THE BOOK OF I JOHN

Introduction to I John

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” I John 1:1-4

When one casually reads the Book of I John for the first time, one is impressed with its simplicity. However, upon further reading one comes to appreciate its depth, and receives a greater benefit from it. It is a letter written from a pastor to his flock, addressing a first century situation in the early church or churches.

The message of I John has significant application for the church and the world today when understood in its first-century context, but any attempt to read and interpret it apart from its setting will not only cause you to miss the truth of the message, but also lead to the introduction of false teachings and heresies. Its message will enable believers to experience growth in their faith, increasing joy, and assurance of salvation, while at the same time giving a true and severe warning to the unbeliever.

Authorship of I John

The traditional understanding is that the author of I John is the Apostle John, the author of the Gospel known by his name. There is both internal and external evidence to support this view. By external evidence we mean information found in sources outside of the book. By internal evidence we mean information found within the text or book itself.

The external evidence to support John's authorship is found in numerous references in the writings of the early church fathers, as well as several Christian books of the second and third centuries.
The internal evidence also supports John’s authorship. It does so in two primary ways. First, the internal evidence points toward John as the author in that the author claims to be an eyewitness to the life of Jesus. He does this in the opening four verses of the book where he describes just how closely and personal he was with Christ. Also, throughout the book, he writes as one having authority such as that of an apostle. This tone of authority is seen in the expression of “my little or dear children.” It is also seen in the commands which are to regulate the lives of his readers. His eyewitness testimony and his authority lead to the conclusion that the author of I John was an apostle.

The second way in which the internal evidence points to John as the author is seen in the similarity of its use of words, expressions, and ideas with those found in the Gospel of John. The author of each book uses the same set of contrasting phrases: “truth and falsehood (lie),” “light and darkness,” “love and hate,” “life and death.” The expression, “only begotten Son” occurs in John 3:16 and I John 4:9. Many such similarities exist in the two books that point to a common authorship.

A brief description of John can be given in this manner. His father was Zebedee. His mother was Salome. His brother was James. His nickname was “Son of Thunder.” His closest ministry partners were James, his brother, and Simon Peter. His Biblical writings are the Gospel of John, I, II, III John and Revelation.

So while John does not identify himself by name, the combination of these elements point to John, the son of Zebedee, who preferred merely to be known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” (John 21:20). John never got over the love that Jesus displayed toward him.

**Date and Origin of The Writing of I John**

The precise date of the writing is not available to us. It is generally believed to have been written shortly after the Gospel of John, which is believed to have been written in about 85 A.D. I John is quoted by Papias of Hieropolis, whose writings we may place at about 95-110 A.D. Polycarp, another of the early church fathers, gives knowledge of I John in his letter to the Philippians, written in the early second century.

Both Papias and Polycarp of Smyrna were residents of Western Asia Minor, not far from the major cultural center of Ephesus. This may be the reason they knew of John’s letter because late in his life, John was a spiritual leader in that part of the Mediterranean world. It is most likely that John is addressing problems that have arisen in the churches over which he, as an apostle, had some jurisdiction. These churches may well
include those congregations to whom he addressed part of the book of Revelation, namely; Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 2, 3).

The letter seems to be combating a form of false teaching that became known as Gnosticism. This movement had its origins in the late first century. This helps place John's letter in the same time period. Also, John refers to his readers as belonging to a younger generation than he, making him advanced up in years. The best date for the letter would then be around 90-95 A.D.

Background and Purpose

Since John, in his letter, is so consumed with the false teachings from which he was attempting to protect his flock, it is most important that we try to gain an understanding of what the false teaching consisted. A crisis had arisen in the community of believers or churches due to the rise of teachers who were promoting a view of Christianity which was different from that held by John and the other apostles. The point had been reached where they could no longer abide in apostolic doctrine and had separated themselves from the church. They had set up a rival church claiming to represent an improved and advanced form of Christianity. In 1 John 2:19, we read, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” But, while they had left the church, they were still in contact with its members and were causing confusion and doubts among them regarding the true nature of Christian belief and practice, and raising questions whether the church members were truly Christians. John considered it necessary to write a careful statement of apostolic Christianity so that his flock might be able to see where the apostates were distorting the message, while at the same time reassuring them that they were the true people of God. Thus his main purpose in the letter is stated in 1 John 5:13: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

It is interesting that while 1 John deals with assurance of salvation, John's first book is for the purpose of evangelism and converting the unbeliever. In John 20:30, 31, we read, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name.”

While we cannot be sure what the false teachers positively believed, we can be assured what features they denied of the apostolic faith.

1. They claimed to have fellowship with God and to be sinless (1:6, 8, 10).
2. They said they knew God (2:4).
3. They believed God was light and lived in that light (2:9).

4. They held unorthodox views about Jesus:
   a. They did not believe that Jesus was the Christ or the Son of God (2:22; 5:1).
   b. They denied that Jesus had come in the flesh (4:2, 3, cf. II John 7).
   c. They denied that His death had any atoning significance. If they claimed they had no sin, they would thus not stand in need of atonement and cleansing by His blood (2:1, 2).
   d. They did not submit to any validity of Christ’s commands (2:4).

5. They were unloving toward apostolic believers (2:9-11).

6. They were unholy and worldly in their lifestyles (2:15-17).

7. They claimed to possess a deeper knowledge of God than ordinary Christians (2:20, 27). This knowledge was based on special prophetic revelations that they claimed to receive directly from God (4:1).

It is quite evident to us today that these lifestyles were a departure from apostolic teaching. These false teachers, nevertheless, wanted to be known as Christians. They wanted to restate or redefine the gospel to fit into the prevailing climate of opinion that was popular in that day. That opinion comprised the beginning of a system that later in the second century systematic form became known as Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was one of the most dangerous and destructive heresies confronting the church in the first two centuries. It was a combination of oriental mysticism and Greek philosophy. It blended in just enough of the Christian message to make an effective counterfeit Christianity.

Although the many Gnostic groups had variations in their systems, Gnosticism had two basic beliefs. First, all matter or physical material is inherently evil, and the spirit is good. It was unthinkable that there could be any direct relation between the supreme God, who was pure spirit and essentially good, and the material universe which by definition essentially evil. It was believed that many aions or spirits emanated from God, and at some point one of these inferior powers known as a “demiurge” became evil and created the material universe. This was the God of the Old Testament in Genesis One. While Jesus was included in their system, the Biblical doctrine of His incarnation, atonement, and the resurrection had to be either rejected or redefined to fit the Gnostic system. The ultimate redemption for a Gnostic believer was to be separated from his physical body to live in the sinless and good realm of his eternal spirit.

This belief led Gnostics into numerous theological and ethical errors that clashed with apostolic Christianity. Their most significant theological error was the denial of the actual incarnation of God in the person of Jesus.
Christ. Since the human body was evil, they believed the perfect God could not be united with it. Hence, Jesus could not be the perfect God.

In desiring to retain Jesus in their message, the Gnostics developed two different forms of teachings about Jesus while denying His incarnation.

**The first was Docetic Gnosticism.** Docetic means “to seem.” In this view the supreme God sent His Christ, an angel-like spirit, into the world to liberate those who were desiring to escape its evil influence. This Christ appeared in the person of Jesus but the body of Jesus was only an illusion. He was never actually human – He only seemed to be human.

**The second form was Cerinthian Gnosticism,** named after its teacher, Cerinthus. This form made a distinction between the divine Christ, which was spirit, and the human Jesus. Cerinthus claimed that Jesus was a mere sinful man, who had the Spirit of Christ come upon Him at His baptism and leave Him just before His suffering and death on the cross. In this way the divine Christ was not born, nor did He die. He merely came upon Jesus for a season.

Both forms of Gnosticism can be seen in 1 John as John reaffirms the reality of the incarnation (4:1-3) and the unity of Jesus as the Christ from the beginning to the end of His earthly life (5:6).

The second basic belief in the Gnostic system was that salvation or redemption came through knowledge as opposed to faith. But this knowledge, which brought one into fellowship with God, was not an intellectual achievement, but consisted of a secret knowledge gained as a gift from a direct revelation of God. The word, “Gnostic” means “knowledge.” This special knowledge was considered different from and superior to the revelation found in the Scriptures. This belief led to a two-class division of Christians: the “haves” and the “have nots.” Those who have it were considered the spiritual ones, and those without it were looked upon as the carnal or fleshly ones. This distorted position led to a spirit of exclusivism, arrogance, and a lack of love toward the carnal Christians.

In the realm of ethics or morals, the Gnostics’ most significant error came about as a result of their belief that matter was evil. This led them into two opposite extremes. First, some treated their bodies harshly and with great discipline. This is seen in Colossians 2:21-23 where the error also existed. Second, some treated their bodies and moral behavior with great liberty and licentiousness. Since the body and the spirit were separate, it did not matter what people did with their bodies. They were above morality and nothing they did was
considered sinful. This extreme teaching was the belief that John was confronting in I John when he insisted upon obedience to God’s commandments.

This new teaching thus combined a new theology with a new morality. In this situation it was impossible for those who taught and embraced the new views to continue to fellowship with those who believed the old teachings of John and the apostles. This led them to separate themselves into a new community or church and to part with their former brethren (2:19).

The Christians who remained in the “old paths” were shaken by their brethren who had left, or were leaving to join the “new school.” The ones who left were so sure they were right. They could talk in such lofty and confident terms of their special insights into the “true knowledge” that the humble believers might well question whether their beliefs were true or not. Who possessed the truth? Where and how was eternal life to be found -- in the old ways they had been taught, or with the new revised form? Those who had left were saying, “We’ve got it, you haven’t!” Who could know what was right?

It was to these perplexed Christians that I John was written. John did not write the letter to condemn them or to raise doubts about their salvation or faithfulness. He wrote to restate in the clearest possible way the criteria upon which Christian truth and experience could be judged, and to help his readers see that they were the true Christians, and the seceders were the counterfeit ones. John is a man who knows what he is talking about. He knows what the true gospel is because he was there when it began. He had been a companion of the incarnate Word of Life! He had seen Him, heard Him and touched Him. His readers had not had this experience that he and his fellow apostles had experienced.

Where was eternal life to be found? In the Son of God. John states in 5:11, 12, “And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life.” But the Son of God had become incarnate. Those who denied His incarnation had not the Son and therefore could not have the eternal life that was to be found only in Him. It was as simple as that. They might claim to possess it, but their claim was in vain. They had abandoned the true foundation. John exhorts his readers with these words in 2:24-26: “Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.” In these words, John makes a strong affirmation of the permanent validity of the apostolic witness to Christ. For us today, that witness is enshrined in the New Testament writings that are our rule of faith and practice.
The Structure of I John

The structural content of the letter does not lend itself to a clear outline form. John is writing to reassure the believers they were the true possessors of eternal life. He is re-establishing the basics of the Christian faith, and in doing so he is providing several series of tests to identify the true faith from the false. He repeats and enlarges upon these tests as the letter expands. It might be viewed as spirals or circles expanding outward, covering the same truths only enlarging themselves each time they are repeated. This will be seen as the letter unfolds.

John provides three basic categories of tests by which a person can judge whether he or she truly possesses eternal life. The three tests cover the entirety of the human life. They are: (1) the theological, (2) the moral, and (3) the social areas of life. They test a person’s beliefs (theological), behavior (moral), and love (social). The repetitions of these three tests provide the skeletal structure of I John.

This introduction should give an overview to help provide the reader of I John with an understanding why John was writing about certain issues and how his readers would have understood his teachings. He was refuting the errors found in the pre-Gnostic teachings which were infiltrating the churches, and he wanted to both clarify Christian doctrine and practice, as well as protect the flock.

The teachings found in the letter are clearly vital for the church and the world today. Despite all the differences between the first conditions existing in the first century and ours, there are fundamental similarities that make it possible to apply apostolic teachings to our present affairs. The church today needs to learn the lesson that faith must rest upon God’s revelation of Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ. Also, that faith and love cannot be separated from one another, and that Christians are called to live a life of moral obedience and manifest love to others. In doing so, they can enjoy assurance that they are in the possession of the knowledge of God which is eternal life. “This is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3).
THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN
Lesson Two

Basic Apostolic Doctrine and Fellowship

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” I John 1:1-10

John opens his letter at full speed. He by-passes the normal greetings as seen in II and III John. He does not identify himself or his readers. He is like a shepherd who has spotted a pack of wolves who have attacked his flock and the sheep are confused and know not which way to run. The shepherd runs toward the invaders, inflicting pain and death with his rod of truth and bow of justice. Thus John sets out both to defend his flock and destroy the enemy.

In this first section he touches on a number of key issues relating to basic true Christianity: (1) The person of Jesus Christ, (2) The genuineness of the Christian message, (3) The authority of the apostle’s witness, (4) The nature of God, (5) The seriousness of sin, (6) The purposes of his letter, (7) The love of God, and more.

The Preface 1:1-4

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and
John begins his preface with the subject of his entire letter, namely Jesus Christ. Verses 1 - 3 comprise one entire complex sentence in the Greek text. The words “that which” refer to an object which is identified as the “Word of life.” But what is the “Word of life?” There are two possibilities. First, it may refer to the impersonal message of the Gospel. In Colossians 3:16 we read, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. . .” Also in 1 Timothy 6:3 we read, “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; . . .” The second meaning of the “Word of life” may be personal and refer to the person of Jesus Christ. John uses it this way in John 1:1,2,14 which reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. . .” Bible teachers are divided over John’s usage and strong arguments can be presented for both positions.

The expression, “from the beginning” is also open to several understandings. One, it may refer to the eternal pre-existence of the person of Christ. Two, it may refer to the beginnings of the Gospel era when Jesus made His appearance in history. A third way in which it is used by John is in reference to when the readers had first heard and believed the Gospel message. Since the message of Christ cannot be separated from the person of Christ, it is best to understand John as using the expressions interchangeable.

John makes much use of the pronoun “we” in these verses in contrast to his readers whom he refers to as “you.” Who are the “we?” It is best understood as the first generation of believers, namely the apostles, who had personal contact with Christ. Now, who did the apostles believe Jesus to be? In verse 1 He was the pre-existent Christ - “was from the beginning.” The verb “was” is in the imperfect tense, meaning an action that has always been ongoing in the past, the present and will continue into the future. In verse 2, John describes the pre-existent Word or Christ as being the eternal life that was with the Father. This is identical with his expression in the Gospel of John where we read again in John 1:1,2, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. . .” John closes his letter by identifying Jesus Christ as the one true God in whom alone exists eternal life. “And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20). John affirms the true deity of Christ's person.
In verses 1 and 2 he goes on to affirm the true humanity of Christ. He asserts that this eternal being had in
day assumed such a real body that His voice could be heard, his features could be seen, and His flesh could
be touched or handled. The apostles heard Jesus teach with a 
human voice. In John 5:24 Jesus spoke, “He
that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life. . .” They saw and beheld His glorious
body in the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter said in II Peter 1:16-18, “For we have not followed cunningly
devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-
witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to
Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came
from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount.” They could touch or handle His
resurrection body. It was to a group of terrified disciples, who believed they were seeing a spirit, that Jesus
said in Luke 24:39, 40, “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit has not
flesh and bones, as you see Me have. And when He had thus spoken, He showed them His hands and His feet.”

What is John asserting? He is saying that the one eternal, true God, revealed or manifested Himself in a real
flesh and bones body. The effect which this had upon the apostles is summarized in the words of doubting
Thomas, when he was asked by Jesus to touch His nail-scarred hands and pierced side. Thomas cried out, “My
Lord and my God.” If Jesus were not God, He should have corrected Thomas right there on the spot. The
apostles were convinced that the eternal person of the Son of God resided in the flesh and bones body of
Jesus.

In verse 3, John asserts that he had personally seen and heard Jesus Christ and can bear witness of the truth of
His person and the words which He taught. The false teachers could not make this claim. To those who were
claiming that Jesus Christ simply appeared or seemed to be human (Docetics), John said he had heard, seen
and felt Him. To those who said that Jesus was not the divine Christ, John said He was the one who was from
the beginning and pre-existed with the eternal Father. In affirming such, John shot down the foundation of his
opponents.

The apostolic doctrinal test for who and what is a true Christian lies in the willingness to confess that Jesus
Christ is fully God and fully man. Any person who refuses to confess this cannot be embraced as an apostolic
Christian. cf. I John 4:2,3: “Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is
come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God:
and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the
world.”
John now proceeds to inform his readers that he had two purposes in mind for telling them this apostolic doctrine. This first purpose was for them to have fellowship with him and with God. And this fellowship is found only in the message concerning God’s Son Jesus Christ. The word that John uses (koinonia) has the basic meaning of “to share something in common with another.” Many churches today promote themselves as places where you can attend and participate in “food, fun, and fellowship.” But for John and his readers “fellowship” is something more profound than good food and good times. It involves a commitment to a common body of beliefs relating to Jesus Christ, and faithfulness to a moral life of dedicated obedience. It also involves a social life consisting of a common love for God and for other people, especially fellow believers.

The second purpose for John’s letter is stated in verse 4. “That your joy may be full.” Joy is not to be equated with the happy thoughtless emotions of party-goers. In John 17:13, Christ spoke of having joy as He was facing the most unhappy occasion of His humiliation leading up to the cross. Christ’s joy was an assuring satisfaction that He would accomplish His goal. He saw the travail of His soul and was satisfied. He prayed that His disciples might possess that same joy. John’s readers have been shaken by the false teachers who have left the church and stand in need of assurance that what they have believed is the true message of eternal life.

The summary of verses 1 - 4 are set forth in these three points:

1. Jesus Christ was a real person. He was God in the flesh. This apostolic witness was based on firsthand experience.
2. The apostolic witness, when received and believed is the basis for sharing the fellowship of eternal life with the Father, the Son, and all true believers.
3. This sharing of fellowship in eternal life is presently going on in the believer’s life and will be perfected in the life to come.

Fellowship With God - 1:5-10

This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”
Apostolic Christianity not only has a doctrinal standard by which our beliefs can be tested, it also provides a moral standard by which our behavior can be judged. In verse 5 John affirms that “God is light.” To speak of God in this manner was to make use of a well-known symbol conveying several facets of meaning. One was that of revelation and illumination. Light illuminates the dark places and symbolizes the way in which God reveals Himself to men to show us how to live. Thus it represents knowledge. The Psalmist can then say, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105). A second use of light is that which describes God’s holiness; light symbolizes the flawless perfection of God’s moral character. God is pure and holy and without sin. The holy angels cover their faces in His presence and cry out “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:3). Again, light is used as a synonym for God’s truth. Psalm 43:3 says, “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me.”

When John goes on to say that “in him is no darkness at all” he is thinking of light and darkness in ethical terms. Light is a picture of truth, knowledge and righteousness while darkness is a picture of falsehood, ignorance and sin. God is a moral being and cannot tolerate immorality in His moral creatures. He thus says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16). The basic Christian message rests upon the foundational premise that if men are to fellowship with God, or have something in common with God, they must walk in His light as revealed in the historical person of His Son Jesus Christ. In essence, those whose fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, will in their lives reflect the moral character of God.

If God is light, then fellowship with Him is dependent on moral purity. The pre-Gnostic teachers were apparently teaching the opposite. To them, fellowship with God was not related to moral conduct. In verses 6 - 10, John refutes three false claims being made by the false teachers. His use of the pronoun “we” now changes its meaning. It no longer refers to John and the apostles but is now being applied to anyone who professes to represent Christianity. John introduces each false claim with the words “if we say.” cf. verses 6, 8, 10. He then proceeds to refute each claim. In each of these three teachings, John demonstrates the Christian attitude toward the nature of sin. The three claims which the false teachers were making were:

1. We have fellowship with God - verse 6.
2. We are without sin - verse 8.
3. We have not sinned - verse 10.

The first claim was that it is possible to live in sin and still have fellowship with God (verse 6). John’s reply is that if God is light and there is no darkness in Him, no person can claim to be living in fellowship with God while walking in sin at the same time. Anyone who makes such a claim is lying and is not living by God’s standard of
truth. The word “walk” refers to a person’s moral activity. It is a present tense verb. In this tense it refers not to a few isolated acts of sin but to an ongoing habitual lifestyle of walking in the darkness.

In verse 7 John shows what a true believer’s lifestyle is like. They “walk in the light.” Their conduct manifests an ongoing conformity to God’s moral standard. Two benefits emerge from such a lifestyle.

(1) The first benefit is that such people have “fellowship with one another.” Who is the “one another?” Some believe it refers to Christians and fellow believers, but it is best to understand it as referring to Christians and God. The fellowship which John has addressed is between God and believers as seen back in verse 6.

(2) The second benefit of walking in light is that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. The “blood” of Christ is a symbolical way of speaking of the death of Christ. Leviticus 17:11 says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul.” In the Old Testament the blood was the result of the death of the sacrificial victim, and its application to the person offering the sacrifice indicated that the effects of the sacrifice applied to him. The effects were the removal and forgiveness of his sin. The expression “all sin” refers to every kind of sin and shows there is no limit to the types of sin that Christ is able and willing to forgive. His death makes all kinds of sins forgivable. Thus a true Christian cannot live a lifestyle of habitual sin. The Christian’s life is one of moral purity that enables fellowship with God to occur through the cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. John’s teaching on the blood flies right in the face of the Cerinthian Gnostics who denied that the divine Christ actually died on the cross.

The second false claim is addressed in verses 8 and 9. The claim is “we have no sin.” This claim moves a step further from the truth. To claim that one may live in sin and this does not affect your fellowship, is one thing, but to claim that you have no sin is quite another. In this, John is addressing another type of the Gnostic error. The word “sin” is in the singular and probably refers to a denial of the principle of sin residing in fallen human nature. The false teachers may have been claiming that through the special knowledge they had received they had been cured of their sinful natures. Or they may have been saying that though they sinned in their bodies, their flesh had nothing to do with their spirits. They communed or fellowshipped with God through their spirit, not their bodies. In either case, they were boldy saying they were not sinful, thus allowing them to fellowship with God.

It was self-evident to John that these men were sinners and were deceiving themselves in their beliefs, and were strangers to the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. No matter what a person claims, a true Christian
cannot or will not deny his or her sinful nature. So just how does true Christianity handle the sin question? Not by denying, but by confessing it. The word confess comes from two Greek words which mean “to speak the same thing.” It carries the idea of “agreeing with or admitting to.” To confess our sins, means we are to say the same thing about our sin as God says. In confession we agree with God that our sin is wrong. Confession not only admits sins but seeks their removal and forgiveness. Proverbs 28:13 says, “He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.” The false teachers were denying their sinfulness, while the true Christians were confessing their sins. To deny one’s sinfulness means the truth is not in us. In contrast, to confess one’s sinfulness is to give evidence of having the truth in us.

God has promised to forgive sin upon our repentance. To this promise, He is both faithful and just. Micah 7:18-20 describes the forgiveness of God. “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardons iniquity and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.” What does it mean to say God is just to forgive us our sins? It is not just for a holy God to allow sin to be removed and the sinner to be released. Justice requires that the acts committed receive the punishment they deserve. It is at this point the doctrines of grace enter the picture. Jesus took the punishment for our sins. Forgiveness is therefore just because Jesus shed His blood as the just one in the place of the unjust ones. God can faithfully promise forgiveness because He has a just basis upon which to forgive.

In verse 10, John pronounces his conclusion upon the spiritual state of the apostate teachers. The third claim of the teachers is the most blatant of all. In verse 6, we have seen that one group of the false teachers were saying that one’s moral conduct had nothing to do with one’s fellowship with God. Then in verse 8, another group was saying that sin was not a part of one’s human nature. They denied the fall of man. But in verse 10, another group had advanced in their apostasy to the point they were saying that the specially enlightened ones had never sinned so as to stand in need of an atoning sacrifice to restore them to God’s fellowship. The expression, “we have not sinned” translates a Greek verb in the perfect tense. This describes an action that occurs in the past of which the effects continue to exist in the present. John uses this type of verb to describe a person claiming to be in a condition of having never committed a sinful act in the past or in the present.

John says this type of person is calling God a liar and identifies himself as a stranger to the word of truth. He cannot be a Christian in any sense of the word. God has spoken, and He has declared that all people have sinned. Paul says in Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no not one,” and in 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” To deny what God has said, to deny what one is and has been, is to place
oneself beyond the effectual solution which God provides for sin. This is final apostasy and is described by John as the “sin unto death” in 1 John 5:16. It is also described by the writer of Hebrews in several forceful expressions. The entire gospel message rests upon the fact that mankind is sinful and needs a Savior.

Thus in his opening, John has affirmed that apostolic Christianity rests upon the doctrinal foundation, that fellowship with God entails a proper confession of Jesus Christ, as perfect God and perfect man, who shed His blood to make atonement for sins. The practical moral experience of Christians is to seek to avoid sin, and if they fail to do so, they are to confess their sins, and avail themselves of the cleansing process found in Christ’s righteousness. Any person or teaching which claims to be Christian and fails to confess these principles, is to be viewed as a parasite which has attached itself to the identity of Christianity, but has no life of its own.

The church of Jesus Christ is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” (Ephesians 2:20). If we should desire to obtain and maintain eternal life in fellowship with God, let us model what is said of those who were converted on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:42, “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.”
THE BOOK OF I JOHN

Lesson Three

True Christians Believe the Gospel, Obey God’s Commandments, and Love Their Brethren

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not, and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keeps His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shines. He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not whither he goes, because that darkness has blinded his eyes. I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.”

I John 2:1-14

As we embark upon this section, we must keep before our thinking that John is doing hand-to-hand combat with the pre-gnostic teachers who had left the church, and set up a rival church. They had rejected the apostolic gospel and had returned to the world of Grecian philosophy. They believed God had given them new light or knowledge which superseded or replaced that of the apostles. They were saying that one had to embrace this new knowledge in order to have a true fellowship with God. This knowledge consisted of believing that all physical matter was evil, while that which was spiritual was good. Thus God could not have incarnated Himself in a true human body. This led to a denial of both the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ.
They also had a low view of the seriousness of sin by believing that one’s moral conduct in the body did not affect one’s spiritual fellowship with God.

John denounced such false teaching by reaffirming the true deity and true humanity of Jesus in 1:1-4. Then in 1:5-10, he went on to establish that fellowship with God requires confession of one’s sinfulness in repentance and availing ourselves of Christ’s cleansing blood.

**God’s Solution For Man’s Sin - 2:1,2**

“**My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not, and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.**”

In verse one, John lists two reasons he is writing to his flock, who are very dear unto him. First, he is writing them to exhort them not to commit a single act of sin. The verb is in the aorist tense meaning individual acts of sin, and not that of a habitual lifestyle like that of the false teachers. While it is wrong to claim that “we have no sin” or that “we have not sinned,” John did not wish to give his readers the idea that sin can be regarded as a natural occurrence in the Christian life lived in the body. Instead the main goal or ideal of the Christian life is to not sin, like the model provided us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, he is writing to comfort and reassure them that when a believer does sin, God has provided a way for believers to respond to it. In the words “**if any man sin**” the verb is in the aorist tense revealing that John did believe that specific acts of sin are possible in a believer’s life. Whenever the sinless ideal is not met, the solution is found in Jesus Christ who is presented in three roles. The first is that of an “advocate.” The word describes a defense attorney as one “who speaks in our defense.” When a believer sins, Christ pleads his case to God the Father who serves as the Judge in the case.

In His second role as the “righteous one,” Jesus can take care of our case in a just and righteous manner. Now what does our sinless or righteous representative plead? It is not a plea of innocence or even a plea of mercy. Instead it is a plea that rests upon His own righteousness, and seeks forgiveness from the Judge on the basis of His sinless life. The third role of Christ is that in His atoning sacrifice, He has satisfied the wrath of God against the guilty party. This act of propitiation renders God favorable toward the sinner. The sin is thus canceled out by the action involved. Thus Jesus is both the advocate and the atoning sacrifice. What He pleads on behalf of sinners is what He Himself has done on their behalf.
Since Jesus bore the penalty for all kinds of sins which the members of Adam’s race are capable of committing. Not only can He pardon the sins of believers, but also the sins of any member of Adam’s world who will confess his sins in repentance, and ask to be forgiven on the basis of Christ’s death. So while there is an infinite sufficiency in Christ’s death to forgive all the sins committed by men, the saving efficiency is designed for believers only. Jesus paid the sin debt only for those who ultimately believe. Those who die in unbelief must pay the price of their own sin debt. Thus John could say in John 3:36, “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.” So while there is enough light in Jesus to lighten every man that comes into the world (John 1:9), the light is efficacious only for those who come to the light. Likewise by virtue of His infinite sacrifice, Jesus has the ability to pardon the sins of Adam’s race, but He has decreed to only pardon the sins of those who repent and believe. So let whosoever is willing to confess their need of Christ, come to Christ and embrace the promise of a faithful God to enact a just and righteous pardon. This is God’s solution for man’s sinning. True Christians believe the Gospel.

C. S. Lewis makes this observation:

“Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness. It therefore, has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know that they need any forgiveness. It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and Power behind that law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power - it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk. When you are sick, you will listen to the doctor.” (C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pp. 38, 39).

**Obeying God’s Commands - 2:3-8**

“And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keeps His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shines.”

In verses 3-6, John presents a moral test to identify a true Christian. Its focus is upon a person’s behavior. It is a test of obedience to the commandments of God. The test is simple. The distinctive characteristic of a child of
God is that he obeys God’s commands. This is a ground for assurance that we know that we know Him. John’s opponents claimed a monopoly on religious knowledge that John denied with his bold assertion “we know him.”

The concept of the knowledge of God appears here in the letter for the first time. Up until now John has described the Christian’s relationship to God in terms of fellowship with Him. He now expresses it in terms of the knowledge of God. Fellowship and knowledge are synonyms, and refer to the same thing. The knowledge of God entails an intimate acquaintance with Him. The sign of possessing this saving knowledge of God is obedience to His commands. When the prophet Hosea complained there was no knowledge of God in the land, he immediately said there is “swearing, lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery.” (Hosea 4:1). To know God thus involves knowledge of His character and requirements, and obedience to these requirements.

When John says, “we know him,” he uses the perfect tense that describes a past experience having continuing results. This describes a believer who has come to know God and still retains this personal relationship because of his initial encounter with God. Such a relationship can be tested by looking for consistent obedience to God’s commands.

John, then proceeds to issue a warning to any who claim to know God, and yet do not live a life of consistent obedience to God. Those who were saying they knew Him were the same false teachers who claimed to have fellowship with God back in 1:6. The expression “he that saith” is the first of three statements in which John will emphasize the importance of joining one’s Christian profession with one’s Christian practice. The two others are found in verses 6 and 9. They are related to the expression “if we say” which John has used back in 1:6, 8, 10. These apostates, who have left the church, have failed the test of moral obedience, and are deceived and deceiving others, and are not true Christians. In contrast, those who keep God’s word give evidence that their love for God is matured and complete.

This gives assurance of being in God (v. 5). To be in God means to display His moral character. And the character of God is not something about which we are left to speculate. God incarnate lived on earth. The character of the invisible God has been manifested in the conduct of the visible Christ. Jesus’ earthly life can be summarized in the words found in Acts 10:38, “who went about doing good.” The expression “abides in him” is probably a reference to Jesus’ teaching on Himself being the vine, and the believers being the branches, who must continually abide in Him. (John 15). A believer’s behavior should resemble that of Christ’s. In 1 John 5:3 we read, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” The test of our religious experience is
whether it produces a reflection of the life of Jesus in our daily life. If it does not, then it is false and we fail the test.

In verses 7-11, John introduces the social test of true apostolic Christianity, namely that of love for God, which he has referred to back in verse 5 and love for our brother in verse 10. In contrast to the “new” teaching, which the pre-Gnostic teachers had introduced into the church, John asserts that his teaching was not new but was the original commandment which had been given by Christ at the beginning of the Christian era. The word “new” means “new in kind, novel.” John was saying that he was not teaching a new novel commandment but was repeating standards of conduct which believers had known ever since their introduction to Christianity. While John does not state what the old commandment was, it would be known by all as being the commandment of Jesus, “that we love one another.” (I I John 5).

In these verses, John introduces the concept of an old/new commandment, making a potentially confusing play on words. The one command is at the same time both old and new. The command is to love one another. It is old in one sense, it is new in another. It is old in that it was taught in the law of Moses (Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus summarized the entirety of the teachings found in the law and the prophets as love to God, and love for one’s neighbor. (Matthew 22:37-40).

In another sense the love commandment was new. It became new when Jesus revealed it afresh in the upper room. He called it a new commandment. “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another.” (John 13:34). And it was new because by His own fulfillment of it, He was giving it a depth of meaning that it had not possessed before. He went on to say, “as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.”

Jesus had just washed the feet of His disciples showing that true love is self-giving to others, as opposed to self-receiving from others. It is the greater humbling himself to serve the lower. It is God humbling Himself to become a man and serving the lower creature, even sinful man. “Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God should die for me!” Whenever this love is manifested in Christians, men will know they are living the life of Jesus in them.

This new commandment inaugurates the new age of the Gospel. Jesus, the true light to show men how to love, is now shining in His people. The old age of darkness and selfishness is now passing away and the new age of love for others is now shining more and more unto that perfect age to come.
Loving The Brethren - vs. 9-11

“He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not whither he goes, because that darkness has blinded his eyes.”

In verses 9 through 11, John now condemns the false teachers for their lack of love for the brotherhood of believers. They had separated themselves from the apostolic believers. John describes this as manifesting hatred or unconcern for their brothers and was causing confusion and a stumbling block to others. In spite of the great light they believed they had been shown, they were still in the darkness of sin and ignorance. They had betrayed the cause of Christ and like it was said of Judas in his betrayal, “He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.” Darkness in the soul cannot love the true Jesus and His disciples, namely those who embrace apostolic doctrine and practice self-giving love.

How does John understand hate? Is it in an abstract theory or in concrete acts. John would answer that love is what one does. Hate is the absence of the deeds of love. To walk in the light is to love one’s brother, and this love will express itself in concrete actions. When these are absent, hate is present. Hate is the failure to deny oneself, the unwillingness to lay down one’s life for a brother. (John 15:13). It considers its own interests first (I Corinthians 13:5); disregards the suffering and afflicted (Luke 10:30-37); despises the little ones (Matthew 18:10); withholds the cup of cold water from the thirsty (Matthew 25:42); and makes no effort to welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, or help the sick (Matthew 25:43).

The term “brother” here refers to those who belong to the community of faith. It is not that John lacks concern for those outside the faith, rather, in this letter, he has the community of believers in view. Moreover, if a believer cannot love his brother, it is doubtful whether he can love his neighbor.

Assuring The Faithful - vs. 12-14

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because you
1 John

have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.”

After giving a strong warning to the apostates who have left the faith, John now turns to his readers and gives them a threefold assurance of being in the orthodox faith. It is important to keep in mind that while John is identifying the counterfeit Christians, he is at the same time giving assurance to his readers that they make up the true Christian community. The false teachers were claiming that the ordinary believers did not really know God because they had not received the special knowledge of Him through direct mystical revelations.

In verses 12 - 14, John addresses three sets of readers: dear children, fathers, and young men. Some Bible students believe this to be a division based on physical, chronological age. Others think it is a division based on spiritual maturity. A third group, to which I belong find these interpretations inconsistent, since fathers is out of the expected sequence, being placed in the middle. Elsewhere in the letter, John refers to all of his readers as “children” (2:1, 28; 3:7, 18; 5:21). Instead, it is more reasonable to believe that each of the terms refers to all of John’s readers. They were all little or “dear” children. They were all “fathers”, and they were all “young men.”

Sometimes when a Bible author contrasts ages (young/old), he does so as a figure of speech to denote young, old, and everyone in between. The prophet Joel, quoted by Luke in Acts 2:28, speaks of old men dreaming dreams and young men seeing visions. This is a poetic way of saying that dreams and visions will be experienced by young, old, and everyone in between. If this principle of interpretation is applied to verses 12 - 14, then whatever is said of each age category is intended to be true for all believers.

If this is so, then John asserts that his readers, like little children, in their immaturity, have all experienced the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake, and have known an intimate relationship with the Father. Then like fathers, in their maturity, they have all truly experienced fellowship with Christ who is the eternal God. Finally, like young men, in their strength, have all engaged in spiritual warfare and had overcome the evil one, and grown stronger because the word of God was living in them.

In summary, John has shown how the false teachers, who were deceived and attempting to deceive others, had failed the three tests of orthodox, apostolic Christianity. They had failed the doctrinal tests of correct beliefs. They had failed the moral tests of behavior, and they had failed the social test of love. They were not to be received as true Christians or brothers in the faith. This was seen in 2:1-11. But far from questioning the salvation of his readers, or expressing dissatisfaction with their spiritual growth, John seeks to reassure them...
of their salvation they have in the gospel of Christ. They have all experienced forgiveness of sins. They all have knowledge of God. And they all have victory in the spiritual battle. “Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
True Christians Avoid The Love of The World, Reject False Teachers, and Abide In the Truth

“I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son. Whosoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father: [but] he that acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in Him.” 1 John 2:15-27

John has carefully exposed the false teachers by testing their claims with that of apostolic Christianity. The false teachers had once been a part of the Christian community known as the church. John has tested their theological beliefs and found them to be false. He tested their moral behavior and found it to be inadequate. He tested their social life of love and found it to be lacking. He concluded they were not Christians and were still in darkness.

While exposing the apostates, John was careful to not question the spiritual status of his readers. He believed they had experienced the forgiveness of sins, that they possessed an intimate knowledge of God, and that
through the Word, they possessed the strength to overcome the wiles of the wicked one. They had fellowship with God and loved their fellow Christians.

**Love not the World - vs. 15-17**

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides for ever.”

Now John, as a good pastor, changes the topic, as well as the mood. The topic is no longer assurance, but warning. The mood is that of command and duty. It is expressed as “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” He gives two reasons for not loving the world. One, love for the world and love for the Father cannot co-exist. Two, love invested in the world will not last since the world is passing away.

There are two words that are important if we are to understand this portion of scripture. They are “world” and “love.” John used the term “world” more than all the other New Testament writers together. It appears 185 times in the New Testament, of which 105 occur in the writings of John (78 times in his Gospel, 24 times in his letters, and 3 times in Revelation). But John uses it with a variety of meaning and often moves from one meaning to the next without explaining his meaning. The role of the Bible interpreter is to examine the context to discover his meaning.

The Greek word is “kosmos.” Its general meaning is an “orderly arrangement; organization.” It is translated “adornment” one time in I Peter 3:3. There it refers to a woman’s clothing arrangement. The word has seven or eight different meanings of which we will only refer to four. It sometimes means the physical universe or planet. “God that made the world (universe) and all things therein.” (Acts 17:27). It also describes the human world of mankind. “For God so loved the world.” (John 3:16). It is used in reference to this present temporal life. “Jesus said, ‘As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’” (John 9:5). In one verse alone, John uses it in three ways. In John 1:10, we read “He was in the world (temporal life), and the world (universe) was made by him and the world (sinful humanity) knew him not.”

John’s use of the word here in I John 2:15-17 is in an entirely different sense. Here it refers to Satan’s organized system of opposing Christ’s kingdom work here on earth. It is the very opposite of what is holy, spiritual and
godly. John clearly defines his usage of the word over in 1 John 5:19 where he says, “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness.” Jesus called Satan “the prince of this world.” (John 12:31). Unsaved people belong to “this world.” Jesus calls them “the children of this world.” (Luke 16:8). These unsaved people, whether they realize it or not, are energized by “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). Just as the Holy Spirit uses people to promote the kingdom of Christ, so Satan uses people to promote his kingdom. Christ’s kingdom is built upon humility and servitude to God’s will, while Satan’s kingdom is built upon pride and dominion in the exercise of self-will. The kingdoms of this world are built upon achieving authority over others. Jesus said in Mark 10:42, “Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.”

All the kingdoms of this world are organized upon and under the control of Satan's kingdom. Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness by offering Him “all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them.” (Matthew 4:8). A Christian is a member of the human world, and lives in a physical world, but does not belong to the spiritual world that is Satan's system for opposing God. Jesus said in John 15:18, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”

In our everyday conversation, we use the word “world” in the sense of a system. When the TV announcer says “We now turn to the world of sports,” he or she is not talking about some separate planet, but is referring to an organized system made up of people, ideas, activities, and plans. It is an invisible system that “keeps things going.” In John's thinking, the world is the invisible spiritual system opposed to God and Christ.

The second word in our text that needs to be understood is the word, “love.” The word is “agape” and is the same word used back in 2:10 in reference to loving the brethren. But here it must mean something different than what it did in verse 10. How are we to understand these expressions of “love” and “love not?”

We do so by distinguishing the two ways in which we give meaning to love. In verse 10, it refers to loving other people. There it signifies an outgoing care and compassion. It is the kind of love which is concerned for the benefit of the person or thing loved. Meanwhile here in verse 15, love is viewed as the pleasure that the person hopes to receive from the object of his love. To love, in this sense, is to be attracted to someone or something so as to enjoy it. The idea is of desire or appetite and is concerned about self-gratification. The statement, “I love ice cream,” is an example of this.
It should be emphasized that the desire for pleasure or self-gratification is not necessarily selfish and wrong. We are created by God with appetites and desires which need to be satisfied, and the satisfying of them produces pleasure. God Himself received pleasure when He looked upon His new creation and saw that “it was good.” We are also told to trust “in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” (I Timothy 6:18). However, a desire can be sinful and evil if it violates a precept of God. From this, in John’s sense, to love the world is to love what is opposed to God by definition. Love for the world and love for the Father are incompatible and cannot co-exist. To put it in the words of James 4:4, “Know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

In verse 16, John lists three ingredients that drive this worldly outlook and “keeps it going!” They are the (1) lust of the flesh; (2) lust of the eyes; (3) pride of life. These are the same three ingredients to which Eve was exposed to in the Garden of Eden when Satan introduced his kingdom to her. (Genesis 3). They are also the same as he used to tempt Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4). To what do these refer?

In the past, Christians have compiled lists of things not to do in order to avoid becoming worldly. These have included things such as don’t go to movies, don’t dance, don’t smoke or drink alcoholic beverages, don’t play cards, don’t listen to secular music, don’t let your hair grow long if you are a man, and don’t cut your hair, wear makeup or jewelry if you are a woman. Now these actions may or may be wise to participate in but they do not get to the root of worldliness. While the fruit of worldliness is manifested in actions, the root of worldliness exists in attitudes.

John lists three dominant attitudes that drive or energize the worldly minded person. Remember, the world is a system of living based on self-gratification. With that to go on, John now gives the first of three human desires flowing out of the root of man’s selfish fallen nature. He calls it “the lust of the flesh.” In this context, flesh does not refer to the human body, but to the entire moral nature of man separated from and opposed to God. It is an attitude that seeks independence of God through the means of self-sufficiency. It is a desire to always be in control of one’s life and plans so that one’s own way is always coming to pass. It can best be expressed in the attitude of “getting my own way.”

The second human desire is described as “the lust of the eyes.” This is an attitude originating in the mind that sees certain goals and objects as being necessary or desirable to accomplish one’s own way! It can be expressed in the attitude of “getting everything I want.”
The third human desire is expressed as being the “pride of life.” The word “life” refers to things that are used to support life, namely what one possesses. The word “pride” is a reference to boasting. Together, the words describe a braggart who exaggerates about what he possesses in order to impress others. It can be expressed in the attitude of “exalting my reputation above others.”

So in order to achieve self-gratification, the worldly-minded person always seeks to get his own way, get all the things he wants, in order to produce a status symbol of importance over that of others.

John lists two reasons for not loving this worldly lifestyle: (1) You cannot love God and the world at the same time; (2) The world and its lusts or desires are temporal and passing away. (vs. 15, 17).

**Rejecting False Teachers - vs. 18 - 23**

“Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son. Whosoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father: [but] he that acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

In verses 18-28, John identifies the apostate teachers of whom he has been warning his readers. They are those who have left the fellowship of apostolic belief. He refers to them as antichrists. The term “antichrist” is used only by John in I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7. The prefix “anti” can have two meanings. First, that of opposition, and second, that of substitution. So antichrist can refer to something or someone who is openly opposed to Christ, or it can mean someone or something that stands in the place of Christ, thus becoming a counterfeit Christ. The antichrists of whom John speaks came out of the ranks of the believers. In verse 19, he says “they went out from us,” that is, they who at one time professed apostolic doctrine, now were rejecting John and his teachings. The expression, “went out” is the same verb that described the departure of Judas from the disciples on the night of Jesus’ betrayal. In John 13:30 we read, “he... went out and it was night.”
The antichrists of whom John speaks are not evil spiritual creatures, but are the false teachers or false prophets which he refers to later on in 4:1-3: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

John asserts that the falling away of these individuals proved them to be false brethren who had never truly shared in the same spiritual fellowship with that of John’s readers. A true union with Christ will manifest itself by abiding in Him. The perseverance of the saints is a Biblical doctrine. While the saints perseverance rests upon their preservation by Christ, the evidence of Him preserving them is their abiding perseverance to apostolic doctrine and practice. While it is Christ who began a good work in them and will bring that work to completion (Philippians 1:6), it is the ongoing maintaining of that good work which provides the evidence that the good work was ever begun. The believer’s present and future faithfulness gives evidence of an experience having begun with Christ in the past.

In light of the preceding context, the people who love the world and its desires, have placed themselves in opposition to the spirit of Christ and His kingdom, namely by lack of the humility and service to others. In its place they are promoting a counterfeit Christian message that has an appeal to those still under the control of Satan’s worldly kingdom. In 1 John 4:5, John identifies the spirit of the message that the false teachers proclaim. He says, “they are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them.” The message of Satan’s kingdom promotes a spirit of pride and dominion. While claiming to advance the kingdom of Christ, it replaces the spirit of Christ with the spirit of the world, and the world embraces it as a form of godliness, but are strangers to the power therein (II Timothy 2:5).

John lists three marks that identify a false prophet or an antichrist.

1. They do not love apostolic Christianity and thus depart from the fellowship of believers (1 John 2: 18, 19);
2. They deny the faith expressed by apostolic Christianity (1 John 2:22-25);
3. They try to seduce or deceive those faithful to apostolic Christianity (1 John 2:26).

When one investigates the history of the false cults and the antichrist religious systems in today’s world, you quickly discover that in most cases their founders were formerly members of an orthodox local church or denomination. They were “with us” but “not of us,” so they went out “from us” and started their own rival group and claim to represent true Christianity!
The reality of seeing professing Christians apostatize from the faith was not something that should have surprised the community of believers. It was something that was to characterize the age known as the last time or hour. The phrase “the last time” appears only this one time in the entire New Testament. It does seem to be equivalent to the expressions, “the last days” or these “last times” used elsewhere in Scripture (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; II Timothy 3:1).

What does John mean when he refers to the “last time?” Some Bible teachers believe that he was referring to the final days just before the return of Jesus. This cannot be true because John believed that he and his readers were then living in the last time. Nearly two thousand years of history have expired since John wrote the epistle. The correct view is that the last time refers to the entire church age beginning with the first coming of Christ and ending with His second coming. But the primary idea conveyed in the term, “last time” is not a duration of time but a kind of time. It refers to a certain quality of time rather than a quantity of time. What are the things that were to characterize the age of the Messiah? It was to be an age in which the light of His truth would now be shining and the past age of darkness would be passing away. (I John 2:8). But at the same time, it would be a perilous time with many leaving the faith. This apostasy would ultimately manifest in either the appearance of a remarkable person of influence known as the Antichrist, or else a principle of belief.

In either case the person or principle associated with the antichrist will be a form of apostate Christianity, which is opposed to apostolic Christianity. It will result in a dominant form of counterfeit Christianity that will make true believers feel they are in the minority. John says we know we are living in the Messianic age because the apostasy has already begun.

After identifying his opponents as those who have left the apostolic fellowship of believers, John now, for the first time, gives the primary error of the apostates. In verse 22, he says they deny that Jesus is the Christ. To deny that Jesus was the Christ meant they denied that Jesus, the Son of God enjoyed an eternal relationship with God the Father. They thus denied the incarnation of God the Son in human flesh (cf. I John 4:3, 15). John calls anyone who denies Christ in this fashion as the antichrist and the liar. This gives weight to the belief that the antichrist is a principle characterizing an apostate rather than some particular person.

Abiding In the Truth - vs. 24-27

“Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life. These things
have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in Him.”

How were John’s readers to respond to the false teachings of these antichrists? By continuing to believe the truths of the gospel message which they had already learned. Six times in verses 24 - 28, John uses the words, “abide,” “remain,” and “continue.” Rather than accepting the new novel ideas of the false teachers, the readers were to permanently hold to the doctrine of the one eternal God, who in His Son incarnated Himself in a human body, lived a life of sinless obedience, died for the sins of others that He might be the Savior of the world. By continuing to believe these teachings, they could be assured that they possessed the eternal life promised by God to believers. In doing so, they could overcome those who were seducing them or leading them astray.

John is assured that his readers will be enabled to discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error because at their conversion they had been anointed or consecrated by the Holy Spirit to so learn the truth of the gospel, that they would not need additional human teachers to come alongside them to lead them into the truth. They already possessed the truth in the true belief of the gospel. Hold on to the truth, buy the truth and sell it not! It is a life and death, heaven and hell issue! To embrace the belief that Jesus is not the Christ, God in the flesh, is to reject a saving relationship with the Father and His Son.

In these verses (15-17), John has asserted that true Christians will not love the world, they will reject false teachers who deny the Son of God (18-23), and they will abide in the truth of the gospel (19-27).
THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN
Lesson Five

True Christians Have a Hope In Christ, Bear Their Family Likeness, and Love Their Family Members

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know that every one that does righteousness is born of him.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

“Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abides in him sins not: whosoever sins has not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother.

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death. Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But
John has been using three tests to distinguish true Christians from the counterfeit ones. In the process he has condemned the false teachers, who have withdrawn from the church, while at the same time he has reassured his readers that their abiding in the truth is an evidence of a true fellowship, or relationship with God. The tests have consisted of a doctrinal test to test their beliefs; a moral test to test their obedience, and a social test to test their love to others.

John is going to go over these three tests three times in the book. He has completed the first set of the three tests and now he is about to circle back for a second look at the themes, and enlarge upon each of them. In 2:28-3:10 he will take a second look at the test of obedience. In 3:11-24, the test of love, and in 4:1-6, the test of belief.

Verses 28 and 29 serve as a connecting link between chapters two and three. Verse 28 gives a summary of the teaching on abiding in Christ, and verse 29 introduces the theme of sonship or membership in the family of God. John is here seeking to give true believers a ground for an assuring hope and confidence, which will enable them to look forward to the approval of Christ at His coming.

The pre-Gnostic teachers were saying that the restraint of sin was not important. John asserts that if the character of God is righteous, then the character of those who make up His family must also be righteous. The righteous Father produces righteous children.

It is here that John introduces the subject of the new birth for the first time in his letter. It is the idea of regeneration. “Re” means “again” and “generation” means “birth.” A person must be rebirthed unto spiritual life to become a member of God’s family. This brings to remembrance the story of Jesus and Nicodemus in the third chapter of the Gospel of John. There are certain signs in the lives of those who have been given spiritual birth. The first one is they “do that which is right.” (2:29). The standard for what is right is what God has revealed as His will in His Word. The second evidence is that true believers do not practice sin (3:9, 10; 5:18). The third evidence is that they love their spiritual brethren (3:14; 4:7). The fourth sign is that they believe that Jesus is the Christ (5:1). The fifth sign or evidence of the new birth is that true believers overcome the love of this present world. (5:4).
It is important to note in verse 29 that when John says that “everyone that does righteousness is born of him,” he is stressing that doing what is right in the sight of God is the consequence and not the cause of the new birth. So John’s readers can take confidence that if they are doing what is right in the sight of God, this is a sign that they are born of God, and thus can take confidence when Jesus comes again to judge the world. Those who are not doing what is right in the sight of God can be assured that they will be brought to shame at His coming.

John is emotionally startled at the idea that God would bestow the privileges of sonship upon sinful creatures. When a father begets a child, he bestows the family name upon that child. Sinners are illegitimate children, who have been adopted into the family of God and granted full status as God’s legitimate children. There is also an enjoined marvel that characterized these members of God’s family. The world of unbelievers does not relate to or know them any longer. This is due to the fact that they do not know God. This is not due to ignorance, but is due to the fact that they love the world and its sin, and willfully despise doing that which is righteous in the sight of God. This is further assurance for John’s readers that they are the true children of God.

Unbelievers have no fellowship with God or His children. That is, they have nothing that is in common with them in spiritual matters. While John uses the word “world” to refer to all those still in Satan’s kingdom, he is probably meaning primarily those who have left the church and are now opposing it.

The Believer’s Hope In Christ - 3:2, 3

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.”

In light of rejection by the world system, how does the believer face the future. He has been given God’s promise that he will become like Christ, that is, without sin. And now he lives in hope that God will fulfill His promise. We are here and now, in principle, children of God who lack perfection because of sin. But that which is in principle now will become a full reality in the future. God has only begun His marvelous work in us, which in time to come at Christ’s appearance, He will bring to completion. In Colossians 1:27, Paul sums it up in these words, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
The believer lives in the hope of becoming conformed to Jesus Christ, and the more he thinks upon this truth, the more he purifies himself from sin. Paul says in II Corinthians 7:1, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The message of the pre-Gnostic teachers was that one could maintain a casual view of sin and learn to live with it. In contrast, the message of the Gospel is that Christ came to separate us from the love of sin, and that His children long for the day when they will be freed from its presence. Thus Paul can say in Titus 2:11-14, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” The believer is not passive toward his sinning but is actively fighting it.

**The Believer Bears the Family Likeness - 3:4-10**

> “Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abides in him sins not: whosoever sins has not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother.”

In these verses, John contrasts two spiritual families. There is the family of God and the family of the Devil. In each family the children may be known by their moral likeness to the head of the family. God’s children are known for their doing of that which is righteous and the Devil’s children are known for their sinning.

In verses 4-6 John defines what he means by the nature of sin. The false teachers were very vague in their definition of sin, and were deceitful at this point, as seen in verse 7. They were claiming to be right with God while living a life dominated by sin. An inadequate view of sin invariably produces an inadequate view of the Gospel and the righteousness it produces.
The world provides its own definition of sin. For the comedians, sin is a naughty deed usually related to sex, which is to arouse laughter. Thus it should not be taken seriously. Others view sin as a weakness caused by a psychological defect. Still others view it as a mistake in judgment. However one views it, it should not be taken as serious enough to bring one under the wrath or displeasure of God.

The Greek word translated “sin” in verse 4, is “harmartia”. It originally meant to “miss the mark”, like that of an archer aiming his arrow at the center of the target, only to miss it. In the Greek world, sin was thereby considered a miscalculation or mistake in judgment. John however, goes further. He defines sin as an attitude of lawlessness. The word for transgression is “anomia” or “lawlessness”. It is an attitude which refuses to acknowledge God’s authority and substitutes one’s own. Sin was a serious offense against God, as John saw it. It represented a deliberate disregard of God’s divine right to establish law. Sin is a direct offence to God. It is an expression of enmity against God and deserves His wrath.

Not only is sin an offence to God, it is contrary to the incarnation of Christ. God became a man for the purpose of doing away with sins (v. 5). Jesus dealt with sin in the only way suitable to God. He lived a life of sinless perfection, and then made the perfect sacrifice of Himself for sins. In doing so, His perfect life became the model of the new creation to which God has predestined all of His children to become. (Romans 8:29).

John now makes two startling statements that have alarmed many Bible readers through the centuries. He says that no one, who abides or lives in Christ, keeps on sinning. And no one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him! In verse 9, he caps it off by saying that everyone who is born of God cannot go on sinning. This alarms true believers who know they are constantly confronting sin in their daily lives. If 1 John is written to assure us of our salvation (5:13), statements like these can have just the opposite effect.

What is John saying? Several explanations have been offered.

(1) He is teaching sinless perfection for Christians. This is to be rejected in that elsewhere in the epistle, John allows for the possibility of sin by Christians (1:8, 10; 2:1; 5:16). He also exhorts his readers not to sin but to practice righteousness (2:1, 15, 29; 3:12, 18; 5:21). Also very few Christians would claim to be sinless.

(2) He is describing a special group of “super Christians” who are living a higher quality of life than others. This is also to be rejected in that John’s language is absolute and what is true of one Christian, is true of them all. “Whoever or everyone” born of God does not commit sin.
John is referring to a particular or special type of sin. This is then understood in several ways. First, that of the Roman Catholic in which sins are divided into mortal and venial; some forgivable and some unforgivable. Second, willful and involuntary sins. Third, sins and mistakes or errors. Fourth, sins versus the sin unto death or apostasy in 5:16, 17. The problem with these views is that there is no indication that John is working with such a limited definition of the term sin. He is talking about all kinds of sin being a manifestation of lawlessness.

Perhaps the best way to solve the problem is to stress that the Greek verbs are in the present tense that describes a continuous or habitual activity. Thus the believer may sin on occasion, but does not make the sin a deliberate habit. This is the most popular understanding of the passages among the commentators. It provides a view that is consistent with the New Testament description of a Christian. The Christian is a person whose heart is set on pleasing God and who cannot make sin his way of life, even if he or she may occasionally lapse from their heart's desire.

In verses 8-10, John traces the origin of sin to the devil, and identifies the two spiritual families. The devil sins continuously. A child of the devil continues to commit sin because he belongs to the evil one. In contrast the child of God will not continue to sin because he has the nature of God in him. When he falls into sin, he realizes that Satan has deceived him and led him astray. When he turns to God in faith and repentance, he finds forgiveness. As a child of God, he is never in the power of the evil one. The false teachers were Satan's children who were trying to seduce John's readers. A child bears his family likeness. You are either a child of the Devil or a child of God. How you live identifies you as to which family you belong.

The Believer Loves His Family Members - 3:11-17

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death. Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God,”
because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But
whoso has this world’s good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of
compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?”

John is now ready to expose his readers to a second look at the second test of love. Having given them a
preliminary discussion on love in 2:7-11, he now enlarges upon it. In doing so, he makes a distinction between
the hatred of the world as exemplified in Cain (3:12, 13) and the love of believers exemplified in Christ. (3:14-18).

Love is an indispensable feature in the lives of the children of God because it is the embodiment of the gospel
message, and the “new commandment” which they received when they were first taught the Christian way.
The proud Gnostics, who boasted of their intellectual superiority, produced a spirit of pride and arrogance
among their followers. Those who rejected their teachings were looked down upon with contempt and
hatred. John exhorts his readers to avoid this practice in their fellowship.

In order to contrast love with hate, John uses an illustration from the second generation of mankind. The story
of Cain shows what failure to love one’s brother can lead to, namely murder. It stresses that hatred is murder
in its embryonic form. According to the story in Genesis 4:1-15, Cain’s sacrifice was unacceptable to God, while
Abel’s sacrifice was acceptable. The reason that Cain killed his brother was that he was envious that Abel’s
righteous act won the approval of God. This angered him because he was lawless and insisted on worshiping
God according to the standards of self-will. Cain did not kill Abel because he was inherently wicked, but rather he,
as a wicked person, hated a good person!

John’s readers are not to be surprised if the world hates them. John clearly has in mind not simply people
outside the church who may persecute Christians but also people within the church whose lack of love
demonstrates that they are not true believers; namely the false brethren who have withdrawn from the
church. The false religious professors insist upon worshiping God according to their own standards of self-will.
The true believer worships God according to the revealed standards of behavior laid down by God in His Word.
God’s will and self-will cannot have fellowship with one another. The absence of love for those who do what is
right in God’s sight is the mark of Cain and reveals that one is lacking spiritual life. They belong to their father
the devil, whom Jesus said was a “murderer from the beginning” because he did not abide in the love of God’s
truth (John 8:44).
After showing the nature of hatred, John now turns to the nature of love in verses 14-18. The word “love” can have a variety of meanings, and it is necessary to know exactly what a person means when he uses the word “love.” Most people associate Christianity with the command to love, and so they think they know all about Christianity when they have understood its teachings in terms of their own concept of love. John found it necessary to clearly explain to his readers what he meant by love, and we can profit greatly from his explanation.

Instead of giving an abstract idea of love, John defines love by giving an example of what he means. It is seen in that Christ “laid down his life for us.” He sacrificed His life for us. As Cain was the supreme example of hate, Christ is the supreme example of love. To rob a person of his or her life is the ultimate sin against one’s fellowman. To give up one’s life for another is the ultimate act of love for one’s fellowman. Jesus had taught that the greatest example of love is seen when a man lays down his life on behalf of his friends (John 15:13). If love is defined by Christ’s giving away His life for us, then “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (V. 16)

Now lest John’s readers might think that the only way to love others is by dying as a martyr, he reminds them that true believers can show love by sharing what they have with those in need. Just as one can show hatred toward another without killing them, so one can show love toward others without actually dying for them.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the religious representatives, who saw the wounded man in the ditch, refused to get involved in his life. After analyzing the situation they realized that it would cost them time, effort and material wealth to get involved. Getting involved would mess up the pursuits they had planned for the day. While they did not murder the guy and put him out of his misery, they showed hatred toward him by leaving him in his misery!

In verse 17, John lists three marks of a person who lacks the love of God in him. (1) They possess the ability to help the needy (“has this world’s goods”); (2) They see the need (“sees his brothers have need”). Note: The verb John uses here for seeing refers not to a casual glance, but to a careful gaze that makes one fully aware of the brother’s difficulty. (3) They refuse to relieve the need (“shut up his bowels of compassion from him”). Anyone who fills all three of these descriptions has failed the test of love.

What then is love in John's usage? It is not a warm feeling of emotion that may come and go. It is instead a doing what God says is right for us to do toward other people. What then is hatred? It is not a cold feeling of
anger that may rise and fall. It is instead a refusal for us to do what God says is right toward other people. It is an attitude leading to a volitional act. The person possessed by worldliness hates anything or any person that calls upon him to have to sacrifice his comforts, plans, and desires. Hatred is the absence of love.

So true Christians are those who have a hope they will be sinless like Christ at His coming. True Christians are those who resemble the family likeness produced by their spiritual Father, and they love to serve their brothers and sisters in Christ.
True Christians Need Assurance From God, and Need to Test the Spirits To See if They Represent God

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

“For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keeps his commandments dwells in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” 1 John 3:18 - 4:6

Christian Assurance

In verses 18-24, John continues to enlarge upon his definition of love as being a test of true Christianity. In doing so, he seeks to give assurance to his readers wherein they may have confidence to approach God in prayer. While our salvation ultimately depends on God Himself, John nevertheless insists that to consciously
enjoy this assurance we must continue to keep His commands to believe in Jesus and love one another. When we do this, the Spirit inwardly assures us of our spiritual position before God.

John says we can know we are in a true relationship with God by our deeds of action and truth. The false, antichrist teachers were saying they possessed the knowledge of the truth by special inner insights received by direct revelations from God. But their lives were models of selfishness and hatred. John countered this impression by claiming that the mark of truth is a lifestyle of high moral character and good deeds flowing out of our commitment to Christ.

Love for other Christians is a test of genuine membership in God’s family. The existence of such love enables the believer to know with assurance that he is walking in the truth, and is confident to the point he can enjoy a prayer life with God. (cf. vs. 21, 22). In verses 19, 20, 21, John makes reference to the believer’s heart. By this he means the entire moral consciousness of man. In our desire to live lives of high moral character and good deeds, we will often fall short of our own ideals, let alone God’s. Sometimes the believer’s heart will accuse him to the point he may question whether he is a true Christian or not. Satan is also known as the accuser of the brethren. (Revelation 12:10). John says there is a way to pacify or put to rest our troubled heart or conscience. It is through the knowledge that God understands our spiritual state better than we do. The human conscience is not the final judge in the matter. God is the final judge. He knows that we believe in Christ, that we strive to love our brothers, and we regret falling short. But the forgiveness found in His mercy is greater than our imperfections. Thus our hearts can be reassured not by our feelings, but by the knowledge that God knows us better than we know ourselves.

After Peter denied his Lord three times, Jesus later asked him three times if he loved Him. This grieved and upset the heart of Peter. He then said, “Lord, you know all things (God is greater): you know that I love you. Jesus said unto him, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). A knowledge that God knows that we still love Him even though we often fail Him, will assure our hearts to further serve Him. Thus it is through the means of objective knowledge rather than subjective feelings that our hearts can be assured.

When our hearts no longer condemn us, we can have confidence before God. This confidence leads to fruitfulness in prayer. When a Christian is confident of his place in God’s family, regardless of any emotions of guilt or unworthiness, he can communicate with his Father in prayer with the assurance that he is being heard. John states it in absolute terms. “We receive from him anything we ask.” (V. 22, NIV). This is another one of those astounding statements which ranks with the statements regarding the believer’s sinlessness (3:6,9) and
his perfection in love (2:5, 4:17). John is teaching the same thing which he heard Jesus teach. In John 14:14, Jesus said, “If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” Also in John 16:23 “. . . whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” (cf. 15:16).

How are these passages to be understood? Some passages of Scripture seem to give assurance that we will receive anything for which we ask, (Matthew 7:7,8), but other passages place qualifications to answered prayer. The assurances of answered prayer assume a knowledge of the qualifications. First, answers to prayer are based on our obedience to God’s commands. John goes on to say in verse 22 that God answers prayer because “we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight.” Second, this same letter requires the qualification of asking for things to be “according to his will” (5:14), not according to our selfish will. Third, we must ask in Jesus’ name (John 14:13; 16:23,26). Fourth, we must be abiding in Jesus (John 15:7, 16).

A life submitted to the will of God is the secret of a successful prayer life. The reason believers can expect answers to prayer is that, as far as they know, they are asking in accordance with the will of God. They certainly would know better than to ask for something contrary to His will. The result is that God gives them what they ask for, and if not, something better. There are many occasions in this life when we do not receive the answer we have expected. But when we arrive in heaven, we will learn that every time God answered in a way which was best for us. We must always trust God to do what is right. Believers can expect God’s help when they are one in agreement with His purposes.

The question now arises that if answered prayer is dependent upon keeping God’s commands, then what are those commands? John summarizes them up in the twin towers of his epistle: faith and love. We are to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another.

“Believe” occurs here for the first time in the epistle, and will be seen more and more as the issue between John and the apostate teachers. The false teachers do not love, but the reason they do not love is that God’s love is not in them because they have not truly believed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To believe in Jesus Christ means in this context, to believe the gospel about Jesus, that He is God’s Son, that He came into this world of humanity to save men and women from their sins, and that by believing in Him, they can have eternal life. (John 3:16, 18). The joining of faith and love into a single command shows how closely connected the two are in John’s mind. Belief precedes love because it is the basis for love (3:16), but love is the expression of true belief.
John now mentions the person of the Holy Spirit for the first time in verse 24. The evidence that we abide in Christ is our doctrinal purity, our love for the brethren, and our obedience to His commands. The evidence He abides in us is the presence of His Spirit whom He has given us. Paul says that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Romans 5:5).

Thus we can be assured that the Holy Spirit has come to make His home in us as evidenced by (1) our correct doctrine - “believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.” (V. 23); (2) our love for the brethren - “love one another” (v. 23); (3) our obedience to His commands - “keep His commands” (v. 24).

Testing the Spirits - 4:1-6

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”

In these verses, John now moves from the test of love to take a second look at the test of doctrine or belief. The sections parallels that of 2:18-27 where he warned of the presence of antichrists who had been among them, but who had gone out from them. The Christian community to which John was writing was in the midst of controversy. The opponents to whom John was engaging were not professing pagans, but people who claimed to be Christians. Their goal was to place doubts in the minds of the people who were remaining in the church, and to lead them away from apostolic doctrine. In this type of setting, John needed to teach his readers how to discern between true and false teachers. He described that this could take place in two ways. First, by observing the content of their teaching in verses 1-3. Second, by the character of their hearers in verses 4-6.
John has stated that all believers have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (3:24) and they all have believed the truth concerning the person of God’s Son, Jesus Christ (3:23). But there are other spirits with which to contend. There is the human spirit and an evil spirit. All of these seek a hearing from our human minds. The words, “believe not every spirit” set forth both a duty and a warning. Christians are to stop listening to every “spirit,” or spokesman, which claims to receive their message from a supernatural source. Not every spirit represents God. Instead of being gullible, they need to try or test the prophet who claims to speak as a mouth-piece for the Spirit of God. A large number of false prophets had already gone out from or abandoned the apostolic faith and modified their message to accommodate the spirit of the world, namely that which was described in 2:15-17.

How then are the spokesmen, claiming to represent God’s truth, to be tested. First, by the content of their message. John lists two contrasting spirits that exist in the world. They are the Spirit of God (v. 2) and the spirit of antichrist (v. 3). These are described as “he that is in you” (Spirit of God) (v. 4), and “he that is in the world” (spirit of antichrist) (v. 4). John further describes these opposing spirits as “the spirit of truth” and “the spirit of error” in verse 6. So behind every human spokesman that is seen, lies an unseen superhuman spirit.

What separates a true spokesman of God from a false one? John says it is in what they believe or confess about Jesus Christ. What a person confesses about Jesus Christ exposes his spirit as being either a spirit of truth or a spirit of error. In John’s conflict, it involved the question of the incarnation. Did Jesus come in the flesh or not? If a teacher has the Spirit of God dwelling in him, then he confesses the incarnation, the
wonderful truth that God did become man and came to earth on a saving mission to redeem lost sinners. The Spirit of God cannot confess anything other than the truth, therefore every teacher who has the Spirit of God will confess the same truth. True Christianity can be examined by the objective doctrine it teaches. Right doctrine-- right Spirit, wrong doctrine--wrong spirit.

Now note the confession in detail in verse 2. The true teacher confesses "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh".

1) The true teacher confesses Jesus. The name Jesus means “Savior”. It is believing that Jesus Christ did come from God to seek and save men who were lost. He came to be the Savior of the world.

2) The true teacher confesses Christ. The name Christ means “Messiah”, the Anointed One of God. It is believing that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures; that He is the fulfillment of all the prophecies of Scripture; that He is the Anointed Savior sent from God to the earth.

3) The true teacher confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (3:23). It is believing that this Jesus, “who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” (Phil 2:6), came out of the dimension of the spiritual world into the dimension of the physical world, to save men in fulfillment of Scripture. It means that by His life, death, resurrection and exaltation to the throne of God, He now ever lives as a God-man to intercede for repentant sinners.

In contrast, the false teachers deny this confession. That is, they refuse to confess such about Jesus. In their actions they distort the Gospel. This departure from the truth of the Gospel is the spirit of the antichrist that they had heard was coming. The spirit of antichrist is the spirit seen in apostasy or departure from the apostolic faith. A sample of such a spirit or principle exists in every person who identifies himself as a Christian, but refuses to confess the true gospel of Christ Jesus. This is the antichrist, the falling away which John's readers heard was coming. John says it was already occurring in the lives of the false prophets. John’s use of “it” rather than “he” indicates that in this context, he is referring to a class of persons who deny Christ, rather than a single person. John’s statement in 2:22 clarifies this. “Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is (the: Greek) antichrist that denies the Father and the Son.” II John 7 is even clearer, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a (the: Greek) deceiver and an (the: Greek) antichrist.”

The false teachers could not only be identified by the content of their message, but by the character of their hearers. This is seen in verses 4-6. The fact that John’s readers had not left the apostolic faith proved they had
overcome the teaching of the apostates and thus belonged to God. Their power to overcome, came not from their own natural willpower, but from the Holy Spirit indwelling enablement (v. 4). The spirit of error and the spirit of truth cannot coexist peacefully side by side. This is why apostates cannot fellowship with apostolic Christians. They must separate and form their own fellowship. These fellowships have a common bond. They are under the control of the world system. That system headed up by Satan as its ruler. It is that system John has described back in 2:15-17; the system built upon the creature’s pride and self-gratification. As we saw in those verses it expresses itself in three attitudes:

1. A desire for self sufficiency and control so that one can always “get his own way.”
2. The desire to “get everything I want” to enable one to get his own way;
3. The desire to be able to brag about one’s being and achievements so as to gain a reputation above that of others.

John begins verses 4, 5 and 6 with a personal pronoun which identifies three representative groups. “Ye” - his readers (v. 4); “they” - his opponents (v. 5); and “we” - John and other apostles (v. 6).

The false prophets had a worldly, man-centered message. They had taken the Gospel, removed its offensive elements, and restated it in such a way to make it acceptable to worldly-minded people. Its message allows the proud, self-gratifying spirit to use God as a means to advance its own temporal, earthly plans, purposes, and pursuits. It does not crucify the flesh and its lusts. Worldly-minded hearers select worldly-minded teachers. Paul instructed Timothy to be aware of this. In II Timothy 4:2-4, he charged Timothy to remain true to the doctrine that he had been taught. He said, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

A religious teacher can determine much about himself by observing what class of people are pleased with his teaching. This was especially true of Jesus. In John 8:47, He told a group of unbelieving Jews, who had just rejected His message, “He that is of God hears God’s words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God.”

As a representative of apostolic doctrine, John could say without apology, “he that knows God hears us, he that is not of God hears not us.” (v. 6). John knew that he believed the Gospel, loved God and His people, and
obeyed God’s words of command. If this be admitted, it would then follow that those who feared and loved God would receive what he taught.

In conclusion, the type of people who welcome a message give a clue as to its nature. The proud, the rich, the ambitious, the sensual will insist on a message or ministry which enhances their desires. People who love truth will respond to a spirit characterized by truth; those who are deluded by error will respond to a spirit of delusion.
“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we 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 ought also to love one another. No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God loves his brother also.

“Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.” – 1 John 4:7 - 5:4

So far John has presented two rounds of tests designed to identify a true Christian. He has twice presented the three tests in order. First, the test of obedience (2:3-6; 2:28 - 3:10). Second, the test of love (2:7-11; 3:11-18). Third, the test of doctrine or belief (2:18-27; 4:1-6). In each new presentation, he has both expanded and deepened the understanding of the tests. Along with the tests, he has called for his readers to apply these
truths to their lives. In doing so, he has exposed the false teachers, who have left the church, as being counterfeit Christians.

He is now ready to present the third round or spiral of tests, only this time the order is changed. Instead of beginning with the test of obedience, he turns again to the test of love in 4:7-11. In 4:12-21 he combines the tests of love and doctrine. Then in 5:1-21 he weaves all three tests together.

**Love's Source - vs. 7, 8**

> “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.”

John begins his discourse by giving an appeal to his readers to love one another, namely, the brethren. Why should Christians exhibit such love? Because the kind of love being discussed finds its origin in God and comes only from God. “Love is (comes) from God.” (v. 7). If God is the source of real love, then all who manifest love in their lives must have first received it from God. It is not an innate virtue in us, nor is it a learned behavior. It is acquired from our being “born of God” and reveals that we have come to “know God” in an intimate relationship.

The opposite is also true. Whoever does not find a love for Christian brethren does not know God. Why is this the case? Because God in His very nature is love. If God be loving in His very nature, our failure to love can only mean that we have no true knowledge of God; that we have not been born of Him, and that we do not have His nature. He is love, His nature is loving and love can never be absent from His being, or any of His actions. When John says that God is love, it is not to be taken that love is a complete description of God. John has also described God as light (1:5), and God as righteous (2:29). In John’s Gospel, it is recorded that God is a Spirit (4:24). Thus, it has been correctly said that “love does not define God, but God defines love.”

If we are to love as God loves, then how does God love? God loves in deed and not in word only. God’s love is explained by what God did. He “sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him... and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Here we are given two factors that define the nature of God’s love. One, it is a self-sacrificing love. It cost God His most prized possession, His only begotten Son. The expression “only begotten” means “unique, one of a kind.” It describes the unity and relationship that are shared by the Father and the Son. The fact that God sent His Son into the world is one evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ. Christ was the pre-existent Son, He did not become His Son at His birth. Babies are not sent into
the world, they are born into the world. As the perfect man, Jesus was born into the world, but as the eternal Son, He was sent into the world.

The second factor that defines God’s love is that it was an action done for the benefit of others. He became the propitiation for our sins. The Greeks understand the word “propitiation” to mean “to please the gods, to obtain their favor and good will.” In most of the world’s religions there exists within the hearts of all people a feeling of guilt over the awareness of sin. Their sin has brought about the wrath and displeasure of the deities involved. The deity or god can become favorable toward them through human deeds and offerings.

In the Biblical sense, it is God not man who provides the offering of propitiation. To propitiate God is to avert His wrath and find His favor. This can only take place through the substitutionary punishment of a sacrifice. The atonement, or covering, is effected when an innocent life is given in exchange for a guilty life. As a consequence of the sacrifice, the guilty party is freed from guilt since payment has been made to God by the offering. How can God forgive sinners and be consistent with His holy nature? In the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus bore the punishment for sin and met the demands of God’s holy law. But there in that cross, God reveals His love and makes it justly possible for men to be forgiven by grace through faith. So it is not man’s love for God that initiates the reconciliation, but it is God’s love for man as seen in the giving of His Son as an offering for sin.

**Love’s Obligation - v. 11**

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

John understood that Christian love can be given to God only when it has first been received from God. Also it is God’s love for us that defines what true love requires; which is the willing commitment to sacrifice one’s most prized possession for the gain of another. This is how we ought to love our brethren. The word, “ought” is a strong word describing a moral obligation. We ought to love others not in the sense that we should do it, but that in light of Christ’s sacrifice we are bound and obligated to love others in the same way. (cf. 2:6; 3:16).

**Love’s Indwelling - vs. 12-16**

“No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the
world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God.

And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.”

At this point, John inserts the well-known fact that God is invisible, and that no one has ever see His essence. The abrupt shift in thought has puzzled many Bible students. But it actually sets the stage for a discussion of the way in which God may actually be known. Most Bible commentators believe that John is referring to the false teachers and their claims to have seen God in special visions that imparted a special knowledge, which others did not possess. John denies this is the way that God is known. Rather than revealing Himself to a select few, God reveals Himself to those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and show their faith by loving others with the sacrificial love with which they were loved.

How then can a person know that the invisible God is present in his life? John answers, “He has given us of His Spirit.” (v. 13). But since the Spirit is also invisible, how can we know that He dwells within us? Paul would answer in Galatians 5:22 that the proof of the Spirit’s indwelling is seen in the fruit of the Spirit, and the first manifestation of the Spirit’s fruit is “love”. In Hebrews 11:27 it is said that by faith Moses saw “Him who is invisible.” How shall men know that the invisible God is present in their lives? Jesus answers in these words, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.” (John 13:35). The world will not believe that the invisible God loves sinners until they can see His love in sending His Son to die for them, and in seeing His love at work in the lives of His children. Sacrificial love, in giving ourselves to the needs of others, is the evidence of God’s indwelling presence in our lives, and of our dwelling in Him. (v. 13).

While the word “trinity” is never used in the Bible, the concept is there. It seems quite clear that John accepted this doctrine and understood it well enough to feel he did not need to explain it. In verses 13, 14 we have the Father sending or giving both the Son, and the Spirit.

Love’s Perfecting - vs. 17-21

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God loves his brother also.”
John has now defined authentic Christian love as being self-giving in contrast to self-receiving. It looks out to the interests of others as opposed to one’s self-interest. John affirmed in verse 12 that when a person understands this in a saving way, God dwells in him and God’s love is perfected in him. The idea of God’s indwelling in the believer was expanded in verses 13-16. Now in verses 17-21, John elaborates on the idea of perfected love. Previously it was God’s love that was perfected in us, now it is our love that is perfected. (v. 17).

The word for “made perfect” describes that “which is complete or fully developed, that which has reached its intended goal.” The mutual indwelling of God and the believer in verse 16 is the means for God’s love to reach a state of completion. When the believer loves as God loves, his love has been perfected or made complete. In other words, he is now loving others as God loves him!

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that His disciples’ love was to extend even to their enemies who opposed them. In doing so, He described the level of love that operates in the lives of lost men. In Matthew 5:46-48 He said, “For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans (tax collectors) the same? And if you salute (greet) your brethren only, what do you more than others? Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

When God generated life into Adam, He gave him the capacity to love on the divine level of God; which acts in a self-giving mode. When Adam fell into sin, he became self-centered and lost his God-given ability to love. Now he and his descendants can love only on a human level; which acts in a receiving mode. It can only give if it knows it can expect to receive something in return. Thus it can only love when it knows it will be loved in return.

One of God’s goals in regenerating human beings is to restore that divine level of love in the new creatures to enable them both to understand and practice the love with which Jesus loves. Since this is God’s goal for the believer, the believer is to desire and seek after the completion of God’s goal for him. So when Jesus said to “be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect,” he was saying, love others in the mode of self-giving as God Himself loves. This capacity is imparted to the believer in the new birth and is enlarged as the believer grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and is changed from one degree of glory into another.
John lists two benefits that occur when God’s love is perfected in us. One, perfect love, (self-giving love) dispels fear of punishment in the day of judgment (vs. 17, 18). Two, perfect love dispels hatred of Christians (vs. 19-21).

Since the believer now living in this present world is already loving as Christ is loving, the believer is in the same position as Christ is before His Father. He is God’s son and the object of His love! Think of it, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (3:1). Sons do not need to be tormented by fear of punishment or condemnation by their father. Fear and love cannot co-exist. This is why a person, who stands in a love relationship with God, can look with confidence toward the day of judgment without fear and torment. Punishment is the portion of those who through their disobedience are condemned already (John 3:18). All such torment or punishment is dispelled by the perfect love in which the members of God’s family lives.

The second benefit from perfected love is the dispelling of hatred toward Christians. The world hates God, His Christ, and His people. The world does not love the Christian, nor his way of living. The believer is now enabled to love because he understands that God first loved him. So Christian love is defined, not on a human level of self-receiving, but on a divine level of self-giving (v. 19). In taking the initiative in loving us, God not only showed us how to love one another (3:11), but He imparted the desire and the power to follow His example.

John now takes another jab at his opponents. For the fourth time, he calls them liars (1:10; 2:4, 22, 4:20). He will do so again in 5:10. They claimed to have seen God (4:12) and to love God (4:20), but this knowledge that they had acquired was for purposes of self-gratification only. It separated them from the brethren, the true believers. One cannot be loving an invisible God while hating a visible brother. Love for God and love for one’s brother in Christ go together.

The Unity of the Three Tests - 5:1-4

“Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.”
In Chapter 5, John starts concluding his discussion of the three tests of authentic or true Christianity. He does so by affirming that it is necessary for the believer to manifest all three signs of the presence of true Christianity; namely, right belief for the doctrinal or faith test, right love for the social test, and right actions for the moral obedience test. He now shows how these three tests are closely related and interwoven into an essential unity. He concentrates on the three essential ingredients that comprise a saving knowledge of God in eternal life. They are in proper order - faith, love and obedience. All three must be present to comprise a true Christian.

In verse 1, he begins by affirming that everybody who holds the true confession of faith about Jesus has been born of God. Faith is thus the sign or evidence of the new birth and not the means of the new birth as Arminian or free will theology teaches. The tenses of the Greek action verbs affirm this. “Believes” is present tense, signifying a present and ongoing belief. “Is born” is perfect tense, meaning “has been born in the past and the results are remaining.” Ongoing faith is the result of the new birth, and not the cause or means of it. How then does one know if they have been born again or not? Not by looking for some religious experience. We can know it has happened when we begin to realize that we believe that Jesus is the Christ sent into the world to be our Savior. Thus we do not believe in order to be born of God, but we are begotten by God in order to enable us to believe!

This should not surprise us, in that our ability to love others is also an evidence of the new birth. John has affirmed this back in 4:7 where he said “everyone that loves is born of God.” I have never met a Christian who has asserted that one must love others in order to be born again. No, it is generally agreed that love is the fruit of the spirit not the prerequisite for the Spirit -- likewise with faith.

Again, John has taught that doing what is right indicates that a person has been born of God. In 2:29 he said, “everyone that does righteousness is born of him.” Does any Christian teach that if a sinner will start living right, then God will regenerate him? No, of course not. Also in 3:9, John says that “whoever is born of God does not commit sin.” Is John saying that when a person ceases to practice sin, then God will grant him spiritual life? I think not. Even now in the present section, John has stated in 5:4, “Whosoever is born of God overcomes the world.” Is God saying to men dead in trespasses and sins that if you will do your part and overcome your love of the world, then I will do my part and give you spiritual life? To ask these questions is to answer them. All these are evidences of God’s activity in working in us these actions that are traceable to the new birth.
The new birth that brings about our believing, also brings about our loving. As a child loves his father, he loves the children whom his father begets. Anyone who loves God must also love God’s children. Just as faith and love are related, so love and obedience are likewise related. They are so closely related that obedience defines love. John says in verse 3, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” The connection between love for God and obedience serves as a protection against thinking of love for God as “emotional feelings” about God. True love acts to obey God’s commands. When true love is acting, God’s commands are not burdensome. When God enters into our lives at the point of the new birth, He sheds His love abroad in our hearts. When we believe on the name of God’s Son, then His yoke becomes easy and his burden light. (Matthew 11:30). Living the life of faith and love becomes our delight, and we discover the freedom and liberty for which we had been seeking.

If love for God is expressed in keeping God’s commandments, how then, can the believer keep God’s commandments? In verse 4, John traces this ability to obey God to its origin in the new birth. There is an overcoming, conquering power in regenerating grace. It imparts a faith which looks to Christ for the victory. John’s readers had overcome the power of the false prophets (4:4). They had also overcome the love of Satan’s world system (2:13-17). They had been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.

Some Christians see their trials and temptations as indicating that their victory is incomplete. This is not an accurate assessment. Paul would say in Romans 8:36, 37, “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” Faith does not exempt us from the struggles or their pain, but it assures us of a certain outcome of victory. When facing the cross, Jesus could say, “In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

John’s argument has now gone full circle. All of the three tests are related to each other. As a result of God’s begetting activity all true Christians have a correct view of who Jesus is. They love both the Father and His children and keep His commands. They are enabled to keep His commands because they overcome the world. Their victory over the world is due to their faith in their Lord who has already won the battle. Faith, love and obedience are the three evidences of salvation. Remove any of these evidences and one fails the tests. True believers will see evidence to some degree of each of these in their lives, and will confidently look forward in hope for the perfection of each of these in their lives to come, after their lives in this world are over. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!
THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN
Lesson Eight
The True Faith Confirmed and Affirmed

“Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself: he that believes not God has made him a liar; because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” 1 John 5:5-21

The Three Confirming Witnesses - v. 5-12

John begins this section by asking a question. Who can overcome the world? He answers it in saying “Only the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” To this another question naturally arises: How does a person come to faith in Jesus as the Son of God? John answers the question by showing that faith is dependent upon having been exposed to the right kind of evidence confirmed by valid testimony or witnesses.
In verses 6-9 he lists three witnesses that God has given to men to support their faith or trust. Then in verses 10-12 John describes the two different types of responses to the testimonies about Christ.

The whole section focuses on Jesus Christ and the mission for which He came into the world. It begins with the somewhat obscure statement that Jesus Christ came by water and by blood. Divorced from its historical setting, this statement is confusing to the modern reader. Some have taught that these two terms refer to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper. Others believe it is a reference to the water and blood that flowed from Christ’s body when the Roman soldier pierced His side in His death on the cross (John 19:34). But neither of these views explain the meaning of “not by water only”. Someone has taught that Jesus Christ came by water only.

Most Bible teachers understand the water to refer to the baptism of Jesus, and the blood to His death on the cross. This fits well into the controversy John was experiencing with the pre-Gnostic teachers. They taught that the heavenly spirit being of Christ descended upon Jesus and began His earthly mission at the point of His baptism, but withdrew His presence from Him just prior to His death on the cross. So that it was only the earthly human Jesus who died, and not the heavenly Christ. Over against this heresy, John emphasized that it was Jesus Christ, not simply a human Jesus, who experienced both baptism and crucifixion. John understood the baptism of Jesus in a different way from that of his opponents. They thought of the baptism as the point in time when Jesus received the heavenly Christ; but John believed that Jesus was already the Christ when He experienced His baptism, and remained the Christ who died on the cross. It was the person of the Son of God who came into the world. He did so in the womb of the virgin. It was the Son who came into this world to seek and save those who were lost. It was the Son who shed His blood on the cross to redeem lost sinners. Apart from Christ’s true humanity, suffering, and dying there could be no propitiation for our sins. In the early church water and blood became key words to convey the true understanding of the Incarnation.

John goes on to introduce a third witness, namely the Holy Spirit. It was at His baptism the Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove, and it was this witness that convinced John the Baptist that Jesus was the Son of God. In John 1:32-34 we read, “And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, ‘Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizes with the Holy Ghost.’ And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.” The Spirit also had inspired the Old Testament Scriptures that spoke of the coming of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.
The fact that there are three witnesses is the main point of the statement, and all three are in agreement concerning the person of Jesus Christ, and the mission for which He came into the world.

While the theme of the section is Jesus Christ, the key word is “witness.” It is sometimes translated in our Authorized Version as “record” or “testimony” and “testified.” All told, John uses it nine times in verses 6-12. It comes from the strict setting found in a courtroom of law. In a court trial, a certain man is called a witness. The witness gives his testimony. He swears to tell the truth. The evidence that is compiled is based upon the trustworthiness of the witnesses. If all the witnesses agree, it is easy for the faith or verdict of the jury to be established.

The Mosaic law required that judgment should be founded upon solid, valid evidence. In criminal cases, testimonies were admissible as evidence upon the basis of two or three witnesses whose testimonies had been heard and confirmed as true. (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). False witnesses were severely punished (Deuteronomy 19:16). In the New Testament this was the pattern for church discipline (Matthew 18:16; I Timothy 5:19; II Corinthians 13:1).

If the system of human witnesses is worthy of respect by men, then how much more should God’s collection of witnesses be respected. Through the voice of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles, God has given us a trustworthy record of the truth concerning the person and mission of His Son Jesus Christ. The Christian faith does not require a blind leap into the dark -- it is confirmed by many “infallible proofs.” (Acts 1:3).

The response to the evidence found in the record that God has given confines a hearer to reach one of two verdicts: either it is truth to be believed or it is a lie that is to be rejected. Based on the Biblical record, the claims that Jesus made for Himself require one to believe He was either a liar, a lunatic or the Lord God. The verdict one makes reveals his standing before God. If he believes the witness, or testimony of God, he is given an internal witness that confirms that he has heard the truth and now is in possession of the truth. In contrast the person who rejects the testimony of God makes God out to be a liar. This insult upon God’s character continues as long as the person remains in unbelief. One cannot profess to believe in God and at the same time reject God’s testimony to His own Son. If Jesus is not God’s own Son in the flesh, then God is no longer the truth. He is a liar. He who has the Son, has life, and he who does not have the Son does not have life. Unbelief is willful rejection of the evidence that God has testified unto.
Christian Certainties Affirmed - vs. 13-21

In verse 13, John begins the conclusion of his epistle. His purpose was to help believers who were being confronted with opposing views of what comprised true Christianity. He wanted to enable them to know with confidence that they had followed the truth. In the remaining verses he uses the word “know” seven times. The Greek word for “know” was used for knowledge characterized by certainty. The false teachers prided themselves to be in possession of the true and advanced knowledge. John says no, we know some things about God for which we are certain. He then lists five Christian certainties. In doing so, he gives a summary of what he has taught.

(1) Assurance of Eternal Life - v. 13

“These things I have written unto you who believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

John sums up his letter by saying that the things that he has written should help to give assurance to believers that they possess eternal life. Those who had left the teachings of the apostles had shaken the faith of the remaining faithful. But by their remaining true to the fundamentals of the faith, their salvation was sure. The fundamental tests were: correct doctrine (a correct view of Christ), correct love (self giving for the brethren), and a correct obedience (doing what God says is right). A clear understanding of the Gospel record gives a legitimate ground for Christian assurance or certainty. Believing, loving, and obeying are the evidences of eternal life.

(2) Answered Prayer - vs. 14-17

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.”
Answered prayer is the second Christian certainty. To pray means to ask. The word confidence meant to speak openly or freely. It was used to describe the free citizens in Athens who were permitted to speak their minds boldly before the assembly or the city council. Slaves were not given this right. Christians have a right to speak freely toward God, that is, face-to-face. In Hebrews 4:16 we are told, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” The word, “boldly” is “confidence.” The words, “he hears us” means to “hear with favor,” not merely to “listen to.” The believer can be certain that God hears any request with a favorable attitude, as long as it is in accord with His will. This passage provides a key to answered prayer. One such condition was given in 3:22 where “living in God's will” was prescribed. Here it is “praying in God’s will.” Even Jesus submitted His will to the will of His Father. As He faced the cross, He prayed, “let his cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” (Matthew 26:39).

Prayer must not be viewed not as our attempt to get God to see things from our point of view but as our attempt to see things from God’s point of view. It is not getting our will done in heaven, but it is getting God's will done here on earth. George Mueller, who fed thousands of orphans with food provided in answer to prayer, said “Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance. It is laying hold of God’s willingness.” David said, “Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psalm 37:4).

In verses 16 and 17, John turns from the assurance in prayer to the ministry of prayer. He shows how prayer in accordance with God’s will results in God answering our petitions. In contrast there are some things for which we are not to pray or intercede. John’s statement in verse 16 has led to much debate over its meaning among Bible students. The subject is sin among the brethren. He says there is a sin for which prayer is efficacious, and there is a sin unto death for which prayer shall not prevail.

Three major questions arise which affect one’s interpretation. First, who is the “brother?” Second, what kind of “death” is spoken of, physical or spiritual? Third, what is the identifiable “sin”? Before we deal with these questions, we first must address the sin which is forgivable. In the passage, John mentions it three times and the unforgivable sin but once. Thus, it is John’s primary focus.

The term “brother” refers to a person who has identified himself with the visible community of faith, namely believers. It does not include those who are pagans and have never professed faith in Christ. The sin not unto death is a sin that other Christians can see and identify. It is a repeated sin as seen in the present tense of the verb. John has consistently declared that a genuine Christian cannot continue in a pattern of sin. God will not allow it to keep on. Thus a person can pray for a sinning brother, and God will answer such a prayer by using corrective means to restore the sinning brother. Paul described a case involving a sinning brother in Galatians
6:1, where we read, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.”

John’s statement somewhat parallels the situation found in James 5:14-20. James describes a believer who is sick, and God has chastened him because of his persistent sin. The man understands his case and sends for the elders who come and pray for him. They pray the prayer of faith and his sins are forgiven, and his health is restored. The prayer of faith in James is the same as the prayer in the will of God in I John 5:14, 15.

This helps to answer the question as why the sinning brother should need intercession by others. Why can he not pray for himself and make his own confession? The answer is that his sin is of a visible public nature which has affected the community life of the church. As the church prays in the will of God, and confession is made on the brother’s part, then fellowship life within the church community can be restored. So the “sin not unto death” is any sin which can be forgiven which leads to the restoration of church fellowship.

Next, we must consider John’s meaning of the word, “death”. Is he referring to physical or spiritual death? In addition to using it three times in verse 16, he uses the word twice in 3:14. There we read, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother, abides in death.” Anyone who does not love the brethren remains in death. John is not thinking of physical death, but is referring to spiritual death. Throughout the letter John is contrasting the true believers from the false ones. He contrasts spiritual death with spiritual life. There is nothing in the historical context of John’s letter that would indicate that he is speaking of the physical death of a believer. Thus the interpretation that the sin unto death is the physical death of a believer at the chastening of God is to be rejected.

This leaves us now with the task of identifying the sin unto death and who commits it. In his commentary, William Barclay notes that the Greek expression “sin unto death” means “the sin which is going towards death, the sin whose end is death, the sin that, if continued in, must finish in death.” (Barclay, The Letters of John and Jude, p. 142).

So the sin is of a spiritual nature and is fatal to the soul’s eternal well-being. The identity of the sin can best occur by identifying who commits or has committed it. In the context of the epistle it would be those antichrists or false prophets who have left the apostolic fellowship. From the opening verses to the closing verse where John says, “Keep yourselves from idols,” he never leaves his purpose; namely to expose the false Christian from the true. It is those who have separated themselves from the church, and who are now trying to deceive the church that can be visibly identified as false brethren. Their sin consists of the refusal to confess the doctrinal truth concerning Jesus Christ; the refusal to love the community of apostolic brethren; and the
refusal to obey the moral commands of God. Their sin and their separation marked them out as apostates for all to see. They do not share the common fellowship with the Father and the Son that brings believers together in a common bond. They lack the signs of the new birth. They are clearly unbelievers.

As the confession of Christ with the mouth and belief in the heart leads to salvation unto life, so the denial of Christ with the mouth and unbelief in the heart is the sin that leads to death. It is committed by those who may yet confess to being Christians but are reprobate concerning the faith. The Greek scholars Marvin Vincent, Kenneth Wuest, A. T. Robinson, and Henry Alford, among others all reach the same conclusion.

By their denial of Christ and His redemptive work, these false prophets have placed themselves beyond the scope of Christ's redemption and intercession. In John 17:9, Jesus Said, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them who you have given me, for they are thine.” Jesus also said in Matthew 7:6, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” One cannot pray for God’s blessings to be upon those who harden their attitudes toward the true Christ and His gospel. To do so is to pray out of the will of God. In II John verses 10 and 11, John goes so far as to forbid financial support and God’s blessings to such false teachers. In doing so the Christian community would only promote further heresy. “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

(3) Assurance of Victory Over Sin and Satan - v. 18

“We know that whosoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not.”

In verse 18, John affirms a third Christian certainty flowing out of his letter. It is the certainty of victory over sin and Satan. Except for a minor variation in wording, the first part of the sentence is virtually identical to that of 3:9. We have seen that John does not teach sinless perfection. But he does affirm that all those who are regenerated by the Spirit of God cannot continue to practice sin. This is true of all Christians, not just some. This establishes the doctrine of the preservation and perseverance of the saints, and refutes the teaching that a regenerate child of God can fall away from a state of eternal life and be lost.
The question is how does a believer keep from practicing sin and succumbing to Satan’s power? Our Authorized Version translates from a set of Greek manuscripts in this manner. “He that is begotten of God (the believer) keeps himself, and the wicked one touches him not.” Read in this manner, it establishes human responsibility and the duty to persevere. But it should not cause a believer to trust in his own will power.

Meanwhile, a number of modern translations are based on an equal number of Greek manuscripts that provide this translation, “He who was begotten of God (Christ) keeps him (the believer), and the wicked one does not touch him (the believer).” This would teach the preservation of the saints by God’s power. Peter’s experience with Satan would help us to understand this truth. In Luke 22:31, 32 we read, “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren.” Christ will keep all of those whom the Father has given Him and will not lose one. (John 17:12).

(4) True Christians Belong to God · v. 19

“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness.”

John’s fourth affirmation of what we know as Christians is that mankind is divided into two camps: those who belong to God and those who belong to the evil one. Those who have been born again and those who have not. There is no middle ground. To be born of God is to be safe from the power of the wicked one. Not to be born of God is to be wholly under the power of the wicked one. Regardless of any doubts that the false prophets may have caused, John and his readers can be assured they belong to the Father.

The Greek word, “lieth” or “lies” carries the idea of passivity. Those who are under the control of the Satanic world system, do not even struggle against or try to be loosed from its power. They are in love with themselves and what they can obtain to make themselves look better than others. The Christian life of faith, love, and obedience is viewed as a bondage.

(5) Salvation Comes Through the Knowledge of God’s Son Jesus Christ, Who is the True God · v. 20

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”
The fifth thing that a Christian knows for certain is that salvation from sin comes only through the knowledge of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who is the true God. If mankind is divided into two camps, how is it possible for a person to come out of one and pass into another? How can one leave the kingdom of Satan and enter into the kingdom of God’s dear Son? John gives the answer. Jesus Christ, God’s Son has come into the world of mankind and has given us understanding or knowledge to be able to understand the One who is the true God. This knowledge comes through a revelation, but a revelation grounded in history.

While the Gnostics claimed that salvation came through knowledge imparted through revelations from the Revealer, it differed from John’s position. Throughout the epistle, John has insisted on the real incarnation of the Son of God, while the Gnostics would only allow that the Son of God seemed to be united with Jesus. John has insisted on the death of Jesus Christ to make an atonement to save us from our sin. The Gnostics insisted their special knowledge was necessary to save a person from their ignorance. They believed that salvation was just the correcting of man’s ignorance, and not a deliverance from sin. Which way is the true way of salvation? Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6).

The Son not only became a man, He revealed the truth, and He gives understanding or knowledge, namely the capacity to receive spiritual truth. This occurs in the new birth that opens the spiritual eyes of the sinner to see and enter the kingdom of truth. In contrast to the Gnostics’ false views of God, Jesus is the true God, and in Him is life eternal. Jesus prayed for those whom the Father had given Him to save in this manner. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

A Closing Exhortation - v. 21

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen”

John closes his epistle by speaking the truth in love. He shows his attachment to his readers by again calling them his little children. He then exhorts them to “keep themselves from idols.” An idol is a false image of God formed in the imagination of the human mind. The idols in verse 21 are not physical images but false concepts of God. They stand in contrast to “the true God” of verse 20. The idols John had in mind are the false doctrines of Cerinthus and the other pre-Gnostic teachers. John closes his epistle while still in pursuit of the truth. The enemy is false teaching, inspired by the evil one. May the truth of God prevail today against error as we confess the correct doctrine of Christ, show a correct love for the apostolic brethren, and live a correct life of obedience to God’s commands. “Buy the truth and sell it not!” (Proverbs 23:23). Beware of false views of God.