

1 John

Introduction

Just as John's gospel is different from the other gospels, so his letters are different from the other epistles of the New Testament.

Author

Whereas for the epistles by Paul we have the book of Acts as a background, we have nothing similar for John's epistles. The author of 1 John does not mention his name. Ancient tradition, however, claims the epistles were written by John, one of the sons of Zebedee, one of the twelve early disciples, and then an apostle of the church. The tone of the letters are that the writer has spiritual authority an apostle would have. In addition, the author placed himself among the eyewitnesses to the incarnate life of the Lord Jesus (1:1-2). Early Christian writers including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian cite the epistles as John's. There is no good reason for denying the traditional belief that the letter is of the apostolic authorship of John.

Background

There is no hint about the identity or location of the readers beyond the fact that they are Christians. Early church tradition places John's home in Ephesus (western Turkey), where he fled to after the dispersion of 70 A.D. It's likely they were written after the gospel of John and before Revelation, but it cannot be definitely proved. According to Irenaeus (175-195), "John, the disciple of the Lord...published the gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia." However, there is other opinions that John had returned to Jerusalem and wrote his epistles from there in the late 60s. "Virtually nothing in the epistle indicates a specific date or period for its writing" [Bible Knowledge Commentary].

Purpose

The internal evidence does strongly suggest that a heresy arose within the church and was spread by respected and able teachers in the community who had defected from the true faith and fellowship, rather than intruders from outside the fellowship.

There are five purpose statements (1:3, 4; 2:1, 26; 5:13) plus 10 imperatives (2:15, 24, 27, 28; 3:1, 7, 13; 4:1 [2 times]; 5:21), any of which could possibly be John's purpose for writing. It is usually true that in the introduction to a book we find the key to that book.

There are seven contrasts in this epistle, using the key phrase "hereby we know..."

1. The light vs. darkness (1:5–2:11)
2. The Father vs. the world (2:12-17)
3. Christ vs. the antichrist (2:18-28)
4. Good works vs. evil works (2:29–3:24)
5. The Holy Spirit vs. error (4:1-6)
6. Love vs. pious pretense (4:7-21)
7. The God-born vs. others (5:1-21)

Structure

First John is very difficult to outline. I have chosen to use the outline suggested by Zane C. Hodges in the “Bible Knowledge Commentary.”

- I. Prologue (1:1-4)
- II. Introduction: Basic Principles (1:5–2:11)
 - A. Basic principles of fellowship (1:5–2:2)
 - B. Basic principles of knowing God (2:3-11)
- III. The Purpose of the Epistle (2:12-27)
 - A. In light of the readers’ spiritual conditions (2:12-14)
 - B. In light of the world’s allurements (2:15-17)
 - C. In light of the deceptions of the last hour (2:18-23)
 - D. In light of the readers’ responsibilities to abide (2:24-27)
- IV. The Body of the Epistle (2:28–4:19)
 - A. The theme stated (2:28)
 - B. Discerning the children of God (2:29–3:10a)
 - C. Discerning the love for the brethren (3:10b-23)
 1. What love is not (3:10b-15)
 2. What love is (3:16-18)
 3. What love does for believers (3:19-23)
 - D. Discerning the indwelling God (3:24–4:16)
 1. Discerning the Spirit of truth (3:24–4:6)
 2. Discerning the God of love (4:7-16)
 - E. The theme realized (4:17-19)
- V. Conclusion (4:20–5:17)
 - A. Love clarified (4:20–5:3a)
 - B. Love empowered (5:3b-15)
 - C. Love practiced (5:16-17)
- VI. Epilogue (5:18-21)

I. Prologue (1:1-4)

Chapter 1

Verse 1—*What*—Because of John 1:1-2 (“In the beginning was the Word...He was in the beginning with God”), it’s common to think that John is here talking about “Who” was from the beginning. But notice the word “What,” not “Who.” “What” would be the original message about Jesus Christ, i.e., the beginning of the gospel proclamation, similar to 1 John 2:7, 24; 3:11.

—***was from the beginning***—the Gospel message has always been the same from the beginning. It is permanent and unalterable. It began with the incarnation of Jesus.

—***what we***—not by John alone, but by a group to which John associates himself, namely, disciples who became the apostles after Christ’s resurrection. They were witnesses from the very beginning (Acts 1:8, 21).

—(1) ***have heard***—a perfect tense of the verb, indicating a completed occurrence in the past (usually translated with the word “have”). John heard the teaching of Jesus, the sermons (Matthew 5), the private time with Jesus, often in a boat (Matthew 14:22), and when Jesus explained the parables for the disciples (Matthew 13:10f), et. al.

—(2) ***what we have seen with our eyes***—such as the Mt of Transfiguration (Matthew 17), the empty tomb (John 20:4), and the ascension (Acts 1). With these 3 words (seen, eyes,

looked), John is making it clear that it was a physical experience of seeing, not some spiritual vision.

—(3) **what we have looked at**—not just a mere glance or quick look. This word means a long, searching gaze (Matthew 11:7; Luke 23:55).

—(4) **and touched with our hands**—of course, this One was Jesus, He is the source of eternal life that John wants to communicate to his readers. John speaks of this eternal life as real—they saw it, they looked at it, they touched it with their hands (John 20:27) in the person of Jesus.

AN APPLICATION—This seems to be a progression of drawing closer to Christ. The same is true of fellowship on the human level. You see someone, you get closer, you hear them, and you gaze at them, to see what you understand about them.

—**concerning**—introducing the topic of discussion

—**the Word of Life**—this should be printed as “the word of life.” With capitals, it communicates that this text is about Jesus, but the context is the word of eternal life (Philippians 2:16; Acts 5:20). It means, “concerning the message about life.” [*logos* in the writings of John favors “message” 25 times.] Of course, eternal life itself cannot be distinguished from God’s Son, who is eternal life. John is not talking about the historical details of Christ’s life (as he did in the gospel of John) but is addressing those principles of the earthly life of the Savior, which are to be restated in the life of John’s Christian readers.

Verse 2—and the life was manifested—the message about life was evidenced by God’s Son, who is Life (5:20). **Manifested** (evidenced, revealed) is used 9 times in this epistle. This eternal life was revealed historically in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But John wants to show his readers that it can be evidenced in them, too.

—**and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you**—This revelation was given to the few but for the many. It was not to be monopolized but proclaimed.

—**the eternal life**—this is not describing a length of time but rather the divine character of the life described. It is the spiritual quality of life, which God gives to every believer through Jesus His Son. This character cannot be measured by clocks. John makes it a synonym for salvation. Someone once wrote, eternal life should be translated “the life appropriate for the heavenly age.” Think of what that entails—to leave this earth in a dead body, and arrive in heaven a spiritual body, and then get a body that is appropriate for living forever in the New Jerusalem on the new earth. Only God can make that happen!!!

—**which was with the Father and was manifested [revealed] to us**—the ultimate source of this life is the Father, who exists (eternal) before the beginning. God the Father revealed this life to us through His Son, and then through the apostles and the Scriptures, and then will be revealed through the believers.

AN APPLICATION—The incarnate life of Christ on earth is the core of the truth John is addressing, but the specific, historical details of that life are not under consideration. It is a major contrast between John’s gospel and this epistle, which proclaims a fellowship with God. Before, this fellowship was possible only to those who had been physically with Jesus (such as the disciples/apostles). But now it is available to all believers.

Verse 3—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you [the readers] **also**—Here John does not repeat 2 of the ideas of verse 1: “which we have looked upon” [gazing], and “our hands have handled.” These two experiences could not be shared with others. But

what they saw and heard, i.e. the message, can be experienced by John's readers. [This is in contrast to the book of Revelation, which was new revelation John received from God.]

AN APPLICATION—"Gazing" at our Lord Jesus is something to look forward to in heaven. As that beautiful hymn says, "Face to face with Christ, my Savior, Face to face—what will it be, when with rapture I behold Him, Jesus Christ who died for me?" An observation I made in reading some obituaries this summer is that unbelievers tend to think of an afterlife as a place—going to heaven. Believers tend to think of the afterlife as going to be with Jesus.

—purpose: ***so that you too may have fellowship with us***—the experience of the apostles with God's incarnate Son was unique and unrepeatable. John wrote his Gospel so that his readers might "*believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing they might have life through His name*" (John 20:31). John wrote this epistle to Christians so that they could "have fellowship" with the apostles, with God the Father, and with Jesus.

—***and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ***—The readers were already believers. But John wants real fellowship with them. This is not saying they could lose their salvation, but their fellowship depended on walking in the light (1:7). The danger to the readers was that they might be lured into darkness by the false teachers.

—***fellowship (koinonia)***—This word, with its derivatives, appears over 60 times in the NT. It is the union in common faith, mutual sharing. It's combining the vertical with the horizontal, the divine with the human. There is no fellowship with the Father or the Son that is not based on the apostolic witness. When a person becomes a believer, they join this fellowship with the Father, the Son, the apostles, other believers.

AN APPLICATION—Believers cannot lose their salvation, but they can lose the experience and enjoyment of it. John is claiming that he is part of a circle so intimate with God that if one has fellowship with his circle, one also has fellowship with God the Father and with His Son! The New Testament message is not more or less than the truth which Jesus revealed to His apostles, which He commanded them to teach to us (John 14:25-26; Matthew 28:18-20).

Verse 4—*These things we* [fellow apostles] ***write***—John has already described what he heard and saw, and now he expresses it in writing, a more permanent form.

—***so that our joy may be made complete***—Jesus said, "*I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete*" (John 15:11; 16:22-24; 17:13). John wanted his readers to experience the joy that comes from understanding the reality of Christ, the saving truth of the gospel, and the fellowship each Christian has with God and other believers.

AN APPLICATION—This ends the introduction to the book. The epistle is written to rebuke doctrinal errors, to keep the readers abiding in the original truths they have learned from the apostles, which the apostles learned from Jesus. There can be no joy if doctrinal errors occur which draw believers away from the teaching of the apostles in the Bible.

Paul wrote, "you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of the household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone...being fitted together...growing into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

II. Introduction: Basic Principles (1:5–2:11)

A. Basic principles of fellowship (1:5–2:2)

Verse 5—*This is the message we* [the apostolic witness] *have heard from Him* [Jesus] *and announce to you* [believers]—What the apostles said, as representatives of a Risen Lord, carried all the authority of the Lord Himself. To refuse to hear the apostles was to refuse to hear God Himself (see Ephesians 2:20).

—**that God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all**—This exact statement is not found in the recorded words of Jesus, but the author was an apostle who heard much more than was written down (see John 21:25).

—John states in John 1:5 that *the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*. It's the nature of light—it overcomes darkness. It is more powerful than darkness. Darkness cannot exist in light. Also, darkness is not described as “more” or “less.” It's just “dark.” It is light that is either more or less.

—In God, there is no degree of immoral impurity (darkness, i.e., sin) at all. None!! It is the nature of God Himself. [The Greek “gods” were often making war with each other and a mixture of good and evil.]

—As Light, God exposes and condemns our sin. If a person walks in darkness, that person is hiding from the truth which the Truth reveals (see John 3:19-20). To have fellowship with such a God, a believer cannot hide from the Light.

—If a person turns from the light and loves darkness rather than light, it is because their deeds are evil (John 3:19-21).

—Ten times John used “darkness” to refer to sin (John 1:5; 3:19; 12:35 [twice]; 1 John 1:5-6; 2:8-9, 11 [twice]).

AN APPLICATION—The psalmist wrote, *In Your light, we see light* (Psalm 36:9). Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world...”* (John 8:12; see also Ephesians 5:8-14). Christians, believing in a God of goodness (light), accept the obligation to be good like Him, to daily walk in His light.

(1) Verse 6—***If we say***—John uses “If we say” in verses 6, 8, 10. It's important that John uses “we,” meaning the believers and even the apostles, and not “they,” meaning unbelievers. This is a danger for believers, and even for apostles. Think of Peter, who told Jesus, *“I will not deny You”* (Matthew 26:35), and who then denied Christ, not once but three times (Matthew 26:69-75).

—**that we have fellowship with Him**—the One in whom is NO darkness!! Fellowship [*koinonia*] is “shared,” “communion,” “partnership” with God. It is not “salvation,” which is individually experienced. Fellowship needs at least two.

—**and yet walk in the darkness**—allowing darkness to define one's life, practicing the deeds of darkness. For example, after Adam and Eve sinned, they no longer lived in fellowship with God. They hid in darkness among the trees (Genesis 2:8).

—**we lie and do not practice the truth**—For John, the test of truth is not belief, but action, deeds, or conduct. Doing the truth expresses belief in the truth. Truth is to be practiced, not only believed. John mentions “truth” 20 times in his letters. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), which began in the Garden of Eden with Eve (Genesis 2).

AN APPLICATION—Think of your last hour. Would you describe what you did as practicing the truth, walking in the light, or lying, not practicing the truth? Lying, such as exaggeration, is more and more common in the world (and among Christians). It seems to be an

acceptable sin—done out of love, not to hurt someone’s feelings, etc.—darkness has been re-defined as light. For example, homosexuality, an abomination to God, is now accepted, even by Christians, who “tolerate” and “accept” sinful behavior as the “loving” thing to do.

Verse 7— *but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light*—God not only is the light, but He is also in the light. For example, a light bulb is the light but when it shines, it is also then in the light. It is the sphere in which God lives and operates. The idea is more where we walk. This would mean that we acknowledge whatever the light reveals as wrong in our lives. It is an openness and responsiveness to the light. Light also illuminates as it shines not only on us but upon everything around us.

AN APPLICATION—Practicing sin has a lot to do with living where sin is acceptable.

—***we have fellowship with one another***—i.e., fellowship between God and us
—***and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin***—cleansing us of the sin we acknowledge because we did not walk in the light, as well as all the sin in our lives.

(2) Verse 8— *If we say that we have no sin*—Just because we may not be conscious of sin does not mean that we are free from it. The more we walk in the light, the more the Holy Spirit will reveal our sin to us. Don’t ever think you have no sin. As long as you live, you have your sin nature and will continue to sin.

—***we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us***—Jeremiah wrote, “*The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick...I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind...*” (Jeremiah 17:9-10). We only deceive ourselves, we don’t deceive God!

AN APPLICATION—When Christians define the spiritual life as rules to keep, the result is that they feel they have no sin because manmade rules are easy to keep. God’s “rules,” however, are impossible. Try “*you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48) for one hour!! It’s *through the Law comes the knowledge of sin* (Romans 3:20). God’s laws do not make us feel righteous (like man’s religious laws do), they make us aware that we are sinners in need of a Savior! For example, we may look good in the big bathroom mirror, but how do we look in the 10x magnified lighted mirror? The closer we get in our fellowship with God, the more we will see the sin in our life.

Verse 9— *If we confess our sins*—acknowledge the sin that the light makes us aware of
—***He is faithful***—God can be relied on to forgive us our sin. He is faithful, whether we have been or not (i.e., acknowledging our sin). It’s God’s reliability, rather than our feelings.

—***and righteous***—verse 7 says, *the blood of Jesus...cleanses us from **ALL** sin*. There is no compromise of God’s righteousness when He forgives because the blood of Christ cleanses from **ALL** sin.

—***to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness***—cleansing is of all sin, not just what is confessed because it is “*the blood of Jesus His Son*” that “*cleanses us from all sin*” (v. 7). His blood covers everything that needs cleansing. It’s the way back into the light.

AN APPLICATION—For example, let’s say a woman puts on a dress, without carefully examining it. She walks into a room of bright light, and realizes there is a spot on the dress. At that point, she can deny the truth of what she saw in the light, saying, “Oh, it’s the weave

of the fabric.” But if she does say this, the light in effect goes out, and she is now in darkness, denying the truth exposed by the light.

(3) Verse 10—*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us*—i.e., that God and God’s Word are not truthful. To say we have no sin is to contradict the Bible, which describes sins. We are positionally forgiven, as believers, but experientially, we continue to sin and need forgiveness. It restores harmony with God.

AN APPLICATION—For example, suppose we steal something, which God’s Word says is sin. But suppose we claim that in this case, or under some special set of circumstances, it is not really an act of theft at all—that somehow we were entitled to it. THEN we are contradicting God’s Word, and calling God a liar, which both say stealing is sin. This is the most serious of the 3 claims (contradicting God’s Word and calling God a liar).

So verses 5-10 connect truth with its opposite falsehood or deception:

- Person claims fellowship with God while walking in darkness is lying, not doing the truth.
- Person who thinks they have no sin is self-deceived and truth is not at work in them.
- Person who will not acknowledge as sin what God calls sin is calling God a liar, denying the truth of His Word (the most serious of the 3 statements).

Contrast:

- Person claims fellowship with God and walks in His light.
- Person confesses their sin as it is made known to them while walking in the light.
- Person agrees with the truth of God and His Word as to what is sin.

Chapter 2

Verse 1—*My little children*—[some translations insert “dear,” but it is not in the Greek text]. An affectionate term, τεκνια [*teknia*], “my little born ones,” genuine believers. It is used 7 times by John in this epistle (vv. 1, 12, 28, 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). The word παιδια [*paidia*] “children” is used twice (2:13, 18).

—*I am writing*—John here changes from “we” to “I” singular, a personal pleading by John. —*these things to you* [believers] *so that you* [believers] *may not sin*—John wrote *these things* so believers would vigorously resist sinning. John wants believers to not sin. That’s the choice. That’s the objective!

AN APPLICATION—With only the sin nature, the unbeliever can only sin and cannot do anything righteous. “*There is none righteous, not even one; ...there is none who seeks for God*” (Romans 3:10-11). But the believer is a new creation, and can chose to not sin. There is a struggle between our new nature and our sin nature (Romans 7). This is the Christian life until we die and leave our bodies and our sin nature on earth, and our new nature in Christ in our spirit goes to heaven.

—*And if anyone sins*—however, sin can and does occur in the lives of believers. The Greek tense conveys a strong probability of actual occurrence (“whenever it happens...”). We still have our sin nature and live in a world controlled by Satan.

—*we have an Advocate with the Father*—all sin is against God. *For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). Precisely at the moment of weakness and

failure, the believer has an Advocate. [For sure, He does NOT plead with God to keep us “saved” (John 10:28-29)] Jesus is in the presence of the Father, the perfect place to intercede for us.

AN APPLICATION—The Greek word for “Advocate” is παρακλητῶν (*parakletos*). It is used five times, all by John (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; and here). The four times in the gospel of John are referring to the Holy Spirit. Here is the only time it is referring to Jesus. It’s the meaning of “one who appears in another’s behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper.”

—**Jesus Christ**—One way Jesus does that is found in Luke 22:31-32. In anticipation of Peter’s approaching denial, Jesus prayed, not that Peter would continue to be saved, but that his “faith should not fail.” The sin would have a devastating effect on Peter’s faith to trust God for forgiveness and to be restored to fellowship with Him (“when you have returned to Me”) and subsequent effectiveness in service (“strengthen your brethren”). So Jesus interceded in prayer for Peter that his faith would not fail, that he would continue in fellowship with the Father and in service to other believers.

— **the righteous**—the very moment we are unrighteous, our Advocate is righteous, ideally qualified to make our case with God. He does not maintain our innocence but confesses our guilt, but then He advocates with His righteousness and payment for our sin.

AN APPLICATION—When a believer sins, do not deceive ourselves about it or lie about it or give up walking in the Light. The answer is the forgiveness of God made available through Jesus Christ. He is worthy of the task because He is the **righteous** One.

Verse 2— and He Himself—in His own person, His sacrificial death for sin, although it’s not the death itself, but Jesus Himself that is the propitiation. God sees Jesus with complete satisfaction because of who He is (righteous) and because of what He has done at the cross.

—**is the propitiation**—God is satisfied with Christ’s payment for our sin.

—**for our sins**—no matter what our sin may be, Christ made satisfactory payment for it.

—**and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world**—Christ did not just die for the elect (Calvinism), but for the totality of human sin from the beginning of creation until the end of history when eternity begins. John also wrote, “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29).

AN APPLICATION—A common teaching is that Jesus was an “atoning sacrifice.” But atonement in the Old Testament sacrifice system was a covering of sin, it did not pay for the sin or forgive the sin. “But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year, for it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 9:3-4). Jesus is not an atonement. “For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

AN APPLICATION—Propitiation does not automatically bring salvation and eternal life, but that salvation and eternal life are available for every single person in history who chooses to believe, who chooses to appropriate that payment for their own sin.

B. Basic principles of knowing God (2:3-11)

Verse 3—By this we know—we can be sure, as believers (“we”) —**that we have come to know Him**—the amount of one’s knowledge is less important than the direction of that knowledge. A baby Christian, for example, will not know God as well as a more mature Christian, but they are both moving in the direction of knowing God. —**if we keep His commandments**—For John, the true test of the knowledge of God is moral conduct. There is no knowledge of God which would not also be keeping the commandments of God. Obedience is not the condition of knowing God (such as “Lordship salvation”), but it should characterize that knowledge, and may even to be a means of testing it. The longer one walks with God in this way, the richer and deeper this knowledge becomes.

AN APPLICATION—John is not talking about salvation. He is talking to those who are already believers. In English, “know” is quite a flexible word. We might know someone because we recognize them, but yet not know them in the sense of a real perception of their character or nature. In the same way, a Christian can know Jesus as their Savior, yet not really know His character or His ways. Just as a claim to fellowship with Him is false if we “walk in darkness,” so too a disobedient lifestyle falsifies any claim to a close and personal knowledge of Him. There was no danger to the *security* of their eternal salvation, but there was a threat to their *assurance* of salvation.

(1) **Verse 4— The one who says, “I have come to know Him”**—It’s easy to say you know God. But what is the person’s moral conduct? —**and does not keep His commandments**—the moral conduct demanded by God —**is a liar, and the truth is not in him**—that person does not know God. This is a discipleship truth (not a salvation truth).

Verse 5— but whoever keeps His word—i.e., keeps His commandments —**in him the love of God has truly been perfected**—brought to maturity, bring to its goal —**By this** [maturity in Christ] **we know that we are in Him**—This shows a security of salvation. How do we know if we are saved? Do we call sin, sin? Do we desire to obey God’s commandments? Those who know Christ, do that. And continue to mature in Him.

(2) **Verse 6— the one who says he abides in Him**—This would be a parallel to branches abiding in the Vine (John 15:1-8). —**ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked**—The human life of Jesus becomes the measuring stick of true moral and ethical behavior. The goal of the disciple is to be like the Teacher (Matthew 10:24-25).

Verse 7— Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard—The original truth of Christianity. There was not ever a message that did not have this command at its heart. This was not some new commandment that his readers had never heard. In fact, God said in the Mosaic Law, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:5) and “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

AN APPLICATION—Down through the centuries of Christian theology, two techniques have been used to “update” traditional beliefs and doctrines. One is to add new ideas to the old

established teaching. Another is to give a new meaning to old teachings (re-define them, such as “Lord” means “lordship”).

Verse 8— *On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you*—It is new in the sense that it is also the commandment for this new age of grace. The newness is not found in the words but in the illustration of love (Jesus)—***which is true in Him and in you—because the darkness is passing away***—the darkness of this present world will disappear forever
—***and the true Light is already shining***—the light of the incarnation of Jesus. “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...*” (John 3:16).

(3) Verse 9— *The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother* [fellow believer] ***is in the darkness until now***—Love is not neutral. Love unexpressed is not love at all. When love is absent, hate is present. His morality does not match his claims.

AN APPLICATION—Every honest believer knows that he or she must often struggle against feelings of hostility and animosity toward other believers. If the Bible taught that feelings of hatred were signs of being unsaved, then no one would be saved! But the Bible does not teach this. The believer, who claims to be a mature believer but has hatred, is living as if in the darkness that is passing away.

Verse 10— *The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling* [trap] ***in him***—For the person who loves his brother there is no stumbling (snare or trap) to cause him to sin by hating the brother. The one who hates his brother sets up the inward conditions which make entrapment by other sin extremely likely (such as sinful words and hostility).

Verse 11— *But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes*—hatred blinds one’s spiritual eyes. Hate destroys any window for light from God, denying oneself fellowship with God and with other believers.

C. The Purpose of the Epistle (2:12-27)

A. In light of the readers’ spiritual conditions (2:12-14)

AN APPLICATION—Some suggest that John is here dividing his readers by chronological age-groups. Then the sequence makes “fathers” the middle term, which does not make sense. Notice, 13 times John calls them “you” (believers) to show that his message was limited to his readers, who were ones who truly were part of God’s family. It is better to be understood as John’s perspective of the believers. He sees them all as God’s children, but some he sees as fathers (mature) and some he sees as young men (younger believers). The “fathers” could actually be young men (such as Timothy, for example), and older men could be young believers.

AN APPLICATION—Also, notice the words “writing” and “have written.” The message is in the written Word. Peter wrote, “...no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Paul wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by

God..." (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus said, "It is written..." (Matthew 4:4). Jesus prayed for His disciples, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth." And then He said, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word" (John 17:17, 20). We believe in Christ because of the words of the apostles that they wrote for us.

Verse 12— *I am writing to you*—all the readers who are believers

—***little children***—John elsewhere addresses all his readers as "children" (vv. 1, 28; 3:7, 18; 5:21). The Greek word here means "born ones," i.e. believers. In the next section, John sees all the "born ones" as divided into younger believers, mature believers, those in the process of maturing.

—***because your sins have been forgiven you***— this would certainly mean all believers. Conversion begins with the propitiation for sin, and sin then being forgiven for the one who believes in Christ.

—***for His name's sake***—God forgives sinners because it pleases Him to glorify His name by His superabundant grace, mercy, and power.

Verse 13— *I am writing to you*—all the readers who are believers

—***fathers***—in the context of 2:4-5, this would be readers who claim to know Christ, and it is evidenced in their obeying the commandments of God. "Whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected (matured)" (2:4-5).

—***because you know Him who has been from the beginning***— that is, the eternal God who was from the beginning (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1). These are eternally demonstrated aspects of God that He has ever done or will do. It's a greater depth of knowledge of God.

—***I am writing to you***—all the readers who are believers

—***young men, because you have overcome the evil one***—in the center of the spiritual warfare. Perhaps they fight against more evil in their exposure to the world and Satan. A believer becomes more aware of the sin nature and their struggle against it.

John here starts the sequence over again. In the Greek, the word for "children" here is a completely different word than verse 12. The statement to the fathers is exactly the same. The statement made to the young men is partly changed and partly the same. What does it mean?

—***I have written to you***—all the readers who are believers

—***children, because you know the Father***—these believers have advanced from having their sins forgiven to "know" the Father. This takes time in the faith and spiritual growth. They know His fatherly concern, compassion, love, etc. They start to understand the Father's character.

Verse 14— *I have written to you*—all the readers who are believers

—***fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning***—that is, the eternal God who was from the beginning (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1). These are eternally demonstrated aspects of God that He has ever done or will do. It's a greater depth of knowledge of God.

—***I have written to you***—all the readers who are believers

—***young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one***—Here we see that they have overcome Satan because the Word of God abides in them. Paul wrote, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." The armor is all defensive but for one

thing. The only offensive weapon is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:10-17).

AN APPLICATION—Maturity in knowing God and victory over Satan comes only when the Word of God abides in you. There is no substitute. To see the value of the Word of God, meditate on Psalm 119.

B. In light of the world’s allurements (2:15-17)

Verse 15— *Do not love the world*—this is a command, for two reasons:

—***nor the things in the world***—The word for “world” (*kosmos*) occurs 6 times in verses 15-17. It does not mean the same as “world” in John 3:16. Love also means something different in this passage. It is not the selfless love for one’s brother (2:10) but the love that entices by evil desire or appetite that is forbidden. It is a moral and spiritual system that appeals to all people, believers as well as unbelievers, and calls for our affection, participation, and loyalty. This evil system is totally under the grip of the devil (1 John 5:19; John 12:31; 14:30). John wrote in 5:19, *the whole world lies in the power of the evil one*.

(1)—***If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him***—Here he’s talking about the love of believers for the Father, not His love for us (Gk. tense). It is impossible to love the world and love the Father at the same time. Some Christians try to compartmentalize their affections so they can love both the things of the world and God.

AN APPLICATION—But Jesus said, “*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other*” (Luke 16:13). James 4:4 says, *Friendship with the world is hatred toward God*.

Verse 16— *For all that is in the world*—the total of all the world has to offer

—***the lust of the flesh***—all corrupt bodily desires, immorality, physical excesses, like drunkenness and gluttony.

—***and the lust of the eyes***—whatever is appealing to our senses, but is not ours to desire or obtain, also called covetousness.

—***and the boastful pride of life***—boasting about self, possessions, or accomplishments in earthly matters

—***is not from the Father, but is from the world***—The Father desires our welfare, but the world will destroy us. All the world is contaminated with wickedness, and God the Father has nothing to do with it.

(2) **Verse 17— *The world is passing away*** [“to disappear”] ***and also its lusts***—it is a corpse not yet buried. It’s already begun to stink. It is in the process of destruction. Think of abilities that are passing away—to play the piano, to be an architect, to read books, etc. Do you have the athletic ability you had, say, in high school?

—***but the one who does the will of God lives forever***—the person is not affected by the passing away of the world and its desires. A Christian’s identity in eternity will be determined by his or her obedience to God in time.

AN APPLICATION—There seems to be 3 ways the world and its lusts are passing away: The earth and its lusts will physically disappear (2 Peter 3:10). But they also disappear with your sin nature when you die. And as you mature as a believer, the world and its lusts should also disappear. Whereas, treasure laid up on heaven lasts forever (Matthew 6:21).

C. In light of the deceptions of the last hour (2:18-23)

Verse 18— *Children*—born ones, i.e., believers

—***it is*** [the] ***last hour***—lit. “last hour it is,” which would refer to the general character of our time rather than to its actual ending (“the” last hour).

—***and just as you heard that antichrist is coming***—the one described in Daniel 7–8; 9:26-27; 11; and Zechariah 11:16-17. Jesus referred to it as “the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet...” (Matthew 24:15-25). Perhaps they also knew of Paul’s teaching about the antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

—***even now many antichrists have appeared***—these seem to be equated with the “false prophets” of 4:1-3.

—***from this we know that it is the last hour***—It is only since the first coming of Christ that the time period between that and His Second Coming would be considered the last hour and the time of many antichrists.

Verse 19— *They went out from us*—repeating “us” four more times in this verse, in contrast to “you” in verse 20, indicates these men were a part of the same fellowship to which the apostles belonged. In Acts 15:1, 24, we are told *some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren...* then the apostles wrote, *Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls...* Later, Paul wrote, *from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them* (Acts 20:30).

—***but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.***

AN APPLICATION—John may have considered these to not be true believers, or to be apostate believers, who now denied the truth they had once believed. In any case, their departure was to be expected and was evidence of what they now believed. Like leaven, they need to be away from true believers so they won’t influence the believers.

Verse 20— *But you have an anointing from the Holy One*—This anointing is the Holy Spirit who abides in us and teaches us (v. 27). Paul wrote, “He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). The messengers proclaimed the gospel, but God Himself by His Spirit taught the heart, from which true knowledge was then manifested.

—***and you all know***—because they received it (the truth—v. 21). He is not writing new truth but what they already know.

Verse 21— *I have not written to you because you do not know the truth*—he has not written to them because they are ignorant of the truth. Just the opposite. He writes because they DO know the truth. They are believers. Knowing the truth is the key to resisting false teaching.

—***but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth***—doctrinal error is not simply a flawed conception of the truth from which we can possibly learn something. There is NO truth in a lie. For example: drink the coffee—it only has a drop of poison in it—NO. Don’t drink it!!!

AN APPLICATION—Today, how many Christian writers, speakers, etc. manage to praise a false idea as somehow “insightful,” no matter how far it is from the truth!!

Verse 22— *Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?*—Christ is the One who guarantees to every believer both resurrection and eternal life.

—*This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son*—any denial, deviation, or distortion of the scriptural view of Jesus Christ is the spirit of antichrist. Neither the Father nor the Son has anything to do with their activities. This would be true of either an unbeliever or a believer who had “departed” from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1).

Verse 23— *Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also*—In his gospel, John wrote, “*He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me*” (John 12:44-45).

D. In light of the readers' responsibilities to abide (2:24-27)

Verse 24— *As for you, let that abide* [continual action] ***in you which you heard from the beginning***—if the readers would resist the lies of the antichrists and let the truth they had heard from the beginning abide in them, then they would continue to abide in fellowship with God the Father and God the Son.

AN APPLICATION—“It is not enough merely to have heard it and assented to the message in time past. The message must continue to be present and active in the lives of those who have heard it. They must continually call it to mind and let it affect their lives” (EBC).

—*If what you heard from the beginning abides* [continual action] ***in you, you also will abide*** [continual action] ***in the Son and in the Father***—what John just said in verse 14, ***the word of God abides in you...***

Verse 25— *This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life*—Eternal life comes through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In 5:11-13, John writes: “*...God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*”

AN APPLICATION—In the Old Testament, God made covenants with the nation of Israel. In the New Testament, God makes promises to the individual. Eternal life is for the individual person. There is no “group” eternal life.

Verse 26— *These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you*—They have already been exposed to the antichrists, but have not yet been deceived into believing them. It seems, from the context, they were trying to convince them that Jesus was not the Christ, and eternal life was not through Him.

Verse 27— *As for you, the anointing which you received from Him* [at salvation] ***abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you***—Jesus said, “When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). This implies the

readers were relatively spiritually mature, since the immature need human teachers (Hebrews 5:12).

— ***but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him***—Verse 20 seems to mean the truth about God and Jesus. Here the “all things” seems to be an evaluation of various situations and/or problems the believers encountered as they grew and spiritually matured.

AN APPLICATION—This does not mean “new insight” into truth, but rather testing claims against the truth already known in Scripture. Are they consistent with the Word? Where they contradict the Spirit’s biblical teaching, we must reject them.

D. The Body of the Epistle (2:28–4:19)

A. The theme stated (2:28)

Verse 28— ***Now, little children, abide in Him***—“abide” has been used 10 times in verses 6-27. John used “abide” 66 of the 112 times it occurs in the NT (40 in John, 23 in 1 John, and 3 in 2 John).

—***so that when He appears***—the Second Coming of Christ, for us, the Rapture

—(1) ***we may have confidence*** [“boldness”]—This positive word “confidence” is used 31 times in the NT, and of these, 13 are in John’s writings.

—(2) ***and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming***—contrasted to the negative, “confidence” vs. “shame”

—This is the beginning of this big section, which ends with 4:19, “...*so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment.*” Now John introduces a new thought—that abiding in Christ will result in confidence, and not shame, at the coming of Christ. The person who has been faithful to the truth of Jesus need not, at the end, be ashamed in His presence. [The opposite truth is implied—those who deny Jesus (vv. 22-23) now can expect to be denied by Him eventually.]

AN APPLICATION—Christians will appear before the “bema” judgment of Christ. Your works will be tested. Those useless to Christ will be burned. What’s done for Christ will receive a reward (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12). This is not a condemnation for sin. Christ took that condemnation for us on the cross (Romans 8:1).

Also, in this context, confidence at Christ’s coming is the result of abiding in Christ (and His Word) and not being deceived by the antichrists.

B. Discerning the children of God (2:29–3:10a)

Verse 29— ***If*** [Gk. “in contrast to some others”] ***you*** [“do”] ***know that He is righteous***—the true character of God that can be learned from His Word. He is the righteous Judge (v. 28).

—***you*** [also] ***know that everyone also who practices*** [Gk. “does”] ***righteousness is born of Him***—this is John’s first reference to the new birth. Because Jesus is “righteous,” those who are in Him can “act rightly,” i.e., respond correctly to God’s moral demands. The righteous One produces the righteous ones! Right behavior comes from right belief. [He does NOT say that whoever does not do righteousness is NOT born of Him. He is not talking about how we can decide if a person is saved.]

AN APPLICATION—Jesus introduced this spiritual “born again” idea to Nicodemus in John 3:3. It’s not described in the other gospels.

Chapter 3

Verse 1— See [behold, look at] **how great** [wonderful, glorious] **a love the Father has bestowed on us**—*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:16). Apart from this love, there would be no children of God. Because of Christ's death on the cross as payment for our sins.....

—**that we would be called children of God; and such we are**—this flows out of the previous verse, being born of Him. Now called the children of God.

—**For this reason the world does not know us** [that we are children of God], **because it did not know Him**—This kind of discernment about others is a distinctively Christian perception. The world does not know or understand because it is spiritually understood, for those who walk in the Light, not in the darkness of the world (John 3:19).

Verse 2— Beloved—a term of endearment

—**now we are children of God**—right now in this body on the earth. There is no physical evidence of this that an eye can see. It is a spiritual perception.

AN APPLICATION—Man-made religions are “decrees...which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body” (Colossians 2:22-23). But John says Christianity is a relationship—we are the children of God.

—**and it has not appeared as yet what we will be**—now we experience God's love, we are His children, but we do not know much about what we will be. However...

—**We know that when He appears**—same word used in 2:28, *when He appears...at His coming*

—**we will be like Him**—it makes our eternal future more personal. It also removes some of the mystery of not knowing what we will be in heaven. In the next verses, we'll see that being like Christ is to be pure and without wickedness/sin.

—**because we will see Him just as He is**—We will be conformed to the likeness of God's Son (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49).

AN APPLICATION—While on this earth, we continue to have our sin nature, which battles our new nature in Christ. But when we get to heaven and no longer have our sin nature, we will have a complete transformation into the likeness of Jesus the moment we see Him.

Verse 3— And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him—“hope” does not refer to something about which we are unsure. In the NT, hope refers to an unfulfilled expectation which we appropriate by faith (Heb 11:1; Col 1:5, 23, 27). According to verse 2, “we know.” —**purifies himself, just as He is pure**—The moral cleanness of Jesus, which is to be imitated by His followers, an “ongoing process.” As mentioned in 1:9, when a believer sins, he/she confesses those sins. They agree with God that sin is wickedness. As believers, we want to move toward the purity of Christ and His righteousness.

Verse 4— Everyone who [habitually] practices sin also [habitually] practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness—Here is the opposite of the “pure” in the previous verse. There are two Greek words that describe sin: *hamartian* and *anomian*. Generally, *hamartian* usually describes the breaking of the commandments of God. *Anomian* defines sin as rebellion against God and was connected to Satan’s rebellion against God. Therefore, those who practice breaking the commandments of God are also in rebellion against God. Simply put—sin is wickedness.

Verse 5—You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin—The incarnation brought into the world the One who is totally sinless who had the objective of removal of sin from the lives of His children. John the Baptist said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Verse 6— No one who abides in Him sins—(Gk) The one who sins has been overtaken by ignorance and blindness toward God. Sin is never the product of the experience of abiding in Christ. Abiding in Christ is in and of itself a sinless experience. It is not contaminated by the presence of sin as other aspects of our experiences are.
—**no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him**—These words do not imply “never” has seen Him or known Him. For example, if I say, “I have not finished my homework,” it would imply the homework for that particular day. There is no implication that I have never at any time completed my homework! Here, John simply means that when a person sins, at that point in time he/she has acted in blindness and ignorance of God. People do not sin when they fully face the truth of God. They sin only when in some way they are blind to and ignorant of the true and living God.

Verses 7-8— Little children (“born ones”), **make sure no one deceives you**—John has already mentioned this deception danger in verse 2:26 **...those who are trying to deceive you**. What is the deception? That sin and righteousness can mix together (like “Christian yoga,” for example). But John here says that sin can never come out of seeing and knowing God. It can never be a part of the experience of abiding in Christ. You are responsible to not be deceived.

—**the one who practices** [Gk. “performs,” “does”] **righteousness is** [the source] **righteous, just as He is righteous**—Christians do not experience the sinless life perfectly on this earth. But for the believer, sin is abnormal and unnatural. The whole bent of the life of the believer is away from sin. Righteousness only comes from the inner nature of one who is already righteous. Sin has no part or role to play in displaying the nature of the righteous Father of believers.

— **the one who practices** [Gk. “performs,” “does”] **sin is** [the source] **of the devil**—Sin has no connection with God at all but is totally connected to the devil. And this is not talking about salvation. If he was talking about salvation, then no one would be saved because everyone sins. John has already admitted that believers sin (1:7-10). For example, to be “of the devil” is illustrated by Peter, when Jesus said to him, “*Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men*” (Matthew 16:23). At this point in time, Peter could be said to be “of the devil.”

—**for the devil has sinned from the beginning**—This does not refer here to eternity past, since the devil is a created being and not eternal. Rather, it would refer to the original state of creation as it was when Satan introduced sin into it. Jesus said, “*...the devil...was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in*

him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

—**The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil**— participation in sin is participation in the very thing that Jesus came to destroy.

Verse 9— No one who is born of God practices ["does"] sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God—Earlier, in John 1:8, John warns, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." As a total person, we do sin and can never claim to be free of it. HOWEVER, our "inward self" that is born of God does not sin. Paul wrote, "...with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:25). Your new nature in Christ cannot sin because it is born of God. When sin does occur, it's the flesh, i.e., the sin nature that does the sin. Paul describes this in Romans 7 as the struggle of the Christian life. [Also, the sin nature cannot do anything righteous because righteousness can only be done by one's new nature in Christ (verses 7-8).]

Verse 10a— By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God—This is not a test of salvation. John's one and only test of salvation is faith (1 John 5:1, 9-13). Rather, a person's actions reveal what is common for a child of God or is common for a child of the devil. Once again, righteousness can only be done by a child of God. However, the converse is not true. A child of God, who still has their sin nature, can sin like a child of the devil.

AN APPLICATION—This is a hard section. Basically, look at what you just thought, said, or did—does it reveal righteousness, that you are a child of God, or does it reveal that you have allowed your sin nature to lead you into sin. Don't deny it—confess your sin, and God will cleanse you (1:9). As Paul wrote, this is the struggle believers have when living in this world (Romans 7). We look for the return of Jesus, when our sin nature will disappear, and we will be transformed and be like Him.

This is the last reference to righteousness in the book. For John, there is no such thing as righteousness which does not include love for one's fellow believer.

C. Discerning love for the brethren (3:10b-23)

1. What love is not (3:10b-15)

Verse 10b—nor the one who does not love his brother—From 3:10b-4:21, the noun form of "love" occurs 14 times and the verb form 21 times. This becomes the new theme. —This continues the previous sentence: ...**anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother**—one must be a child of God before one could **not love his brother**. An unsaved person has no Christian **brother** to not love.

—John already wrote that all sin is **of the devil** (3:8). So a person is **not of God** in the sense that God is not behind what he is doing. He is doing the devil's work and not God's work. So in this phrase, John moves from a broader to a narrower theme. Loving (*agape*—giving without reciprocity) a fellow believer is a specific kind of righteousness that only a Christian can do or not do.

Verse 11— *For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*—Jesus expressed this command in the Upper Room after Judas had left (John 13:30). So His audience were all believers. So, this command was given to believers and can only be fulfilled or not fulfilled by believers.

Verse 12—*not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother*—Soon after creation, in Genesis 3, Satan tempted Eve to sin, resulting in the curse of death on mankind. Immediately in 4:8 is the first death. Cain, ***who was of the evil one***, killed his brother Abel, the righteous one.

—Whether or not Cain was a “believer” or not cannot be answered from the biblical information we have. Even murder, in the NT, is not regarded as impossible for a Christian to commit. *“But let none of you suffer as a murderer...”* (1 Peter 4:15). Yet, if a Christian were guilty of this, the influence of the evil one would be obvious.

—***And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brothers were righteous***—it was the result of spiritual envy. It was hatred toward the one whom he knew God approved. Divisions among believers are common (see 1 Corinthians 11:19).

AN APPLICATION—There are many ways to slay another believer: their reputation, slandering them, unkindness, hatred, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions. When I was a teenager, I was the organist of our church. But I wanted to “slay” the pianist. There was a “rule” that if there were 3 sharps or more in a song, you played it in flats. But I practiced and played the song with 3 sharps. Needless to say, the pianist sounded awful as she started playing in flats. Obviously, what I did was of the evil one!!! It wasn’t in a vacuum. I heard her verbally “slayed” many times from others in the church.

Verse 13— *Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you*—Christian hating a fellow Christian is inconsistent with Christ’s command “to love one another.” However, the same cannot be said of the world. The world’s hatred is to be expected (John 15:18-19).

Verse 14— *We know that we have passed out of death into life*—This phrase is only used in one other place in the NT. Jesus said, “...*he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life*” (John 5:24). This, of course, is salvation.

—The Greek word for “know” means to understand, come to know, experience. For example, when Abraham showed himself willing to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice, God said to him, “...*now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me*” (Genesis 22:12). Of course, God already knew this before Abraham did anything at all, but now God *knows* it as a manifested reality.

—***because we love the brethren***—The knowledge and experience of passing out of death into life at salvation, can be experientially known through Christian *agape* love of other believers.

—***He who does not love abides [dwells] in death***—as love is an experience of life, hatred of our fellow believers is an experience of death.

Verse 15— *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him*—We might ask about King David, who was a murderer. But John did not say, ‘No murderer *has* eternal life.’ He said, “*No murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*” Although eternal life is the possession of each and every

believer in Christ, hatred of another believer shows the spirit of a murderer is abiding in that person, and all the vital experience with God's life is lost. A person's actions reveal what is common for a child of God or is common for a child of the devil.

2. What love is (3:16-18)

Verse 16— We know love by this—What is true Christian love?

—**that He laid down His life** [Gk. *psyche*, "soul"] **for us**—Christ *emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...He humbled Himself...* (Philippians 2:6-8). "*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life* [Gk. *psyche*, "soul"] *a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28).

—**and we ought to lay down our lives** [Gk. *psyche*, "soul"] **for the brethren**—This would be the opposite of what Cain did to his brother. Hatred of our brethren makes us like Cain, while love for our brethren makes us like Christ.

Verse 17— But whoever has the world's goods [Gk. *bios*, what it takes to life daily life, existence]—i.e., this believer possesses the means, the world's goods necessary for life, so he/she could help another brother in need

—**and sees his brother in need and closes his heart** ["locks up his sympathies"] **against him**, and doesn't help them

—**how does the love of God abide in him?**—again, not talking about salvation but of revealing the love of God that abides in you as a believer. The uncompassionate Christian is not living the abiding life.

Verse 18— Little children [born ones], **let us not love with word or with tongue**—Don't think you have loved just because you expressed love.

— **but in deed** [action] **and truth**—if you say you love but do not do actions fitting of that love, you are not telling the truth by your claim. Self-serving acts done in the name of love are not the truth.

AN APPLICATION—Christians can deceive themselves and/or others by performing actions that actually serve their own interests better than they do those of the recipients. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10) are examples of someone professing a sacrifice of property but that was not the truth. They wanted to get credit and attention for doing something about which they were actually lying.

3. What love does for believers (3:19-23)

Verse 19— We will know by this [referring to verse 18] **that we are of the truth**—by the agape love that is practiced between believers, not just claimed in words but seen in deeds, a person can actually know that by such actions she is participating in the truth. Such loving actions have their source in the truth.

—**and will assure our heart before Him**—"have confidence before God" (v. 21)

Verse 20— in whatever our heart condemns us—this last phrase of verse 19 should go with verse 20. Every sincere Christian knows our conscience will condemn us, thinking we did too little, or didn't make up for past failures, or even suspecting ourselves of impure or unworthy motives. Our conscience can easily make us ineffective. Doubt, guilt, and failure are never far from any of us. So we may lose our assurance (not our security). The conscience is God's guilt-producing warning device, given to every person to confront sin

(Romans 2:15). However, the conscience must be formed by the moral standards of God's Word.

AN APPLICATION—The conscience is not in itself an independent system of morality. It operates based on whatever knowledge and belief system that informs it, and in response to the cultural conditions surrounding it. If the moral or spiritual knowledge is drawn from any source other than Scripture, the conscience will function in response to those false ideas. The conscience can be silenced not only by being misinformed but by being constantly ignored or overridden, until it is scarred, seared, and unresponsive (1 Timothy 4:2).

—**for God is greater than our heart and knows all things**—God knows the love we have expressed in our actions. He takes it all into account—whether our heart condemns us or not. His Word and His truth are greater than our feelings or our conscience.

Verse 21— Beloved—a term of endearment

—**if our heart does not condemn us**—confessed sin, agape love. James wrote, “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:17).

—**we have confidence [boldness] before God**—if we are Christians in word and deed, we have confidence in our prayers—and answered prayer gives us confidence, too.

Verse 22— and whatever we ask we receive from Him—of course, asking is not demanding. Prayer for the will of God to be accomplished is one of the primary ways in which obedient Christians can pray, and a mature Christian will ask for what is pleasing in God's sight, such as Jesus did in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:42).

—(1) **because we keep His commandments and** (2) **do the things that are pleasing in His sight** (obeying His commandments)—Christians sometimes forget the simple truth that God is pleased when we obey.

Verse 23—This is His commandment—This is what is pleasing in God's sight (1) **that we believe [in—not in the Gk text] the name of His Son Jesus Christ**—Here we see John ties together faith and agape love. The most pleasing thing in God's sight is to have faith, believe the name of Jesus.

—**and** (2) **love one another**—agape love, not expecting something in return

—**just as He commanded us**—as in verse 22, keeping His commandments is pleasing in His sight, and His commandment is to believe the name of Jesus and agape love.

D. Discerning the indwelling God (3:24–4:16)

1. Discerning the Spirit of Truth (3:24–4:6)

Verse 24— The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him—Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make *our home* [Gk. “to abide, live, dwell”] with him” (John 14:23). There is a mutual abiding—you in Him and Him in you.

—**We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us**—This is the first of five explicit references to the Holy Spirit (4:2, 6, 13; 5:6, 8).

AN APPLICATION—The evidence that we abide in Christ is our obedience to His commands. The evidence that He abides in us is the presence of His Spirit. John does not repeat the teaching about the Spirit from his gospel but only applies it to the current problem—distinguishing the true Spirit from false spirits.

Chapter 4

Verse 1— *Beloved*—again, the term of endearment for these believers

—***do not believe every spirit***—This should be the first response. “Do not believe...” Sadly, the first response by many Christians is “to believe” every spirit until proven otherwise. Very dangerous!! They are already headed in the wrong direction. Abiding means obeying (3:24), and God’s command is to “not believe” every spirit.

—***but test the spirits***—“test” is used to refer to a metallurgist’s assaying of metals to test their purity and value. John uses the present tense, indicating believers are to continually test the spirits. These teachers may speak some truth, which will deceive you into believing error. Satan quoted God’s words to Eve (Genesis 3:1f) and Jesus (Matthew 4:6). Or perhaps the last time you heard this person, they spoke God’s truth, but now they do not.

AN APPLICATION—“spirit” can refer to a human spirit, or supernatural spirits (demons), or to an attitude or disposition (such as “a spirit of fear” or “of power and of love and of a sound mind” in 2 Timothy 1:7). In verse 1, John does not necessarily imply a separate supernatural (demonic) spirit for each false prophet. However, John is warning that every evil spirit is of Satan, and every human spirit can become his agent (2 Corinthians 11:14-15), “...his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

—***to see whether they are from God***—i.e., continually evaluate what we see, hear, and read, to determine if it is consistent with the Word of God or not. Obviously, the more you know the Word of God, the more accurately and quicker you will be to discern these spirits. For example, I may look at a metal and think, “It’s gold!” But a metallurgist looks at the same metal and thinks, “Fool’s gold!” The more one knows, the more accurate and quicker one’s discernment.

—***because many false prophets have gone out into the world***—There will be many more false teachers than true teachers of God’s Word. Jesus said they “come to you in sheep’s clothing” so that they look like sheep, when in reality they are “ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

AN APPLICATION—Understand that it is not just a matter of error, false prophets have the purpose to spiritually kill you—to get you to turn away from God and abiding in Him. The “ravenous wolf” is hungry to eat sheep!!!

Verse 2— *By this you know*—referring backward to the testing of the spirits. Only those willing to test the spirits will be able to recognize God’s Spirit. If a person “believes every spirit,” and does not test the spirit, they will not really know which of them is truly God’s.

—***the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses [that is not in the text] Jesus [as] Christ has come in the flesh is from God***—this links the Holy Spirit of God with every human spirit that confesses Jesus has come in the flesh. The person who makes this confession is of God because she has been enlightened and motivated by God’s Spirit.

—That Jesus [human] is recognized as the Christ [divine] come in the flesh. Recognizing the deity of the Messiah (Christ) has become human Jesus.

Verse 3— and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God—Just as the one who confesses Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, so every spirit that does NOT confess Jesus is NOT from God.

AN APPLICATION—The first test is Christological, it's how John began the epistle: ...*our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ* (1:1-3). Jesus also stated, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me*" (John 14:6). The NAR, for example, denies Jesus was God and teaches Jesus was born a man in whom God indwelt, just as they (the NAR) are men in whom God dwells.

—**this is the spirit of the antichrist**—in fact, not only are they not from God, they are from the spirit (the inherent qualities of mind and/or character) of Satan's man the antichrist, i.e.,
—**of which you have heard that it is coming**—John already wrote of this in 2:18-27.
—**and now it is already in the world**—Satan has an adult antichrist ready to assume worldwide rule at all times (because he doesn't know when the Rapture will happen and the Tribulation will start). However, also already in the world is the "spirit of the antichrist," that is, his qualities of thinking and character that will persuade people to follow and worship him.

Verse 4—You are from God, little children, and have overcome them—one has already overcome Satan to become believer

—**because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world**—the Holy Spirit is inside every believer, and He is greater than Satan who is in the world.

Verse 5— They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world—worldly things of the values of this earth, rather than godly things. For example, putting money into temporary earthy things destined to perish rather than into eternal people. Notice the pronoun "they," versus "you" of verse 4.

—**and the world listens to them**—their success would itself be a problem and was probably used as an authenticating sign by them to deceive their followers.

Verse 6— We are from God; he who knows God listens to us—the positive—we listen to the apostles. True Christianity is apostolic Christianity (Ephesians 2:20), not replacement theology (church replaces Israel, therefore, promises to Israel are also to the church).

AN APPLICATION—This, of course, is the Scriptures. The first test is to confess Jesus came in the flesh, becoming obedient to the Word of the Gospel, and the Spirit of God becomes present and active in their life. The second test is discerning the message—is it of the world (and, therefore, of the antichrist) or of the apostles (the Bible). Be like the Bereans, who "received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). As Jude wrote, "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3).

—**he who is not from God does not listen to us**—the negative, they do not listen to the Scriptures, perhaps they get their own personal "words from God," or listen to doctrines contrary to Scripture. Judge and discern.

—**By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error**—testing anything against the Scriptures, the writings of the apostles, is how we know truth from error. As believers,

we have the Holy Spirit living in us to help us. Pray for understanding. Pray for faithfulness to the Word.

2. Discerning the God of love (4:7-16)

Verse 7— Beloved—believers (used six times in 1 John—2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11).

—**let us love** [agape—giving not expecting a return] **one another**—this is a command from God. [Hating another believer is possible (3:15), i.e., failing to love.]

—(1) **for love is from God**—God by nature is love and therefore defines love. Love does not define God. People impose on God a human view of love. But He and His love transcend any human limitations. See 1 Corinthians 13.

—(2) **and everyone who loves is born of God**—agape love is not a virtue innate in us nor is it a learned behavior. It is from God, the giver of love. It is not because the object/ someone is attractive or lovable. It's not saying that everyone who loves is a believer but that the one who is born of God (the believer) can and should (agape) love because God is love.

—(3) **and knows God**—“know” means come together, personal involvement or experience (the abiding in God John was talking about in 3:24).

Verse 8— The one who does not love does not know God—is not abiding in God

—**for God is love**—first we read “God is Light” (1:5), now we read “God is love.” God by His Spirit enables us to love but does not compel us to love one another. We have a choice. There is no love without choice.

Verse 9— By this the love of God was manifested in us—God's love is explained by what He did. Agape love requires concrete and objective acts. The way God's love was revealed, i.e., displayed. Love is not just words, it is to be shown in actions.

—**that God has sent His only begotten** [“unique, one-of-a-kind,” there is nothing in the Greek word to indicate that this means He was actually begotten in eternity past. It means the relationship itself, without suggesting a point of origin. A better translation is simply “only.”] **Son into the world**—God's love becomes comprehensible to humanity because of our common earthly experience of parental love. Loving parents can empathize with the sorrow that losing a child can bring. What better way could God demonstrate His exceptional love than by sending, not simply a son, but His **only begotten Son into the world**.

—**so that we might live through Him**—what could possibly make this fundamental truth about God's nature of love more evident to us than the fact that God has sent His Son for our salvation. Death for God's Son, life for us.

Verse 10—(1) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us—The basic character of God's love. It was not in response to man's love but an initiative on God's part. Jesus said, “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (Matthew 5:46). So love for our Christian brothers does not require that they love us! Agape love will require our sacrifice, as it required God's sacrifice.

—**and (2) sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**—God loved us enough to save us. God's Son becomes the means by which sins are forgiven.

Though some traditional translations render ἱλαστήριον as ‘propitiation,’ this involves a wrong interpretation of the term in question. Propitiation is essentially a process by which one does a favor to a person in order to make him or her favorably disposed, but in the NT God is never the object of propitiation since he is already on

the side of people. ἰλασμός and ἰλαστήριον denote the means of forgiveness and not propitiation (Louw & Nida Greek).

Verse 11— *Beloved, if* [Gk “since”] ***God so*** [“in this way”—referring to what follows] ***loved us***—God’s love is unselfish and sacrificial

—***we also ought*** [must] ***to love one another***—Paul wrote, “...walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Our obligation in light of God’s love for us is to love one another.

Verse 12— *No one has seen God at any time*—His divine nature and essence has never been seen by any living man (but John saw Him in a vision in Revelation 4–5, and we will see Him in the New Jerusalem—Revelation 21:22). In a similar verse, John said in John 1:18 that “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” But now, Jesus is no longer on the earth. So John says the way God is seen now is when His love is seen in us.

—***if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected*** [Gk. “to complete,” to “finish,” “to bring to its goal”] ***in us***—this love, experienced among Christians, can make God’s love visible to them. It is not a “blessing” or “fruit” of belief, but the basic question of God’s presence and manifestation in the world. Love that originated in God, was manifested in His Son, is now demonstrated in His people.

Verse 13— *By this* [agape one another] ***we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit***—A believer’s Spirit-led obedience becomes the evidence that the believer has the mutual abiding relationship with God that John wrote about. The God of love is loving our brethren through us by the power of His Spirit. Thus we can know that He abides in us.

Verse 14— *We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world*—All who believe see our Savior Jesus by faith. This brings us back to 1:2-3, “...the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that [purpose] you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” So by loving one another, the readers can have fellowship with the apostles in what the apostles had seen—fellowship with the Father and His Son.

AN APPLICATION—John uses this title “Savior of the world” in one other place, in the conversation with the Samaritan woman, referring to the believing Samaritans, Jesus says He is Savior of the world (John 4:42). Here, referring to the believing Gentiles, John again says Jesus is “the Savior of the world.” John has met his goal in 1:2-3, that the readers might share the apostles experience. In a loving Christian community, believers testify that Jesus is the Savior, because God has given us His Spirit to testify to that.

Verse 15— *Whoever confesses* [what is heard] ***that Jesus is the Son of God***—this can be heard in conversations, prayer, singing... We read in 4:2 that this confession is how we can also know the Spirit of God dwelling in you. He is the Guarantor of eternal life and future resurrection to every believer.

—***God abides*** [makes His home] ***in him, and he in God***—When Peter made his confession to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus said, “Blessed

are you, Simon, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:16-17).

Verse 16— *We have come to know*—believers attain and possess this knowledge **—and have believed**—the expression of Christian love in the believing community produces a fresh evidence and belief of the truth of the love of God, who sent His Son. **—the love which God has for us**—the believing body of Christ **—God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him**—this concludes this section, which began with 3:24, ***We know by this that He abides in us***. John has now told us what it means to abide in God and God abides in us.

AN APPLICATION—As brothers and sisters in Christ, we come together to study the Word, with agape love for one another, when we don't really have many other things in common or even see each other at other times. Yet we recognize that common bond of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and out of our agape love we pray for one another, and help each other when we can.

E. Discerning the indwelling God (4:17–19)

Verse 17— *By this*—God's love

—love is perfected [complete, mature] **with us**—God's love reaches its fullness and maturity in us only as we learn to pass it on to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

—so that we may have confidence [boldness] **in the day of judgment**—John already said, "...abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence [boldness] and now shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (2:28).

- There is no such thing as a judgment for the saved to determine their destiny in heaven or hell, "There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus" (John 5:24; Romans 8:1).
- There is, however, a Judgment Seat of Christ for believers (2 Corinthians 5:10). There, our works will be tested as by fire, and if anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but still be saved (1 Corinthians 3:13, 15).
- God's basic command is that "we should believe [faith] on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another" (3:23).
- "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22).
- "So then each of us shall give an account of Himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

—because as He is [Jesus abides in the love of the Father], **so also are we** [abiding in the love of the Father] **in this world**—while alive in this world

Verse 18— *There is no fear in love* [lack of boldness]; **but perfect love** [God's love] **casts out fear, because fear involves punishment** [fear carries with it a kind of torment that is its own punishment], **and the one who fears is not perfected** [matured] **in love**—love and fear are incompatible. They cannot coexist.

AN APPLICATION—John's use of "punishment" is unclear (possibly on purpose). Some think he is referring to the final judgment, which a believer will not be part of, so need not be afraid. Or fear is painful suffering, and so it interrupts the relationship of love. This can also be translated "fear involves intense suffering." The point is—the more you mature in your love of God and of other believers, the less you will fear.

Verse 19— *We love, because He first loved us*—the only reason we love at all is because love was initiated by God. The unbeliever is blind to this concept. If anything, they count on good works to get them to heaven. For the believer, it is faith, not works, and a love relationship with God, not a place.

E. Conclusion (4:20–5:17)

A. Love clarified (4:20–5:3a)

Verse 20— *If someone says, “I love God,” and hates* [Gk. on-going] *his brother, he is a liar*—i.e., what that person says is not true. To not love another believer is to also not love God. It might seem easier to love God because God deserves our love, and a brother or sister in Christ often does not deserve our love. *Agape* love is giving without expecting something in return. It is not conditioned on whether the other believer deserves it or not. If the brother really loved God (and not just said he did), he would obey God’s commandment to love other believers, i.e., he would give to the Christian in need.

AN APPLICATION—The verb *agape* is often colorless: it does not have the passionate overtones of the verb *eros* for romantic love or the warmth of the word *phileo* for affectionate, or friendly love. [So far, the NT word *agape* has only been found once in secular literature.] For John, *agape* love is to behave in a way that meets the need of one’s fellow Christian. It’s giving, not receiving. It’s actions, not emotions. So to “hate” means there is a fellow Christian in need, and this Christian refuses to give help.

—*for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen*—our actions show what we really believe.

—*cannot love God whom he has not seen*—to love God is to obey His commandment to love our fellow believers (3:23). The two are connected.

Verse 21— *And this commandment we have from Him*—in 2:3; 3:23-24; 4:21; 5:3 —*that the one who loves God should love his brother also*—these two cannot be separated.

AN APPLICATION—Hatred (or non-love) of brothers and sisters in Christ is possible, or John would not write these verses. He already wrote about that in 3:15. That these people are called “brothers” means they are believers. But when a believer hates or does not love a fellow believer, it reveals that they are not abiding in God’s love. They are a believer but not a maturing believer. Jesus said these are the greatest commandments: (1) love the Lord your God and (2) love your neighbor as yourself (John 13:34).

Chapter 5

Verse 1— *Whoever* [no exceptions] *believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*—see 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18. John also wrote, “...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). There is no other way that John ever defines a Christian. A Christian is not defined by lifestyle, good works or obedience to God. Only by faith in Christ.

—*and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him*—Whether or not a believer is worthy of his/her Christian faith is totally irrelevant. The reason for loving him/her has nothing to do with their performance. I love them only because they are a child of the Father. If I do not love the child, I am simply lying if I say that I love his/her Father (4:20).

Verse 2—*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments*—Even as one cannot love God without loving His children (v. 1), so also it is impossible to truly love the children of God without loving God also. If one claims he/she loves his brother and not God, he has not truly recognized his brother as one born of God and has not offered him the true love that comes from the Father.

Verse 3a—*For this is the love of God—that we keep His commandments*—Jesus said to his disciples, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15 21, 23-24; 15:10, 14).

AN APPLICATION—It’s a chiasmic pattern: love Father—obey His commandments—love believers—obey His commandments—love Father

B. Love empowered (5:3b-15)

Verse 3b—*and His commandments are not burdensome* [too difficult to do]—Jesus said, “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

Verse 4—*For* [Gk. “because”] ***whatever is born of God overcomes the world***—John does not say “whoever” but “whatever.” Then he immediately tells us what the “whatever” is—

—*and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith*—This initial victory does not guarantee subsequent victory in Christian living. But the victory of the new birth makes obedience to God’s commands an achievable goal. The seeds of victory are found in our new birth, but these must be nurtured until they ripen into mature, victorious Christian living.

Verse 5—*Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes* [our faith] ***that Jesus is the Son of God?***—the faith in Christ, the Son of God, has already overcome the world.

AN APPLICATION—The Greek is interesting here. The construction is essentially timeless and characterizes an individual(s). For example, “She is a cheater,” may describe the person based on one instance of cheating (or many such acts). So here, John is saying “the overcomer” is based on the one instance of overcoming by believing in Jesus. Therefore, from now on, we are “overcomers.”

AN APPLICATION—The Christian life begins with faith. But the Christian life is also lived by faith. Paul wrote, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Verse 6—*This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood*—These bookend Christ’s ministry on earth. It began with His water baptism and ended with His shed blood on the cross.
—*It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth*—Humankind would not deduce this by itself by analogical reasoning. It is the Spirit of God who testifies. He knows that He tells the truth, and He testifies so that you also may believe (John 19:35).

Verses 7-8—*For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement*—the baptism, earthly life, and crucifixion of Jesus was

history, to which there were some alive at this writing who witnessed it. The Spirit, as the ultimate truth, testifies (John 14:26; 15:25; 16:8, 12; 1 John 3:24; 4:13).

—The Old Testament law of verification required two or three witnesses (Deut 17:6; 19:15). This is repeated in various places in the NT (Matthew 18:16; John 5:31-40; 8:17-18).

—Some translations read "...three that bear witness [in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth:] the Spirit, the water..." This bracketed material was part of the 1611 edition of the KJV, but they are overwhelmingly absent from almost all Greek manuscripts, and therefore not considered credible Scripture and do not appear in most modern-day translations.

Verse 9— *If* [Gk. "since"] ***we receive the testimony of men***—not that the testimony of men is always received, but it is received and treated as valid (in court, for example).

—***the testimony of God is greater***—man's testimony is received, but God's testimony is greater than man's, so it should be more readily received.

—(1) ***for the testimony of God is this***—The Father's voice from heaven (John 12:28-30), the water to blood of Jesus, and the Spirit

—***that He has testified concerning His Son***—Believing Jesus Christ, Jesus as a human who died, Christ as the Messiah/Deity

Verse 10—*The one who believes* [has faith] ***in the Son of God has the testimony in himself***—Believers have God's testimony of Christ in our hearts

—***the one who does not believe God has made Him [God] a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son***—There is no middle ground. Either a person believes or they question God's truthfulness and His character.

Verse 11—(2) ***And the testimony is this***—this is revelation from heaven, not from man

—***that God has given us eternal life***—This is the message that John started the epistle with: "*What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us*" (1 John 1:1-2).

—***and this life is in His Son***—Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me*" (John 14:6).

Verse 12— ***He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life***—eternal life is not about a place (heaven) or a time but a person.

To have faith in the person of Jesus is life.

Verse 13— ***These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God***—John wrote his gospel so that his readers "*may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name*" (John 20:31). But the epistle of 1 John was written to *you who believe*, i.e., believers who have already come to faith in Jesus Christ

—***so that you may know that you have eternal life***—we know because God said so, and He keeps His promises, and He does not lie.

Verse 14— ***This is the confidence*** [boldness] ***which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us***—what is His will? Faith in His Son and obeying His commandments. So we can pray for whatever help or enablement we need to

carry out His commandments, which are not burdensome. Prayer is not a battle but a response. Its power consists in lifting our wills to God, not in trying to bring His will down to us.

Verse 15— *And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him*—But God determines the means and timing. Jesus prayed, “*Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will*” (Mark 14:36). Sometimes even the best prayers of even the best people are not answered as they would wish.

C. Love practiced (5:1.6-17)

Verse 16— *If anyone sees his brother*—first-hand knowledge of a fellow believer, —***committing a sin not leading [directly] to death, he shall ask, and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death***—technically, all sin leads to death. When a believer sees another believer sinning, he should pray for the sinning believer.

—***There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this***—examples of this would be Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11; and the immorality of 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; and some who take Communion in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:28-30).

Verse 17— *All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading [directly] to death*. Praying for one’s sinning brother is obedience to God. Reminds us of Job, who, “*rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all [10 children]; for Job said, ‘Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts’*” (Job 1:5). Job interceded for his children.

F. Epilogue (5:18-21)

Verse 18— *We know that no one who is born of God sins*—In 3:9— ***No one who is born of God practices [“does”] sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God***—a believer’s new nature in Christ cannot sin. Sin comes from the sin nature. The Christian life is a struggle between the two natures (Romans 7). —***but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him***—the believer’s new nature in Christ lies outside of Satan’s reach.

Verse 19— *We know that we* [including John] ***are of God, and that the whole world*** [its politics, economics, education, entertainment, and religion] ***lies in the power of the evil one***—Believers are distinct from the satanically controlled world system and free from its power (v. 18). Because we live in the world, we feel some of the effects of the evil one’s power. To not be born of God is to be wholly under the power of the evil one. Jesus said, “*He who is not with Me is against Me...*” (Luke 11:23). James 4:4 says, “*...do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*”

Verse 20— *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding*—This is the first time John uses this Greek word “understanding.” It’s close to the word for “mind.” Best translated “intelligence.” Paul wrote a similar thing: “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ*”

(1 Corinthians 2:15-16). Spiritual comprehension of God has to come from God. Jesus has given that to us. No man can know it or give it to us.

—**so that we may know Him who is true**—Jesus is “the truth” (John 14:6). Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), and the world lies in his power (v. 19). As believers, we are people of truth, living in a cesspool world full of lies.

—**and we are in Him who is true**—Paul uses “in Him” to usually refer to salvation, but John in this book uses “in Him” to refer to abiding in God, i.e., sanctification, a life of obeying God’s commands.

—**in His Son Jesus Christ**—John has shown Jesus as the Son of God.

—**This is the true God and eternal life**—Eternal life is faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 21— Little children [“born ones”], **guard yourselves** [Gk. command—personal effort] **from idols**—Paul wrote, “...in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

2 John

Introduction—see Introduction to 1 John.

Verse 1—*The elder*—although by this time John was probably old and the last surviving apostle, the definite article “the” stresses more his position of spiritual oversight.

—***to the chosen lady***—there are two primary interpretations: (1) a local Christian community or (2) an actual lady, possibly named *Kyria* (Gk. “lady”). A strict interpretation of the text supports an individual person as the addressee, claims Ryrie, and I agree. Even a casual reading would lead one to understand John is writing to a particular woman. [No one questions that Third John is written to an individual, yet many consider 2 John to not be written to an individual.]

—***and her children***—Reminding me of what Paul wrote to Timothy: “*For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice...*” (2 Timothy 1:5).

—***whom I love***—In 1 John, John also stressed *agape* love of the believers. To John, truth and love are connected.

—***in truth***—In 1 John 5:20, John said, “*...we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.*” Truth is connected to faith in Jesus, who is the truth (John 14:6).

—***and not only I, but also all who know the truth***—i.e., all believers. This is stressed here because in verse 7 he will warn about the deceivers who will persuade believers to abandon the truth and follow lies.

Verse 2—*for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever*—The parallel is the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6).

AN APPLICATION—The truth is eternal and will be with us forever. Think of Revelation 21–22, for example, it is the truth about the New Jerusalem, and will be with us forever. Of course, Jesus is the truth, and we know we will be with Him forever. But think of living forever with truth and no lies. What glory.....

Verse 3—*Grace* [favor/gift of God], ***mercy*** [Divine forgiveness] ***and peace*** [*“the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:6-7)] ***will be with us***—not a wish, it is a promise. It is always there as we live in this world under the power of Satan and his lies (1 John 5:18-20). And “*greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4).

—***from God the Father***—from the triune Godhead: Spirit of truth, the Father, and the Son
—***and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father***—Jesus said, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9).

—***in truth and love***—In 1 John, John encouraged the believers to maintain the qualities of truth and *agape* love. These are the “bones” of sanctification.

Verse 4—*I was very glad to find [some] of your children walking in truth*—Here is an interpretation issue. The Greek text reads “find of (or from) your children.” If I say, “I was very glad to find from the children of Sally those who believe,” I would understand and be glad that all Sally’s children believe.

—However, some (most?) commentaries interpret the “find of” as “some.” The actual word for “some” is not there (which is why it is in italics in most translations), but they think “find of” means “some.” Of course, this interpretive translation greatly influences the reader’s

understanding of what John meant. In addition, if they think the “lady” is the local church, they interpret this verse as some in the local church are not living as believers or are even not believers. [Hmm—I think the Bible teaches that the church by definition is believers (Eph 2:22-230), so how could some not be believers?!?!?]

—Also, this is me, but—if John thought some of her children were not walking in the truth, you’d think he would be sad about that. Instead, we read that not only was he glad, he was **very glad**. So...

—Therefore, I understand that John is telling this believing mother to watch herself and her believing children because deceivers are in the world (v. 8). And she should not receive false teachers into her home (v. 10), especially to protect these children from the lies of the world (v. 11).

AN APPLICATION—This would have a tremendous application for mothers in guarding their children from the lies of the world, which can enter the home in many ways—TV programs, podcasts, YouTubes, video games, friends, even school work—remember John said **the whole world** [its politics, economics, education, entertainment, and religion] **lies in the power of the evil one** (1 John 5:19). One thing I read about the results of the virtual learning of the children at home is some parents were shocked by what was being taught to them. Education can be the worst because the children have to actually take tests and write papers *supporting* an evil view! Very persuasive..... The children may not even know what is wrong or evil unless you tell them!! How else would they know?

—**just as we have received commandment to do from the Father**—stated in verse 5: *that we love one another*, defined in verse 6: *and this is love, that we walk according to His commandments*. So “walking in truth” is obeying God’s commandments.

Verse 5—Now I ask you, lady [kyria], not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another—What the Father required (1 John 4:7), the Son manifested (1 John 3:16), and the Spirit makes available through life in Him (1 John 4:13-15), the elder now asks—“that we love one another.”

Verse 6—And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments—love is not emotions. *Agape* love is obeying God’s commandments. It is giving Him your obedience.

—**This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it**—Four times in verses 4-6, John makes clear that what he is saying is a direct expression of God’s will.

AN APPLICATION—How do you know God’s will? What are His commandments? Don’t look for God’s will in your experiences or feelings or dreams. They are a product of imagination, etc. They are not where to find truth. This was also a problem in ancient Israel. God said, “*They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord...but let him who has My word speak My word in truth*” (Jeremiah 23).

Verse 7—For [Gk. “because”] many [not just a few] deceivers [“ones who lead astray”] have gone out into the world—“*the whole world lies in the power of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19).

AN APPLICATION—Reminding us of 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ...Satan disguises himself as an angel of light ... Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...”

For example, Bethel and Hillsong music have infiltrated our local churches. They are the NAR. They teach Jesus was not God, and so many other heresies there’s not room here to list them. Every time a church or group uses one of their songs, their name appears at the bottom of the words, and copyright money is given to them. (For example, wonder if Planned Parenthood made a song. Would you sing it knowing every time you do money would go to support Planned Parenthood? And Bethel and Hillsong are much worse because they are damning people to an eternity in hell.) Bill Johnson says he is a man indwelled with God, just as Jesus was. He is claiming to be God!!!

—those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist—we must repeat 1 John 4:2-5—

1 John 4:2— By this you know—referring backward to the testing of the spirits.

Only those willing to test the spirits will be able to recognize God’s Spirit. If a person “believes every spirit,” and does not test the spirit, they will not really know which of them is truly God’s.

—the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses [that is not in the text] Jesus [as] Christ has come in the flesh is from God—this links the Holy Spirit of God with every human spirit that confesses Jesus has come in the flesh. The person who makes this confession is of God because she has been enlightened and motivated by God’s Spirit.

—That Jesus [human] is recognized as the Christ [divine] come in the flesh. Recognizing the deity of the Messiah (Christ) has become human Jesus.

Verse 3— and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God—Just as the one who confesses Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, so every spirit that does NOT confess Jesus is NOT from God.

—this is the spirit of the antichrist—in fact, not only are they not from God, they are from the spirit (the inherent qualities of mind and/or character) of Satan’s man the antichrist, i.e.,

—of which you have heard that it is coming—John already wrote of this in 1 John 2:18-27.

—and now it is already in the world—Satan has an adult antichrist ready to assume worldwide rule at all times (because he doesn’t know when the Rapture will happen and the Tribulation will start). However, also already in the world is the “spirit of the antichrist,” that is, his qualities of thinking and character.

Verse 4—You are from God, little children, and have overcome them—one has already overcome Satan to become believer

—because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world—the Holy Spirit is inside every believer, and He is greater than Satan who is in the world.

Verse 5— They [the deceivers] are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world—worldly things of the values of this earth, rather than godly things. For

example, putting money into temporary earthy things destined to perish rather than into eternal people. Notice the pronoun “they,” versus “you” of verse 4.
—**and the world listens to them**—their success would itself be a problem and was probably used as an authenticating sign by them.

Verse 8—Watch yourselves—take responsibility for causing something to happen or not happen. Prepare to respond appropriately to future dangers.

Paul makes a similar warning: *“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully”* (2 Corinthians 11:1–4)

—**that you do not lose what we** [The text is unclear here—it could be “we” as meaning the apostles and teachers who have taught the lady or it could be “you” meaning just what the lady and children have accomplished.] **have accomplished**—Either way would be true. A teacher has a responsibility to teach the truth, and the believer has the responsibility to listen and discern what is true.

—**but that you may receive a full reward**—the danger is NOT in losing salvation (that cannot be lost) but in losing rewards, so a person does not lose the **full** reward.

Verse 9—Anyone who goes too far [lit. “turns aside,” “goes beyond”]—defection from the truth by those who had once held to it. They go beyond the bounds of Scripture. Paul wrote, *“...that you may learn not to exceed what is written”* (1 Corinthians 4:6). John also wrote to not add to the words of the Scripture (Revelation 22:18-19).

—**and does not abide** [lit. “to continue, to remain, to keep on”] **in the teaching of** [about] **Christ**—false teachers do not remain within the confines of Scripture. Instead, they add erroneous interpretations, revelations, visions, words as if from the Lord, distortions, claiming to have advanced knowledge, new truth, or hidden wisdom available only to them and their followers.

—**does not have** [“to hold on to”] **God**—when a person turns away from the Bible, they turn away from God. [He is not saying they lose their salvation. But they would lose their assurance of salvation. His command was to “Watch yourselves.” They must be believers to have this warning. It would make no sense to be describing unbelievers. John is not writing to unbelievers. He is writing to this believing mom about danger to her and her children.

—**the one who abides** [lit. “to continue, to remain”] **in the teaching** of the Bible

—**he has** [holds on to] **both the Father and the Son.**

AN APPLICATION—John has already said that if a believer is deceived by false teaching:

- (1) They will lose whatever they have been taught and understood about God in the Bible
- (2) They will lose rewards—because rewards are tied to obeying God’s commands.
- (3) They will actually be moving away from God, but be deceived into believing they are moving toward God

Verse 10—If [as we have seen many times, the Greek is “since”] **anyone comes to you**—i.e., into your house, into your family, where you (hopefully) have the control. Notice this is

not “if,” meaning possibly it won’t happen. It is a sure thing: “since,” “because.” Be assured—Satan wants access to your home and your family. Being a believer has put a spiritual target on you. Paul wrote, “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 6:12).

—**and does not bring this teaching**—what you know to be true about Jesus from the Scriptures. The modern inclination among believers is to be highly tolerant of religious differences. The New Testament writers did not believe in this toleration. Their commitment to the truth and their consciousness of the dangers of religious error drove them to warn the believers. Heresy is spiritually dangerous. Wolves in sheep’s clothing have the goal to spiritually kill or maim the sheep! (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29).

—**do not receive him into your house**—do not let the false teaching or the one promoting false teaching into your house or among your believing children. To receive them would be a mockery of the Father and a sin against Christ. To do so would be to become a partaker in their unbelief and hatred of the truth.

—the contrast is in 3 John, where John says if a person is a believer, they are to be received into your house. It’s the *agape* love believers give one another.

and do not give him a greeting—Even a word of greeting might tend to give the false teacher a sense of acceptance that could be misunderstood. John says to make sure these people promoting a false teaching are not confused by any possible idea of acceptance.

AN APPLICATION—The Scripture clearly teaches that a believer should attempt to turn a sinning believer back to Christ (Jude 17-23, for example). But that does not mean you welcome such a person into your home or to be around your children. Paul wrote that a little leaven will leaven the whole lump (1 Corinthians 5). Even a little evil spreads like leaven. One good apple will not cause a bushel of rotten apples to become good, but one rotten apple can destroy a bushel of good apples.

Verse 11—*for the one who gives him a greeting* [“to rejoice,” to be glad,” “a wish for happiness”] **participates** [“to have the same characteristics and nature of”] **in his evil deeds**—of course, pretty sure these with the false teaching will cry, “You’re not loving!” But love of God, love of Christ, love of your family forbids allowing dangerous spiritual deception to get a foothold. A mother would not allow her child to even sip a drink that had a drop of poison in it.

AN APPLICATION—Also, there is an issue of stumbling. When a young or immature believer finds out your greeted or allowed a false teaching to come into your house, they may understand that it is not false. Remember in the application about Bethel, Hillsong, and the NAR, believers might join the NAR, recognizing their Bethel’s and Hillsong’s names, thinking their home church sang their songs, so the NAR must be ok.

Verse 12—*Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full*—more can be said in person, but the false teaching is so dangerous, John had to write to warn her before he was able to see her in person. **Verse 13—*The children of your chosen sister greet you***—the easiest and clearest meaning would be this woman’s sister was a chosen believer and either she had died or her children lived where John did, and he was sending their greetings to her.

3 John

Verse 1—*The elder*— although by this time John was probably old and the last surviving apostle, the definite article “the” stresses more his position of spiritual oversight.

—***to the beloved***—related to the Greek word *agape* (I love). Three times John addresses Gaius as “beloved” (vv. 2, 5, 11). One of the points in 1 John is that believers are to *agape* one another, that is, giving without reciprocity.

—***Gaius***—“Gaius” is mentioned in Acts 19:29, Gaius of Macedonia; 20:4, Gaius of Derbe; Romans 16:23 and 1 Corinthians 1:14, Gaius of Corinth, baptized by Paul. However, there is no way to know if this is the same Gaius. So aside from what is said of him in 3 John, his identity is unknown to us.

—***whom I love in truth***—To John, as taught in 1 John, truth about Jesus and *agape* love to other believers are connected.

AN APPLICATION—It seems so obvious, but this personal greeting is very similar to the personal greeting John gave the *chosen lady (kyria)* in 2 John 1: “*The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth....*” John’s greeting at the beginning of 1 John to all believers is very different. Therefore, it seems like another indication that 2 John was written to an individual person, not a local group.

Verse 2—*Beloved*—

—***I pray that in all respects you may prosper***—physically “get along well,” not necessarily material prosperity

—***and be in good health***—this does not necessarily mean Gaius is ill, though he may have been. Basically, John is praying that Gaius would do as well physically as he is spiritually.

AN APPLICATION—It reminds us of 2 Corinthians 4:16, “*We do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.*” No matter what the physical condition, spiritually, in our inner man, we can continue to grow and mature.

—***just as your soul prospers***—Gaius was very spiritually mature. Gaius is growing, he is not losing what had been spiritually accomplished, and he will receive his full reward (2 John 8).

AN APPLICATION—It’s been observed that today, if one were to pray that a Christian would have as good physical health as their spiritual health, there would be a lot of Christians in the hospital!!!

Verse 3—*For I was very glad when brethren came*—possibly some brethren who had enjoyed the hospitality of Gaius and had now come to John and reported to him about Gaius. In the early church, information flowed between believers as they traveled. John was not only very glad when these believers came to see him but also very glad for the good news of the spiritual maturity of Gaius.

—***and testified to your truth***—lit. “of the truth that is in you.” As John writes in 1 John 4:3-4 and 2 John 7, the truth is the reality that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh

—that is, how you are walking in truth—again, a phrase John also uses in 2 John 4, “*I was very glad to find of your children walking in truth.*” That is, they were living a lifestyle consistent with the truth they believed.

Verse 4—I have no greater joy than this—there is no more important news he can receive or no greater joy he can experience than this.

—to hear of my children walking in the truth—for anyone in ministry, the goal is not just to teach the truth or even to know that those who are taught understand the truth, but that they believe, love, and obey the truth. The greatest grief is those who are indifferent or rebellious toward the Word of God.

Verse 5—Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish—in Greek, this refers both to what he has done and what he will do

— for the brethren and especially when they are strangers—Some manuscripts read “for the brothers and for strangers,” which would indicate his hospitality did not stop with the believers but extended also to strangers. OR it could mean believers who were strangers.

Verse 6—and they have testified to your love before the church—*ekklesia*—called-out ones, i.e., the believers. The believers where John was? Where Gaius is? Other places?

—You will do well [“please”] **to send them on their way**—making provisions for them as his guests as well as providing provisions for their trip. It seems like these believers had stayed with Gaius before, journeyed to John and reported to him about Gaius, and now they have returned to Gaius with a letter from John.

—in a manner worthy of God—generously as God would give.

Verse 7—For they went out for the sake of the Name—missionaries. “the Name” is Jesus Christ, of course. Philippians 4:10-18 describes believers supporting those who go out in ministry. It is good for those who go out as well as for those who support it. False ministers are in it for the money and have no commitment to the truth. They are “peddling the Word of God” (2 Corinthians 2:17).

—accepting nothing from the Gentiles—Unbelievers are not going to support those who go out for the Gospel. Therefore, if Christians do not support them, no one will.

Verse 8—Therefore we ought to support such men—John had warned *Kyria* about receiving false teachers into her home. He said to not even give them a greeting (2 John 10-11). But if they are truly believers, teaching Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, then they should be supported by other believers.

—so that we may be fellow workers with the truth—Just as John told *Kyria* that giving false teachers a greeting was participating in their evil deeds (2 John 11), so supporting true believers teaching the Word makes the supporter a fellow worker with the truth.

AN APPLICATION—This principle was practiced by David. After he came back from a war, he divided the spoil. “*For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike*” (1 Samuel 30:24).

Verse 9—I wrote something to the church—all the believers, among whom are Gaius and Diotrophes, perhaps even the assembly of the believers

—but Diotrophes, who loves to be first among them—this could be just a personal rivalry or it could reflect a dictatorial ego. Obviously, his prominence in the community was

longstanding. He may even have been troubled by John's continued influence over this group of believers Diotrephes was leading.

—**does not accept what we say**—this implies that John had already written to these believers, asking them to give hospitality, and even financial support, to the traveling missionaries who had come there. Perhaps Diotrephes either suppressed the letter or even publicly opposed the letter to the other believers. He does not receive these missionaries, and he even threatens to put whoever does receive them out from the assembly or fellowship of the believers.

Verse 10—For this reason, if I come—to John, who was known for his message of love, Diotrephes' behavior was unthinkable. However, love was to be based on truth. And not only did Diotrephes speak wicked words, he unjustly accused John and the missionaries and those who supported them with wicked words and expelled them from the other believers.

—**I will call attention to his deeds which he does**—perhaps the other believers do not realize what is going on, and John will make them aware of it, maybe hoping Diotrephes will repent or be expelled.

—**unjustly accusing us with wicked words**—perhaps accusing them of being motivated by money, or accusing them of not teaching about Jesus and the truth

—**and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either**—he refused to welcome the traveling missionaries, who are “brethren”

—**and he forbids those who desire to do so**—Obviously, Diotrephes has (or thinks he has) authority in the lives of the other believers that he could “forbid” them to do something. Jesus said, “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. It is not so among you...*” (Matthew 20:25-26). Leadership was to serve, not “lord it over them.”

—**and puts them out of the church**—The church is the body of Christ. No one can put you out of it (Eph 1:22-23). But the believers did assemble for fellowship, teaching, singing, prayer, and taking Communion. So he did not allow those who received the traveling missionaries to participate in this assembly.

Verse 11—Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good—What Diotrephes did was evil, and his behavior was to be avoided, not copied.

—**The one who does good is of God**—Godly good conduct comes from God.

—**the one who does evil has not seen** [perceived or learned about] **God**—Diotrephes' evil conduct showed spiritual blindness toward God. John is not saying Diotrephes lost his salvation (if he had it), but that he was not abiding or maturing in Christ. He was walking according to his sin nature.

Verse 12—Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true—

Three-fold testimony: (1) *from everyone*, (2) *from the truth itself*, (3) *from the testimony of John*. John is holding Demetrius up as a good example to be copied. We do not know anything about him except this one verse. But John thought it was important for Gaius to know and trust Demetrius. Perhaps he was one of the traveling missionaries who Diotrephes would not receive, and John is encouraging Gaius to receive Demetrius because he was a true believer in Jesus. Or maybe Demetrius was welcoming the traveling missionaries, as John was encouraging Gaius to do.

Verse 13—*I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink*—as John wrote in John 20:30, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.” John, it seems, always had more to say than he could possibly write. I think we all do!!!

Verse 14—*but I hope to see you shortly*—John plans a visit there not long after this letter arrives.

—*and we will speak face to face*—parallels 2 John 12.

Verse 15—*Peace be to you*—there were hard days ahead as he confronted Diotrephes

—*The friends greet you*—John’s friends with him were also friends of Gaius

—*Greet the friends by name*—the other believers in this fellowship or assembly.

AN APPLICATION—It’s good to remember, no matter what your local assembly or fellowship is, there are other believer friends who greet you, care about you. There are believers all over the world. Don’t be too local.

AN APPLICATION—2 and 3 John are opposite instructions. They both require discernment.

- 2 John—do not receive or even greet unbelievers.
- 3 John—do receive and support believers.