVED**

- 1) True or false: No human being has ever lived a *perfectly* loving life. If you answered this question correctly (see John 1:1-5), what implications does this have for our understanding of what love really is?
- 2) John is emphatic and persistent in his emphasis on the *human* nature of Jesus and the specific events in Christian history that demonstrate his humanity, such as the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. How does the theme of “love” emerge especially clearly in the seasons of the church year that focus on these events (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday).
- 3) What was completely *unique* about the way Jesus personified love in his life here on earth? How was the love he showed and embodied different from the love of any other person? (See 1 John 4:10-14)
- 4) How can we imitate in God-pleasing ways the love that Jesus embodied and demonstrated? (See 1 John 3:16-18)
- 5) Can we ever hope to be *perfectly* loving like Jesus? (See 1 John 3:2)

➤ **Live LOVED**

- 1) How does this sub-theme help us answer the all-important question, “Who am I?”
- 2) Based on your study of First John, how can we *really know* that we are loved by God with a perfect, unceasing, unbreakable love? (See 1 John 5:13; 1 John 5:9-12)
- 3) Read 1 John 4:10. What happens when we get confused about what love really is? Why is this reminder and clarification so vitally important?
- 4) Read 1 John 4:19. What various facets of this verse come to light when emphasizing the different words or phrases in this short verse?
- 5) According to 1 John 4:17-18, by what will our lives be consumed if we fail to understand that we are loved perfectly and completely by God? How do we battle this enemy? (See 1 John 2:28; 5:4-5).

➤ **Live Love**

- 1) Why do you think John is especially concerned about the love that we have and show for each other as *Christians*? (See John 13:35)
- 2) Discuss in light of your study of 1 John: “If you really love someone, you will never do anything to hurt them.” Should we be surprised if non-Christians resist and resent our attempts to show them Christ-like love? (See 1 John 3:1; 4:6)? How should we react when this happens?
- 3) Read 1 John 3:23 and, taking your cue from Luther, summarize what it means to be a Christian in two words. Does this mean that being a Christian is “easy?” Discuss.
- 4) As we strive to live a life of Christ-like love, why is regular worship with other Christians so important? What happens in worship to strengthen us for this life-long endeavor? (See, e.g., 1 John 1:8-10)
- 5) Discuss specific, down-to-earth, practical ways that Christ’s love could be demonstrated in your home, congregation, and community.

Selected Luther Quotes on Love

Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation (1518), Thesis 28:

“The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.”

From Luther’s explanation of Thesis 28:

“Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. . . . This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person.” (Timothy Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 48).

Luther in *The Freedom of the Christian*:

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

“[A Christian] ought to think: ‘Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.’”

“Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one’s neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss.” (LW 31:367)

“We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.” (LW 31:371)

Luther's Works, vol. 22, pages 373-374, sermon on John 3:16ff)

"Christ says: 'God so loved the world.' This is an inexpressibly beautiful message; that God, the heavenly Father, had compassion on us and in His mercy and pity gave us His Son. Add to this the fact that we did not deserve it but that it was done, not in view of any piety or merit in us but out of sheer grace. And to whom was this grace shown? To 'the world,' that is, to those who were condemned and lost. We are ready to listen to the message that God loved the world, but the statement that the world was lost is repugnant to us. And what does God give the world? Ah, it is an ineffable love that gives us more than a kingdom, more than a thousand angels, which would indeed be a great and remarkable gift. But no, He gives us Himself. He gives us His Son, who is very God. He gives us the very dearest thing He has and is."

"To whom does God give His Son? To the world, that is, to the wayward multitude, which has not merited this but, on the contrary, should reasonably expect to be doomed and damned. The Son is given that those who were lost may be saved through Him."

"And what are we to give God in return for this love? Nothing. You shall not go to Rome on pilgrimages, become a monk or a nun, or perform this or that good work. Only believe in Christ, cast off your old nature, and cleave to Him. Your faith, however, must be of the sort that abounds in good works."

Luther, Prefaces to the New Testament (LW 35:361), on the Gospels:

"Hence it comes that to a believer no law is given by which he becomes righteous before God, as St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 1 [:9], because he is alive and righteous and saved by faith, and he needs nothing further except to prove his faith by works. Truly, if faith is there, he cannot hold back; he proves himself, breaks out into good works, confesses and teaches this gospel before the people, and stakes his life on it. Everything that he lives and does is directed to his neighbor's profit, in order to help him—not only to the attainment of this grace, but also in body, property, and honor. Seeing that Christ has done this for him, he thus follows Christ's example."

"That is what Christ meant when at the last he gave no other commandment than love, by which men were to know who were his disciples [John 13:34-34] and true believers. For where works and love do not break forth, there faith is not right, the gospel does not yet take hold, and Christ is not rightly known."