

# 1 JOHN STUDY NOTES

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# The Purpose of 1 John

There are five times in this letter in which John alludes to or directly states the purposes his epistle will serve.

The first of these is found in 1:2-3 where John makes a statement about the purpose of all his proclamations of truth, including this letter. He writes, “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you might have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Therefore, in John’s writing we find an accurate commentary by an eyewitness and close companion of Jesus Christ on “the life” or lifestyle of perfect, uninterrupted fellowship with God the Father. That is what John calls “eternal life.” It is important to note that John speaks first of fellowship “with us.” He is referring here to himself and the remaining core of the Apostolic company, the mainstream of Christ’s church. So he is passing on in written form what the readers would need to know in order to be in harmony with apostolic teaching. If they knew this that he wrote and proclaimed, they would have a standard of sound thought that would lead to fellowship with God. So in 1 John we find a standard of practice by which churches could remain aligned with Apostolic teaching and so have fellowship with each other and with God.

A second statement of purpose follows in verse 4, where John says, “these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.” Elsewhere John says that he has no greater joy than to hear of his spiritual offspring living in accordance with the truth (3 John 4). So 1 John provides a standard of practical obedience that expressed what the Apostles sought to bring about in their followers.

A third statement of purpose is found in 1 John 2:1 where John says, “I am writing these things to you that you may not sin.” It is clear through the surrounding statements that his meaning is not that they will achieve a state of perfection. The verse immediately preceding says, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and his word is not in us.” The statement following says, “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;” So sandwiched in between two statements regarding how we are to deal with sin as believers, is this statement about not sinning. The thought is clearly that John wants to insulate us against sin’s subtle power. 1 John then provides teaching that will steer us away from choices that lead us toward sinning.

A fourth statement of purpose is found in 1 John 2:26 where John writes, “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.” John was concerned with the growing number of teachers arising from within the Church who were teaching in a way that took people away from the apostolic tradition. Providing protection against doctrinal drift is a very evident purpose in his letter.

We know little about the false teachings of John’s day. We must piece together like a puzzle the different statements John makes. Some of these false teachers had

apparently started out with a relational connection to the Apostles, but had broken ranks with them (1 John 2:19). Some denied that Jesus was the Messiah of the Old Testament (1 John 2:22). Some must have been denying that Jesus had come in the flesh (1 John 4:1). Some were apparently living lawlessly (1 John 2:4). Some were denying that Jesus was the Son of God (1 John 4:15). Throughout the letter we can spot various errors, all of them propagated by teachers who apparently claimed to be in fellowship with God. Some of the errors came from thought that was being birthed outside the Church. It would eventually grow into the Gnostic thought that would become prevalent in the Mediterranean world over the course of the next century. Some of the errors would rear their heads throughout Church history and so persist to the present day in one form or another. 1 John provides a standard by which to discern who should be accepted as a guide and teacher in spiritual matters. This is evident throughout John's letter and is primary in his purposes for writing it.

A final statement of purpose is made by John in 1 John 5:13 where he writes, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life." His letter is meant to provide an assurance that they need not look for something additional, or new secrets, or any alternate, more effective means of pursuing God. They had the truth in the Apostolic pattern and they should remain faithful to that. 1 John provides a standard of sound words meant to guide us toward a settled confidence regarding "eternal life."

It will be seen that in this book the term "eternal life" does not refer merely to the afterlife. Rather, it refers to a lifestyle, a way of living life modeled by Christ of unbroken fellowship with God. Fellowship with God is fostered by a certain pattern of thought and living. This pattern of life was that which had been embraced by the Apostles, as they had seen it in Jesus Himself and had been taught by Him. In following this pattern, the readers could be assured that they had embraced the way in which the eternal and the eternal One converged with mere mortals in a temporal world.

# The Absolute and Relative Language of 1 John

There is a type of statement that has been appropriated by humanity in nearly every era. It is a statement that sounds absolute in nature, but it is relative in meaning. For example, it is often said today by those in the United States, “Americans accept people without regard to the color of their skin!” That is certainly true from the point of view of our constitution and our laws. It is not absolutely true of all American citizens. There is a hypothetical American of which a number of such things are true, but no American in which all of them are absolutely true.

The Scripture uses the term righteous and its related terms in both an absolute and relative sense. In the absolute sense there is no one righteous among all the members of humanity save one. The Scripture is very clear on this, stating it adamantly in several places (Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 130:3; Romans 3:11-18; 7:18). So Christ is called “the Righteous One” (Acts 3:14; 1 John 2:1), meaning He is absolutely unique among all those who have experienced human life. This does not mean that individuals do no good. It means that they cannot achieve a level of righteousness by their own moral capacity whereby they are judged righteous by God. We see this reality reflected in the language of Scripture.

At the same time it is true that in Scripture people are described by God as being righteous though in the absolute sense of that term they are certainly not. There is clearly this relative usage of the term. Job is described as righteous and upright, and his deeds are cited as evidence (Job 1:1-12). Cornelius is described as “devout” and one who “feared God” before he came to believe in Christ (Acts 10:1-4). Paul describes his own behavior as being righteous (2 Thessalonians 2:10). John the Baptist is said to be righteous and holy (Mark 6:20). Simeon is said to have been righteous and devout (Luke 2:25). Church leaders are to be upright and holy (Titus 1:8). Christians are called to walk in a manner “worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1). These kinds of statements are common (see also Matthew 1:19; Luke 1:6; Luke 23:50). They seem to be describing one who embraces a pattern of deeds that corresponds to and is consistent with faith in Yahweh. This “righteousness” is not such that it would save them apart from Christ’s death. But God acknowledges and commends it, calls it righteousness, and urges it as a pattern to follow.

It will be clear in John’s writing that both ideas are part of his thinking. He clearly sees that no one is righteous in the absolute sense. Yet He clearly sees that there are people who behave righteously and those who behave unrighteously in more relative terms.

It is always a challenge to deal with such relative expressions of righteousness. The question is how much righteousness is required for this to be an appropriate label to place on someone? Scripture provides no relief from this tension. As we read it we are left with tension. How righteous had Paul behaved in Thessalonica? (2 Thessalonians 2:10). How righteous does a potential Elder have to be? (Titus 1:8) How righteous was Cornelius? (Acts 10:1-4)

Because this tension is uncomfortable, the temptation is to minimize or engineer our way around such expressions. By their nature these statements create inevitable tensions as we attempt to quantify, draw lines, and establish boundaries. But because the expressions are a part of the teaching of Scripture, we must not eliminate them. We must adapt to having them unresolved. This is a critical matter as one interprets and applies the epistles of John.

There is a particular type of this relative language used by John in this epistle. It becomes a challenge to interpret because it is expressed by him in language normally reserved for absolute statements. For example he says, “No one who is born of God practices sin...” (1 John 3:10). Later he says, “We know that no one who is born of God sins...” (1 John 5:18). These sound like absolute statements. At the outset we must determine that such statements are hopelessly contradictory with the thought of the epistle and the rest of Scripture if they are taken in an absolute sense. They are in some way relative, or there is something in the context that governs how they should be understood. We will examine these as they occur in the text. But this recognition of the presence of absolute and relative statements regarding righteousness in Scripture must be acknowledged at the outset.

This is not unique to John, though it is a more complex in his writings. Though not as frequently as John, Paul makes statements that in isolation could be taken as absolute ones. But the context tells us they are relative. 1 Corinthians 6:11 is an example. There Paul says, “And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” That language could lead us to believe that their sins were a thing of the past, their sanctification complete, were we not aware from the rest of Paul’s letter of the things going on in Corinth. They were by comparison sanctified, yet that sanctification was still a work in progress. What we understand of Paul’s usage of terms, of the truth about Corinth, and of the broader truth of Scripture allows us to accurately interpret his statement like these (see also Romans 15:14; Philippians 2:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

# 1 John 1

**1 Jn 1:1 | What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life—**

What John was writing might have been new to the hearers, but it was not new in the sense of recently coming about. In fact, it had been around forever, and that is not a hyperbolic expression in this case. Though there had been ever-deepening revelations and statements of this truth, it was not new. Nor was it a mere assemblage of subjectively perceived ideas that had slowly been pieced together. It was not the product of mystical imaginings. John begins by immediately speaking of the reality of his subject matter citing the witnesses of the physical senses, his own and that of the whole apostolic company.

The “beginning” here might refer to this historic faith that persisted on earth over the centuries that transpired from the fall of Adam until John’s day. It might also refer to the “beginning” of the New Testament Church era. This was a term used in other New Testament era writings to hark back to the pattern of the earliest days of the Holy Spirit’s ministry through the body of Christ (Acts 11:15). John uses the term of the actual beginning (1 John. 2:23), of the beginning of the reader’s experience of the faith (1 John. 3:11), and of the beginning of the Christian movement (1 John 2 5).

John’s subject is Jesus, the God man, who modeled a life of perfect union with God the Father. John heard straight from the lips of Christ with his own ears the words that were borne out of such a life. Adding to the testimony of his ears was that of his own eyes that had seen this life that Jesus had lived for humanity to see. But John had not just seen Christ, as one might see a famous landmark. He had looked closely, examined and studied Jesus. He had observed closely His body, His emotions at work, both His actions and His reactions. Everything a body does John had not just seen and observed. By adding the short phrase “what we beheld,” he is saying “we have gone back for a second look,” validating what our eyes originally told us. His testimony that would follow was not just a result of casual observation on the apostle’s part. It is the result of careful examination, observation and contemplation.

To this John adds the knowledge he had gained of Christ through physical touch. Not only had he examined these things closely with his eyes and ears, but he had also physically touched them. John has no doubt thinking of the physical body of Jesus and along with it the physical evidence produced by this extraordinary life in the physical realm. There would have been things like healed bodies, resurrected bodies, multiplied loaves, many fish, etc. As John would talk about ideas such as love and obedience, his witness wasn’t just that of one who had simply discussed, debated, and articulated the abstract. He was one whose hands had actually handled the fruit and result of supernatural love and obedience. He had physically touched the one who had done such things and those who had been the beneficiaries of them. With this statement John clearly distinguishes what he would write from the works of

mere philosophers. They spoke of the abstract. He of the concrete. They spoke of what they had observed of ideas. He spoke of that plus actual physical realities. By summoning the senses of hearing, sight and touch, John is distinguishing the nature of this Biblical revelation from the normal subjective stuff of which much spiritual ideology is based.

It is after stating these ideas that John states the actual subject of his writing . The information he will pass along in written form is concerning the  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  of life. In Greek thought “the logos” was the beginning point, the explanation of existence, its fundamental foundation. By adopting this term as he did in his gospel, John is assigning a certain level of authority to Christ and His message. He is saying that this he is writing is concerned with the origination and the governing authority of life. It is that thing that has simply always been and is itself the cause of all that now is or ever will be. Within the minds of the readers, shaped as they would have been by Greek culture and thought, this would have been the clear inference. John was writing about the fundamental essential thing that explains the universe and all that exists. This included the explanation of human life and existence.

John repeatedly uses the personal pronoun “we.” Two groups are in view. First, it refers to the apostolic company, or at least the inner circle of eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life and ministry (1 John 1:1-5 are classic examples, where we is not true of all believers). Second, it refers to the entire community of Christians who had come to believe in the apostles’ teaching and conform their thinking to it (1 John 1:1-6 speaks of things that are true of all Christians).

**1 Jn 1:2 | and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—**

An extra-ordinary life had been lived of which John and others had been eyewitnesses. In that particular, unique life had been revealed a life, or what we would call a lifestyle or way of living. This way of living was extra-ordinary in many ways, and notable because it was a life of complete dependence on God the Father and of intimate fellowship with him. It was a life no man had ever lived since Adam and Eve before the fall. No other person had seen it before the manifestation of Jesus Christ, the son of God. When John says “the life was manifested” he is making a statement loaded with meaning. That being who was the source of life suddenly became visible for all to see and hear. What had been written words, became living flesh. A life of unbroken fellowship with the Creator God, unknown to human beings, was publicly displayed. It was put forward to humanity for examination.

John speaks in these words of both his qualifications to write what he is writing and the nature of his task in the letter as he sees it. He is qualified as an eyewitness. By this time, this was probably a fairly significant issue. It is quite possible that by this time John was the only one of the original apostles left. It is certain that most others who would have been alive in Jesus’ time are now gone.

The fact that John is appealing over and over to the senses in these first few verses would be significant in terms of the doctrinal errors he is concerned with. The Gnostics were denying that God had, could, or would become flesh and blood or any form of matter. John wants to make clear that he is an eyewitness to this revelation of God, uniquely qualified to speak of this matter, above all other teachers. He had not only seen it but had studied it closely and intently and had touched it (verse 1). The fact that he had seen was critical. He viewed himself as bearing witness to it. As a devout Jew this was serious business, to go on the witness stand. He is, in a sense, going under oath here. He also viewed himself as an official herald of the good news of Christ. He wants to spread the news around in an official way. He is the bearer of an “official statement,” authoritative, on the unique and special revelation.

John was speaking not simply of another in a long line of lifestyles which have come and gone within the human race. This was that life which had always existed, the original, life from its source. It was life eternal in essence, the eternal one in fleshly, human form. It was also a quality of life manifested, namely that quality of life which can be lived when there is no sin, therefore no death. This individual life demonstrated a life lived in unbroken dynamic fellowship with God.

What had previously existed only in God’s presence in heaven now is disclosed and made known to men. It is placed before mankind in a way in which their senses can perceive it and more importantly imitate it which will become John’s goal in his writing. This sinless, holy, morally perfect life, had never before been witnessed by the human race. Now it was placed before them for their examination and profit, for their salvation, and ultimately for their imitation.

**1 Jn 1:3 | What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

John’s states very simply here that he intends to pass along what his senses have perceived. John’s concerns to provide evidence against the Gnostic idea that Christ had not really “come in the flesh” in the form of man, is seen in these words. Jesus’ life is the source and content of John’s ministry, his doctrine, and his life. He will present it in this letter as a standard by which to prove or disprove the orthodoxy of all belief systems (1 John 2:18-19). This must be understood as the purpose of the book. 1 John is often taken as a rule or standard by which to judge whether or not someone is a Christian. It is meant to be a standard by which to judge spiritual leaders and movements, a critical skill for the rank and file of the Church.

There is in John’s words basis for fellowship with God and with each other. These word would provide a kind of standard by which the presence of the true spiritual life that flows from God to each Christian and then back and forth between Christians and Christian Churches could be confirmed. Unhealthy, and outright fleshly versions of this fellowship abounded. Confirming and promoting true fellowship, the mutual sharing in partnership with God is John’s first stated reason for his letter. John’s God,

Yahweh, is a relational one and John wanted to impart a message which would ensure healthy spiritual relationship between his compatriots in the gospel, all who believed their message, and God.

Given that purpose, there is much that would be expected then about the material to come in this letter. We would expect to find issues covered that have to do with being rightly related to God, such as how to handle sin, how to live in such a way as to please Him, how to understand Him and think rightly about Him, and what to believe as far as his essence, character and revelation of Himself. There would also be issues covered that have to do with us being rightly related to each other, specifically the standards and outworking of Christ's love. There would be a balance of doctrinal matters to produce healthy thinking, and practical matters to produce healthy relationships. Since the letter is written to a general audience with the goal of producing healthy community, we would expect that the author might make some broad, general, sweeping statements to provide tracks for the community to run on. There could be, in view of such concerns, general trend type statements made which would serve very well in the community-wide sense, but break down somewhat in the individual sense. For example, it is perfectly accurate to say, from a broad perspective, "A Christian person is one who holds to a high moral standard, and anyone who doesn't is not with us." That is accurate in the community and fellowship sense. It defines our character in a broad way, defends us against false teachers who might sneak in and teach a lesser degree of morality, and holds up a standard for us to collectively strive towards. It is quite another matter to take that statement in the individual sense, different from how it is made. To do that would be to suggest that moral failure and weakness prove a lack of individual faith. It is a fairly easy matter to judge the health of a movement; it is quite another matter to judge the authenticity of an individual.

It is good to think of the overall purpose of John in writing this letter as being to promote community health and relational functionality. Many of his statements provide an expectation. They answer the question "What should be said of us by others?" And so they provide us with things by which overall health can be judged. Using them we can look back over 2000 years of Christian history and say, "Yes, these things have been true historically of Christians. Christianity has always embraced these things." We cannot say that every individual Christian has embraced them or that there have not been some very dark periods when they were all but lost.

To interpret 1 John rightly, it is essential to hear John making statements that are to be taken in the broad, community sense—what could be called the "we sense." If they are taken in the more individual sense, the book is hopelessly contradictory to itself and other Scripture. John's letter is full of statements meant to serve as a general description of the overall pattern of behavior in the Christian community as they pursue "the eternal life." They are true in the overall sense in which they are made.

## **1 Jn 1:4 | And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.**

A closely related purpose of the book is stated here by John. He will by this writing accomplish something which will make his own joy complete. The concept underlying this statement is that the maturity of followers brings an ultimate form of joy to true spiritual leaders. This idea reflected often in the writings of John (John 3:29, 15:11, 16:24, 17:13; 2 John 4,12, 3 John 3-4). It is also reflected in the writings of Paul and Luke (Acts 16:34, Romans 16:19, 2 Corinthians 7:4-7, Philippians 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, Philemon 7). Complete obedience in spiritual followers produces complete joy in leaders.

For a leader, the joy of the Lord is always present. It comes with doing what they know God wants them doing. Their joy is complete however, when the pieces begin to fall together in others and a work they began begins to function on its own effectively. Their joy becomes complete when the vision begins to become reality. That happens when people really grasp the implications of spiritual truth and become obedient to it. It is a wonderful thing because while the leader's joy is made complete by the obedience of the followers, at the same time the follower's joy is also made complete through their own obedience. There is a completeness of joy entered into by both so that their experience together and their memory of each other is a joyful one. The "our" here might just refer to both leader and follower.

## **1 Jn 1:5 | And this is the message we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.**

The message John was delivering was a very specific one. It was not some loosely structured thought or philosophy. There was a specific and precise content to the faith. It had a certain authority to it. It was "heard from Him," that is Jesus. It was not John's own thinking, not his carefully crafted ideas. It was the message heard from Jesus. But it was not being hoarded, it was being passed along, made known to others. John would pass it along, as that which should regulate and shape their own understanding of the Christian life. Jesus was that life, therefore he should be that by which our lives are molded.

The message was definitive, and could be condensed into a simple statement that John gives here. The message of Christ about Yahweh was the "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." That is the essence of what Jesus modeled and proclaimed.

One way for us to take this word picture is to interpret it in the sense that we might use the words light and darkness today in the English language. And so we might read this and think, "God is holy and in Him there is no sin at all." While that statement is certainly true, it is probably not the primary idea that John was getting at.

From those who have given a lifetime to studying the writings of John, we have learned that John was heavily influenced in the symbols he used by the writings of the Old Testament, and in particular the writings of Isaiah and the Psalms. If we study the metaphorical usage of light and darkness in those books we find that the terms light and darkness are meant to contrast understanding of truth versus ignorance of the truth or rebellion against it. (See Psalm 43:3, 56:13, 119:105, 130, 19:8, 36:9, Isaiah 2:5, 50:11 all of which are best understood by substituting the idea of knowledge of the standard of truth for light and ignorance or rebellion for darkness).

The differences in these two ways of looking at “light and darkness” are subtle. But they bring about very distinct differences in meaning for individual verses and the entire book.

- If by the phrase “God is light” John means God is truth, then the book becomes a means of discerning truth in teachers and in movements. It becomes a means of asking, “Are we going in the right direction if we look to this man, or this movement as a source of truth and a means of drawing us closer to God?” It is a yardstick by which to judge the presence of truth.
- If by the phrase “God is light” John means God is without sin, then the book becomes a means of judging the performance of His children, a yardstick by which we judge ourselves and others.
- If it means God is truth, then when John says in the end, “These things I have written unto you that you might know you have eternal life,” it has a very distinct meaning. He is saying, “You have all you need in what God has revealed to you so that you can experience the kind of life Jesus lived. You don’t need to examine other movements and teachings to find hidden secrets to that eternal life.”
- If the phrase “God is light” means God is without sin, then when John says in the end, “These things I have written unto you that you might know you have eternal life,” we must understand that his words are a tool or a ruler to evaluate whether or not we and others are justified.

The purpose of the book thus far stated by John is to pass on the truth (what we have seen, heard, handled), about “the life.” It is also to complete our joy, accomplished when his children “walk in the truth” (3 John 3:4). The message that Christ passed on is that truth. It resides in God and so becomes visible and clear in Christ. To accept that truth is to be His child. To shape one’s life by it is to experience His life. To remain in falsehood whether intentional or unintentional, is to be stumbling and groping in the darkness.

This verse about light, darkness is about truth and untruth. It is also about God, the source and embodiment of truth. Understood in this way it helps us understand sin and holiness. We live holy lives when we regulate them by the truth. We stray into unholiness when we set aside the truth not allowing it to regulate our behavior. God

is light, meaning truth. The truth always regulates His action. He embodies it. In them there is no falsehood. There is nothing he does not know, there is no truth he is choosing to shun. He is light--both truth in and of itself and a source of truth to us.

**1 Jn 1:6 | If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.**

John places himself right in the middle of the issues he wishes to address in the ensuing statements through the use of the personal pronoun “we.” There was a certain dialog happening in churches that John projects himself and the other authorities of the church into. The dialog involved people claiming to be close to God while at the same time not allowing the truth to regulate the practical matters of their lives. This projection of himself into the conversation indicates that he is trying to dramatically illustrate the seriousness of this matter. It is a very effective way of pointing out the unacceptable nature of a situation where leaders do not regulate their lives by the truth. He is suggesting that even if he himself, the last of the original 12, did such a thing, his witness should not be accepted. His point is that the basis for any authority to teach or lead in the Church is conformity to the standard of revealed truth. Truth cannot be set aside in the shaping of our lifestyles.

By the phrase “fellowship with Him,” John is referring to intimate relationship with Him. It describes not only one who believes in Jesus, but one who is “in touch” with Him, and on good terms with Him. Such individuals agree with Him and speak for Him. Fellowshiping with Him describes those who are practicing a face-to-face relationship with Him. In John’s day the Gnostics were claiming increasing levels of oneness with God, and were so speaking falsely of having fellowship with Him. Yet their lives were not regulated by truth. Some believers were being taken in by them and mixing Gnosticism in with Christianity. A large part of John’s teaching is to head off this growing influence.

In contrast to having “fellowship with Him,” “walking in darkness” is shaping our lives by the standards of those ignorant of truth. When we live apart from the truth, our lives in practical matters are not regulated by the truth. Though we may supposedly have intimate association with Him, His teachings do not sway our decisions or govern our conduct. That is walking in darkness. Both Christians and non-Christians can walk in darkness.

When we walk in the light, we allow God, through the Holy Spirit, to illuminate our path. We bring the truth to bear on each choice we make, and each action we take so that we do all things in accordance with the truth. To walk in the light is to have our actions regulated by the truth. To walk in the darkness is to act independent of that truth either as a result of ignorance or rebellion. Walking in the light begins with acceptance of the truth of Christ. It continues by regulating one’s life by the truth He taught. That is the action John represents here as walking in the light.

There are several Greek words to choose from to express the idea of doing. There is considerable overlap in these different terms. John chose to use the verb ποιῶ. NASB expresses the use of the present tense of ποιῶ by using the term “practice.” ποιῶ is used elsewhere when one wishes to express the state which results when something is done. It often implies acts which by nature leave a visible result. The practicing of a kind of deed is more often expressed by another Greek word, πράσσω, a word that does not appear in this epistle. That is not to say that the NASB is in error, since a normal use of the present tense is to describe action that is going on presently. But it is to say that ποιῶ can be an expression of the result that remains when the deeds are done. To not ποιῶ the truth is to bring about a certain state in terms of our relationship to God. Ποιῶ is a word which will appear repeatedly in this book. More will be noted on this later.

An interesting thing to observe in this verse is how well it harmonizes with all of Scripture if we understand the terms light and darkness to refer to ones relationship to the truth. If we claim to have a special intimacy with God, as many of the false teachers of John’s day did, yet we do not allow the truth to regulate our actions, we are lying about having intimate fellowship with God. The result of that lie will be visibly present. We will not align ourselves with the truth. When we do this we cease advocating the truth. Our lives begin to advocate the lie and in time that can be clearly spotted.

**1 Jn 1:7 | But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

Patterning our lives by the standard set forth by the truth is something we do. It is something God is. That contrast is brought out in this verse. We may “walk” in the truth, but He is “in” truth. It is His essence, whereas it is something we make a choice about. We must walk in the truth to get to where He is. We cannot come to His side for fellowship if we are unwilling to go where He Himself is. We’ll reach Him in no other way. And so while truth is not our essence, we can choose to walk in it. Walking in the light here has primary reference to our complete trust in the message of Christ about Himself, us, and our world. It stands in stark contrast to picking a la carte from various alternative philosophies. The contrast is like that between light and darkness.

When we, together with Him, walk in the light, it impacts our relationship to each other. We find we not only gain a growing intimacy with Him, but a growing intimacy with each other. Fellowship with God draws us closer to each other. It does not put distance between us. The Gnostics believed in an exclusive inner circle, an elite spiritual class composed of those who had knowledge of deep spiritual secrets. John embraces the inclusiveness of fellowship with God. To walk in the light was in John’s mind a journey people took together, he himself along with the rest of the community of believers.

We do not escape our sin as in the journey of the Gnostics. We are forgiven for it through the work of Christ. We are not set free from it by escaping our mortal body. We are forgiven through the blood of Christ. Blood, a form of matter, evil to the Gnostics, becomes the means by which we are cleansed. John makes a very interesting choice of words here, words which showed him to be diametrically opposed to Gnosticism. They did not believe God could or would take on human form because they viewed matter as evil. Jesus, if he was a historical figure with flesh and blood, could not have been the Son of God in their minds. Further, cleansing from sin was unnecessary since it involved things done in the body, which was written off as essentially evil, bound for destruction anyway. So they didn't believe Jesus had a body, did not believe he had blood, did not believe sin could be cleansed from us or needed to be. So this is a loaded statement in terms of the Gnostic position. John does not have the illusion of perfection. He knows we walk in the light as opposed to being in the light. We'll need cleansing as we walk, which is something Christ's blood provides. In responding to the truth (walking in the light), confession is naturally entered into and this forgiveness is experienced.

**1 Jn 1:8 | If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

It would seem likely that this statement is confronting something which was probably being said at the time by some of the false teachers. The word "sin" is singular, referring to a sin principle, resident evil that is a part of each member of humanity. There were apparently some false teachers who were saying that they were not fallen, that there was no principle of sin operating in them.

John notes that it is not God that we deceive in embracing such a position. We could add that we probably do not deceive others in claiming this. It is us whom we deceive. It is a very simple situation when we claim to be without sin. The truth is not in us. We are not evaluating ourselves in light of revelation but are engaging in self-deception at that point. We are not walking in the light, living out and embracing what the truth has revealed to us. Truth and revelation always have the result of making sin more visible, not of convincing us we don't have it. If we become convinced we are without sin, it is not because we have been taught by the truth. It is because we have strayed from it.

**1 Jn 1:9 | If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

It is a healthy Christian movement that is confessing their sins and failings. It is healthy doctrine and teaching and leadership that stimulates and models such confessions made to God. If we are admitting to our sins, actual actions we engage in that are out of harmony with the truth, we are by that act moving back into the light.

No other condition is imposed for renewed fellowship but confession. Movements stay healthy through confession.

Now what exactly is it that John is calling for Spiritual leaders and movements to do? The force of the word confession is the idea of agreeing. Confession is agreeing with the testimony of the Spirit shedding light on our personal thoughts or actions. Walking in light is ongoing agreement with the testimony of the Holy Spirit within us. This is essential whether that testimony be favorable or unfavorable. That is the two-edged nature of truth. And so we must agree with the guilty sentence when it is passed down to us by the Holy Spirit. Sins, the result and acts of our sin (vs 8), our fallen nature, have to be dealt with. We must admit to them, that is our responsibility in the matter.

If we admit to our sinful acts, God can be counted on absolutely to forgive them. In doing so He is faithful. By that John means that He can be depended on, He is reliable, He will not withhold His response. He is also righteous in forgiving us. This means that His integrity is not compromised. He is in fact establishing His integrity by fulfilling a covenant obligation. Apart from such an obligation and the judicial power of the blood of Christ, forgiveness could be viewed as unrighteous, winking at sin, not holding parties responsible, or letting sin slide. God's righteousness would thus be compromised. The blood of Christ combined with Yahweh's covenantal obligation is what makes forgiveness righteous.

But what of the sins which we commit due to the sin principle in us that we are unaware of. There must be a myriad of such deeds! These too are forgiven. We are cleansed from all the unrighteousness which we are unaware of, which remains unconfessed. There is a world of blessing made available to us through confession. Walking in the light, conforming our lives to the truth, produces a sensitivity to sin. This produces confession and then an awareness of this cleansing of us, cleansing which extends to deeds and acts of which we are unaware.

**1 Jn 1:10 | If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” We oppose the voice of truth and conviction when we refuse to agree that we have sinned. This is a very audacious act. It is opposing the voice of the Holy Spirit. By that act we are calling God a liar, and in effect placing ourselves above him.**

The testimony of any who stray into such a state is not to be trusted. They cannot be trusted to have any special knowledge or revelation regarding God or the things of God. What they bring is not the word of God. It is interesting that John continues to use the first person plural. In doing so he is subjecting even himself to this scrutiny. He is in effect saying. “Even if we ourselves should say this, you should immediately realize the truth is not in us.” It is a dramatic statement which leaves little doubt as to how they should respond in the event of such teaching.

# 1 John 2

**1 Jn 2:1 | My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous;**

John viewed the readers as his offspring in the Lord. They are vulnerable to false teaching and wrong thinking. He states another objective of his in the writing of this letter. He wanted to convey to them a message that will re-enforce their thinking in the key elements of the faith so that they will not be in danger of drifting into sin.

The first choice of any spiritual leader is that no sin be committed among his followers. But reality leads them to prepare their followers for their own failings. The solution when sin has been committed is not in ourselves. It is with Jesus Christ who is our advocate with the Father. He comes alongside in our weakness to lend aid. That is the meaning of advocate. He can do so because he is the righteous one, without sin Himself. This idea supplied right understanding to those being battered by the ideas of Gnosticism. Sin does matter, and our personal sin is dealt with to the utmost by Jesus Christ.

**1 Jn 2:2 | And he himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world...**

Jesus is the one who appeases the wrath of God which otherwise would be directed at us. He is that propitiation. He doesn't just bring it about by words. He, and more precisely His sacrifice, is that which propitiates.

Christ appeases God's wrath regarding the world's sin not just ours. Apart from that work of Christ, the patience of God might have expired. Because of Christ, the wrath of God does not immediately run its course as one day it will. God patiently continues to call men to faith in Jesus Christ without regard for their many offenses. His death is sufficient to pay for any and all sin, though it applies only to those who place faith in Him.

**1 Jn 2:3 | And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep his commandments.**

The Gnostic teachers were claiming that they had special knowledge of the secrets of the things of God. John casts doubt on their claim by stating that which is the unmistakable fruit of intimacy with God. That fruit does not consist of a casual attitude toward practical righteousness, as the Gnostics were teaching. Rather, intimacy with God ultimately demonstrates itself in obedience to his will. One who lays claim to special intimacy with God will reflect that without a word by their conformity to his standard of right behavior.

The phrase “come to know Him” should not be understood as we in the 21st century might understand it when we say someone “knows the Lord.” By that statement we mean that they have believed in Jesus Christ so as to be justified.” The Gnostics and John were talking about arrival at a point of intimate knowledge of Him, His ways and His truth.

**1 Jn 2:4 | The one who says, ‘I have come to know him.’ And does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in them.**

John does not leave the possible conclusion of what he has said in verse 4 up in the air. He immediately states the implication of verse 3 in verse 4, as if to say, “Yes you’re hearing me right.” In both verses the phrase “come to know Him” involves a perfect tense. This implies that this hypothetical person has arrived at a state of special knowledge or intimacy with God and enjoys the ongoing result of that intimacy. They have arrival at a particular spiritual plane.

This was the claim of the false teachers, but yet in practical matters they viewed righteousness as unimportant and irrelevant. John unequivocally refutes their claim here to any special spiritual authority. He says simply “they’re liars!” They have no intimacy with God and have arrived at no special state of relationship to Him. Their description of that relationship is a fabrication of their own imagination. Since the truth is not in them, they should not be looked to as spiritual guides and teachers. Whether intentional or unintentional, they are not in the pathway of truth.

This stands in stark contrast to John. He has seen and handled the word of life. As an authority on “the life,” that what others are teaching is not that life. So while John himself was speaking concerning the “logos of life,” these teachers were trafficking in fabrications.

**1 Jn 2:5 | but whoever keeps his word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:**

God’s love has motivated Him to take action that not only provides forgiveness for a person, declaring them righteous and forgiving them, but also provides for their sanctification. God joins His Spirit to that person and as they learn to discern and follow His leadings, the character of Christ is imparted to them. And so one who obeys Christ’s words does so because they have entered into all that His love has made available to them. Another way to express the idea of spiritual maturity is this that John has said. Maturity comes about as God’s love is allowed to do its complete work in us.

This statement allows for spiritual maturity and depth, but attributes it to a work of God’s love rather than just human effort. It affirms that mature Christians indeed keep God’s word. But it leaves them feeling humbled and privileged, not arrogant, elite, or untouchable. A mature Christian is blessed not superior.

The next verse will complete a very important thought introduced here by the sentence, “By this we know that we are in Him.” The expression “in Him,” does not appear to be referring to the positional sense in which Paul used the term “in Christ.” John uses “in Him” in the experiential sense of being in intimate communion with him. The expression came from Christ and is recorded in John’s gospel (John 15). It was used by Christ in this way. So John is about to make a statement about how we can know if we are functioning relationally with Christ. It is first a statement by which we can judge our own maturity. Just as important to this particular context, if we wish to find someone who should be looked to as being a source of wisdom and maturity, there is something we should look for.

### **1 Jn 2:6 | the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.**

This statement provides a test for us to use as we pick those to whom we will turn for spiritual leadership. That is contextually what John was seeking to do with this letter. And so he speaks here of the one who claims to “abide in Him.” He has used a different term than the one he introduced this thought within the previous verse. There he used the phrase “in Him.” Though two different verbs are used in these expressions, εἶμι and μένω, John seems to be using them interchangeably. The phrase used here, “abide in Him,” clarifies how John had used the phrase “in him.” To abide means to stay or remain (John 15), and describes an intimate relationship in which the resources of Christ flow into us. So we could say of those who “abide in Him” that their lives are absorbed in Him.

Now here is the important thing. John says that the unmistakable sign of intimate connection with Christ is the visible reproduction of His life. This aligns with the teaching of Jesus. This then is the visible sign we should seek as we look for spiritual leaders, teachers, and mentors.

The word “ought” speaks of obligation. It defines a clear conviction regarding thought and conduct that drives the mature Christian. At the same time it allows for the margin of human error that goes with being a fallen human being. Statements like this by John should not be viewed as absolute statements, since they could never be true of any Christian in the absolute sense. Just as Scripture defines men like Job as “blameless and upright” (Job 1:8), so it is possible to view mature Christians as those who “walk as He walked.”

The one who doesn’t keep Christ’s commands or who doesn’t walk as Christ walked is not the one who aims and misses the mark, but the one who scorns the commandments and views obedience as irrelevant as the false teachers of John’s day were doing.

This verse and the others like it in the epistle are talking about how to judge whether or not someone who claims to have special knowledge of God and special relationship with Him really in fact does. John’s point is that anyone who lives in the

presence of the Almighty One will have a deep concern for his own manner of life. One cannot experience intimacy with the Holy One and not also experience a desire to become more holy himself. How much holiness one has in the practical matters of life is a measure of one's level of fellowship with God. But John is not telling us that it is something by which we can determine the presence of saving faith. In John's mind the question, at this point, is not "are these false teachers saved?" but should these individuals be teaching and should they be accepted as authorities in matters of the faith. His answer is "no," and through such statements as these throughout the epistle he is logically building his case for the exclusion of such teachers from positions of spiritual authority.

**1 Jn 2:7 | Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had since the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.**

The Christian faith did not begin with Christ, though His life gave it greater, clearer definition. And so John's words were not new material that took the faith in some entirely new direction. That his commandment was not new agrees with John's original statements at the start of the letter, "what was from the beginning, what we have heard..." John was not claiming special knowledge as the false teachers were. He is claiming linkage with the faith as it had always been. This is a key element of orthodoxy. How does the teaching in question line up with what men of the faith of all ages and times have embraced? Is there common ground or is this a new direction? If it is a new direction, it's probably not entirely orthodox.

John is not writing a new commandment. He states forthrightly that what he is writing is linked directly to the way in which the faith has been continuously taught. He was clarifying to the readers the faith as it was originally passed on to them. The message that constitutes the faith marked their beginning in the faith. This message was unchanged from the very beginning of time. Though more of God's plan has been revealed, which casts what was known in a different light, the essence of the faith has not changed.

The apostolic pattern of the faith, the way in which it was first delivered, should remain our standard and rule. There is always safety in using this original pattern as a judge of present trends in the faith.

**1 Jn 2:8 | On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.**

On the one hand there is harmony with the old, on the other there are new things, and there are some new things John's letter would bring to light for his readers. Christ's life forever changed the role of some things. John's "commandment" was not one in particular. It was a body of statements that shed further light on the truth and

helped the readers make important judgments about the spiritual ideas and trends of their day.

This commandment is different in the sense that for the first time there is that which has produced union between man and God. There are things which are true of both Christ and us. The death of Christ provided for the complete forgiveness of our sins and allowed for God to indwell us through His Spirit. A fellowship and a union has occurred at a new level. There is new content to our faith, foretold in the Old Testament, but heralded in the New Testament.

Christ was the apex of revelation. Everything revealed before Christ was preparation. Everything after was explanation. Until Christ revelation was not complete. In Christ it became complete, though additional written revelation, like this letter from John, came to explain what had happened through His life. The darkness, ignorance of truth, had been finally “solved” through his coming. The Old Testament was like the dawning of the day. The incarnation was like the appearance of the sun in that process.

### **1 Jn 2:9 | The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.**

The one who claims understanding of truth, but at the same time hates his brother is not related to the truth in the way he thinks he is. The phrase “until now” is interesting and changes how this verse should probably be understood. The verse is probably saying that this scenario existed before the revelation of Christ and the light of truth his life brought. It was to a degree understandable, such a condition could exist due to the partial nature of revelation. Now that God has been incarnated and we have seen the full expression of His love, anyone knows the truth, knows better. If they do not live out Christ’s love, God’s love is not yet completed its work in them. They are not mature and large portions of truth remain unknown to them.

What was before attributable to ignorance is now willful ignorance, because of the work of love done by Christ and then carried on by the Holy Spirit. In both ages, hating one’s brother was a result of not being rightly related to truth. Now however, that truth is more fully known and understood. A person advanced in Christianity, as the false teachers claimed to be, should know better now. There should be no separating of believers into classes, no making of distinctions.

### **1 Jn 2:10 | The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.**

John describes the person who not only knows about the truth, but lives in it. This person stays in the spot where the truth, like light, illuminates his life. He adjusts to what that light is telling him. We must remember that with the words of this letter John is building a picture of what one who claims to have special understanding of

God lives like. Again this is to insulate the churches against the rising tide of what would come to be labeled “Gnosticism.”

The statement about there being no cause for stumbling in such a person is of course a very general statement added by John. It places a huge expectation on any Christian. It is not true in the absolute sense, except maybe to say that while one is abiding in the light this is true in the absolute sense. John is probably not writing it in this way. He is making a statement about general lifestyle, and probably specifically meant for application to those individuals we choose as our spiritual authorities. An individual who is a mature leader capable of guiding us demonstrates the love of Christ to fellow believers. They can be looked to as an asset to our faith not a liability.

**1 Jn 2:11 | 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.**

In contrast credible spiritual leaders are those who are in darkness. Darkness means outside the reach of the truth. It describes one who is not governed by truth. It is the domain occupied by the disobedient, saved and unsaved alike. The one who hates his fellow believer is outside of the boundaries imposed by truth, regardless of what he might say or think of himself.

Not only is such a one in darkness, that is outside the safety of the light of truth, but they are walking there. They are conducting life affairs there. This is where they incur great danger. The one who hates his brother is thinking he can successfully live life spiritually while ignoring this responsibility. He is vulnerable to all sorts of hidden danger as he attempts to negotiate his way through life. This is the ongoing state of one who is not reckoning with the truth. He loses all reference points. He works from a faulty perspective. He is going, but doesn't really know where, and cannot know where.

The picture John paints then of the false teacher who claims the light of “special knowledge of God,” is the extreme opposite of what they were making themselves out to be. He shows that they are not only wrong, but they are very dangerously wrong. It is impossible for such a person to serve as a spiritual guide or authority to anyone. They need rescue themselves and are to be ministered to. They are not to be viewed as a source of spiritual growth and enlightenment.

**1 Jn 2:12 | I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.**

With this John begins a series of statements aimed at those in different age groups, or different stages of their journey, or perhaps with different stations in the program and plans of God, roughly corresponding to their physical ages. In each case he delineates a truth which should be especially significant for that age or stage.

He begins with “little children,” referring to the young or at least those young in the faith. For them there is no truth more important to understand and embrace than that of forgiveness. Their sins are forgiven on the basis of something outside of themselves, “His name’s sake,” the name of Christ. This is “a new commandment.” By that we mean that such a doctrine of forgiveness came fully into view after the work of Christ. Though it was in operation by God’s grace, it became fully known and understood in John’s lifetime. John’s writing to the little children was occurring because of this great work of Christ. That work was both the cause and the purpose of John’s message to them. There is in that truth of forgiveness something especially important to the very young.

**1 Jn 2:13 | I am writing to you fathers because you know Him who has been from the beginning.” I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.**

To those further along in their life/faith, John’s purpose centers on their knowledge of the eternal one. In this there is an old/new aspect as well. Others historically had known God, those in Old Testament times. However these were those who both knew God in that traditional sense but who had also now come to understand the full revelation of Him through His Son Jesus Christ. The significant thing for this age group is their seasoned faith. This is their strength and it is what they “bring to the table” in terms of their contribution to the body of Christ. Where the very young bring a vibrant grip on God’s forgiveness, the old bring a deep knowledge of God and His ways. There were those who really knew God the Father within the faith who had to rally against those claiming, “special knowledge.”

The essence of the Christian life for young men is to overcome the evil one. Life was and is full of distractions to young men. Daily their lives hang in the balance. They can make decisions which disqualify them for God’s service daily. In Christ there is so much potential in terms of resisting evil. Armed with a strong provision for forgiveness, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, there was and is great potential for young men. Their challenge is their faith. They need to become men of faith (5:4), and thus overcome the normal pattern of simply living to provide for the gratification of the flesh. What a tradition compared to the young educated by the false teachers.

After speaking of fathers and young men, John goes back to the first group, and will once again address all three groups he has singled out. Instead of addressing the “little children” they are addressed as “children.” He switches from the present, “I am writing,” to the past, “I have written.” These are probably simple stylistic variations.

John says here that the children know the Father. He has been revealed to them and they have come to be related to Him. With the youngest of us there is an intimacy with God, and a union with God. What a contrast this would be with the false teachers who were teaching that only those with special knowledge cultivated through a long series of escapes from the limits of one’s mortality could say, “I know God.” There is in the teaching of Christianity no such system of ranks. The youngest

can truly claim to know God. It is knowledge of the Father, not simply of one of His so called “emanations.”

**1 Jn 2:14 | I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**

Nothing changes in this statement to fathers except the tense of the verb. To the ones who were most influential in the group John works to send a clear message, “You know God, the unchanging God.” He wants to stabilize the situation and keep them from thinking there is something they need to change in order to gain real knowledge of God. They could guide the movement with their knowledge of truth.

The glory of all young men is their strength (Proverbs 20:29). It can be their point of vulnerability as well. The young man who knows the truth is strong throughout. His inner strength makes his physical strength even more of an asset. John knew that the conflicts and battles for the truth would be either joined or abandoned by the young men. They were the future of the mission, their energy essential to its health.

Against all odds, young men then and now come to faith in Christ. Against all odds they overcome the evil one in terms of the battles they must classically fight for moral purity and character. The great and precious possession of a young man are his victories over the evil one in establishing and preserving his life direction. Will he be shaped by the world he is in and by the natural desires that arise in him? Or will he shape and mold those desires through the power of the Holy Spirit so that he conforms to God’s design.

**1 Jn 2:15 | Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

John commands his readers not to allow the world system to fasten its grip on them so that their values are dominated by the things that are a part of the world system. There is the recognition the world can give, the acclaim, there are the pleasures of the world, and there is a pursuit of glory and its addictive course. We must not allow our lives to be governed and regulated by these things.

John says that if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him? What does this mean? Does he mean that to the degree that we love the things related to the world’s values, God’s love toward us is reduced? Or does he mean that to the degree we love the world we remain incomplete in terms of the work of God’s love in us? It seems that both from the rest of Scripture and what John has already said this is best understood by the latter option. John has stated that those who obey God’s word reflect that God’s love has been made complete in them (1 John 2:5). The love of worldly things is a sure sign that we have not entered into all that God in His love wants to free us from. We may be justified, but we are certainly not yet sanctified.

**1 Jn 2:16 | For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life is not from the father, but is from the world.**

The world system is what it is and functions as it does as a result of three forces. The first is the lust of the flesh. That is, the cravings of man for self-gratification and self-fulfillment. The desire of man to be his own master, set his own boundaries, and be accountable to no one has marred the character of humanity since Eden. The desire to acquire—covetousness, that insatiable desire to acquire the things of others for one's own pleasure is the second force behind the world system. The third is the tendency towards self-glorification. It is the desire to elevate oneself above all others and at their expense. These three things that John speaks of are the heart and soul of those who have not been justified by faith and brought to maturity by the full work of God's love.

These things do not have as their source, God. We must not be deluded by anything motivated by these forces. If you see these things, you can be sure you're not dealing with a movement of God, but a fleshly, earthly influence.

**1 Jn 2:17 | And the world is passing away, and also its lusts. But the one who does the will of God abides forever.**

Though this system dominates, it is on its way out.; The pursuit of such things is short sighted, because they will pass away and the desire for them will pass away. In terms of eternity, the things we kill for and run over others for, will lose their luster to where we look back and can't believe what we were willing to do to gain something of such fleeting value. Like all the fads of the world system the desire for the things of the earth one day will be taken from us.

“But the one who does the will of God abides forever.” Or perhaps better, “the doing of the will of God abides forever.” Doing God's will is never going to be “out “ in terms of the wisdom of it, the value of it, and the sheer joy of it. All other activities we pursue, all other desires we chose will be regrettable one day. The pursuit of the will of God will not be.

**1 Jn 2:18 | Children, it is the last hour. Just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen. By this we know that it is the last hour.**

The belief of John and all the apostles was that in terms of world history we were entering the final stage. In their minds the time was short. More importantly, in the Holy Spirit's mind and therefore by God's standard this is an accurate statement.

All that had transpired before Christ was preliminary. The revelation of Jesus Christ was the event toward which all of history pointed. Now that He had died and risen again, and sent the Holy Spirit, all was in place for His second coming. In terms of necessary events that had been prophesied and revealed, there was nothing left to

fulfill before the coming of the final events prophesied by Daniel and John. John was, after all, an authority on end times prophecy. Coming from him this is a significant statement, but most of all, coming from the Holy Spirit it is a significant statement. In some sense, we are living in the last hour. The term used is ωρα, which speaks of a moment, an instant, an occasion, a short indefinite period of time. Either from the viewpoint of the overall time allotted to world history or from the viewpoint of prophetic events remaining to be fulfilled, John was living in the “last hour.”

The early church was clearly taught a doctrine that a specific individual opposed to Christ would come on the world scene. Here, John suggests that at the present time many such individuals had come on the scene. In terms of what they were advocating they were aligning themselves with that ruler, though they might lack the power and mystique that would belong to him. Individuals with this type of doctrine were to be considered every bit as dangerous and as unorthodox as that great ruler of the last days. This is a very dramatic way of characterizing the dangers of the doctrines beginning to invade the church in John’s day.

Wherever the gospel has been preached there has arisen teaching which opposes it, prevents it, and seeks to strip it of its power which is truth. Jesus had taught the twelve that this would be characteristic of the times between Christ’s first coming and his second coming (Matthew 24:23-24). John affirms his belief in the imminent return of Christ and he reaffirms the idea that doctrine which is anti-Christ will continually have to be purged from the church by its leaders and members.

**1 Jn 2:19 | They went out from us but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.**

John had observed Judas. Among the twelve all were baffled by the prospect that one of them would betray Christ. John himself had posed the question of who this person was to Jesus (John 13:24-25). Still, when Jesus gave clear indication, it never entered the minds of the eleven that Judas was not with them (John 13:26-30). He was that good!

These teachers who turned out to be anti-Christ had in some way been connected with the orthodox leaders of the faith. They may even have had some type of official sanctioning. They were at the very least considered to be “church people,” and “part of the household of the faith.” John simply says of them, “they were not of us.” They did not really have their source in what we embrace and sanction as the truth. The sanctioning in the end does not matter. We must look at two things. In the previous material John has emphasized the importance of behavior. Here he is going to emphasize doctrine taught as a means of discerning if someone is walking in the light of truth.

John is saying that if these individuals had shared a common source with us, a common fellowship with God the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ, they would

have continued to be in doctrinal harmony with us and in fellowship with us (i.e., 1 John 1:3). As it is they are not “with us,” that is not serving the same cause or advancing the same truths. Common fellowship with God produces a common mission, common doctrine and common lifestyle. In the spiritual realm, a common source produces commonality.

Not all who come along teaching share a common source of truth with us. In fact those who drift away in doctrine or in lifestyle demonstrate clearly that they are drawing from a different spiritual source. Their verbalization of their doctrine and belief system and the lifestyle they embrace are windows into their soul. They reveal the level of their intimacy with God.

Unorthodoxy begins with weak fellowship, either with God or God’s people, or both. It soon blatantly takes that direction. A splinter group develops, isolated from the body of Christ. Sin always comes from the loss of fellowship with God, and leads to loss of fellowship with God’s people.

### **1 Jn 2:20 | But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.**

Anointing always implies special choices, an appointing and marking out for a specific office and task, and the bestowal of divine enablement for that office and task. The anointing in the Old Testament had an outward symbol, the pouring of oil on the head. It symbolized the choice of God, his appointment and enablement, all three of which are important. Hence oil became in some ways a type of the Holy Spirit. He was the person of the Trinity who provided the anointed one with the enablement for the office, task and mission to which they had been called of God.

The anointing John is referring to here is likely a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit which places a believer in the body of Christ. They are by this act joined to Christ and to His family at the moment of belief. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit within them and through each other, Christians can know whom to follow and entrust with spiritual authority in their lives. By being attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, they do not succumb to the enticement of false doctrine. They live in the way they are taught and remain true to the truths they receive. They need only occasional reminders and exhortations from those when they have entrusted with spiritual authority. They are this way in accordance with their level of fellowship with God and His people.

### **1 Jn 2:21 | I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.**

John is not dealing with ignorant people in this letter. He is not dealing with people who need more information. His purpose is not to impart more knowledge, but to impart more wisdom. They had no need to grow in knowledge on these points. They

did need to increase in wisdom. They knew the truth, now they needed help applying it in real life.

To know the truth is to have that by which a lie can be judged. Only through the truth can truth be determined. Without it one is susceptible to lies. With it one only has to use it to identify and reject all that is not in harmony with it. By this statement John is insulating his readers against the false teaching of any sort which would suggest “new truth” or “deeper truth,” or “secret truth,” or “greater truth.” His implication is, do not be vulnerable to the enticement of such ideas, and beware of mixtures where there is some truth and some lies.

No lie has its source in truth and therefore in the truthful One. “In Him there is no darkness at all.”

### **1 Jn 2:22 | Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.**

John moves from talking about lies to talking about liars. The ultimate example of a liar is any person or group who deny that Jesus is the promised One of the Old Testament. Nothing could be more contrary to what had been received by the Church from Christ and so named “Christianity.” Since such an idea is not in harmony with the truth that had been delivered in the Gospel to the readers, it is clearly a lie. It is the most dangerous of lies because it strikes at the very heart of the truth of Christianity, the identity of Christ. Such a teaching aligned with the position of the Jews who crucified Christ rather than with the Church He had established.

In the denial of Christ, there is not simply a denial of the Son of God, but a denial of God Himself. This was the teaching that the apostles heard from Jesus (John 5:36-47). The individual who denies Christ is the antichrist, and he is anti-God in terms of the personal being who has revealed Himself. He may be pro-God in conceptual terms, believing in a god, but he is anti-God in terms of the true God who became the man Jesus Christ.

### **1 Jn 2:23 | Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.**

One cannot arrive at faith in Christ apart from the work of God the Father. It is God the Holy Spirit influencing according to the will of God the Father which brings about faith. So belief in Christ starts with a decision made by God the Father. No one on their own initiative reaches the same thought toward Christ as God the Father (John 6:44). One only gets that thought as a result of a decree of God the Father and the ensuing presence and influence of God through the Holy Spirit. Belief in Christ is the sure sign that such fellowship, such intimate sharing of information has begun. Such a person who believes has seen, heard, and handled the things of God, and has reached a God-guided conclusion.

**1 Jn 2:24 | As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If that which you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.**

Now from a digression regarding unbelievers and antichrist, John turns once again to the believers he is writing to. In view of all the false teachers and teachings bombarding them what should these believers do? They should allow the truth, as they have received it and been taught it, to be their guide. It should be the standard by which all teaching is either accepted or rejected. John says, “let it remain in you,” that is, do not allow it to be displaced by other teaching so that it loses its position of influence and control in your life.

This whole verse is built around one idea stated twice in the middle. That one idea is, “what you heard from the beginning.” It refers to the body of truth that composed the faith as the apostles originally delivered it to them. On either side of the two statements of that idea is a statement about a certain spiritual condition. The first is a statement about a condition we must choose that of allowing what we heard from the beginning to abide in us--be the guiding truth of our lives. The last statement in the verse lays out the condition which will develop if that which we heard abides in us. The person who does this will continue in intimate fellowship with God the Father, and God the Son.

Staying on a right doctrinal path results in unbroken fellowship with God. Therefore this should be the focus of one’s spiritual efforts. It is the truth that sets us free and keeps us from being in the darkness, away from the experience of all that God’s love has for us.

**1 Jn 2:25 | And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.**

John speaks of the important promise that is ours as a result of our belief in what we have heard from the beginning. It is eternal life. The phrase eternal life represents a quality of life in this letter. The fact that it is eternal in terms of time is true, but almost incidental to the message of the book. It is “the life” that John had seen, heard, touched and handled in Christ. So it was a lifestyle, that of living each moment in partnership with our Creator. It was the life that would have lasted Adam forever if he would not have abandoned it.

John is saying that God has obligated Himself to give us eternal life. It is His promise to us. It will be delivered. It is not a discovery of some initial information/clues that guide us on some sort of soul journey resulting in immortality. Eternal life is a blessing from God, guaranteed by Him, in response to our faith.

**1 Jn 2:26 | These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.**

This is a very critical verse with big implications on how John's letter is interpreted. It is a clear statement in the body of the letter of the reason for the words he has written. They are intended to be applied to false teachers. Such individuals were present and were intentionally trying to lead Christians astray. John's concern to insulate the church against these individuals is clear both indirectly in his line of argument, and directly through this statement. It is key to understanding the whole book. Applying the book as a rule by which we can know people are Christians can lead to big trouble. Applying it to those who are under consideration for authority in spiritual matters is its intent. It weeds out false teachers not false Christians.

**1 Jn 2:27 | And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; 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.**

This is a second "as for you" statement (1 John 2:24), showing that there is a set of teachings John is giving concerning the false teachers, but a distinctly different set of expectations for the Church. When someone was anointed, it symbolized the choice of God, His appointment and enablement, all three of which are important.

The anointing John is referring to here is the baptism and subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit which occurs at the moment of belief. His presence enables us to be God's priests and in that office to officially carry out the specific work for which we have been chosen. The Holy Spirit abides in us. He remains. There is nothing in this verse which would indicate that our task is to help that anointing remain in us. It is a very matter-of-fact work of God as a result of His sovereign choice.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to address our hearts with the issues that are on God's heart for us. In the final analysis that is the only way we learn in regard to spiritual things. Apart from his illumination of the truths of God so that we comprehend them and apply them to the detail of our lives there is no real learning on our parts. So the fact of the Christian life is that though God uses many human instruments to bring information into our lives, apart from the Holy Spirit acting both in them and in us there would be no real learning on our parts.

When John says here that we have no need for teachers, he is not saying that Christians need no instruction at all in the truths of Scriptures. There is much we need to be taught or God would not have bestowed within the Church the gift of teaching on certain individuals. This statement must be understood in the context of the type of teaching coming to the specific Churches of John's time. False teachers were suggesting the need for new information, education on the "deeper secrets" of spirituality, the journey of the soul towards oneness with God to Christians. No believer has ever needed that. They do need instruction in the truth God has revealed recorded in the Bible.

John was addressing Churches in which there were mature believers. The Holy Spirit's presence applying the truth of God's word, was bringing about in them oneness with God. The reality is that any "secret knowledge" was a long step down from the heights to which God had already taken them. Like them, we have no need of private spiritual gurus who will take us into spiritual realms beyond the Scripture inaccessible to us. The spiritual realms are already unveiled, thrown open to us. It is all ours through Christ who has given us the Holy Spirit as our personal helper in these matters. Why would we seek information on achieving oneness with God when we're already been given it, when we're already beyond that step?

The Holy Spirit's instruction extends to all areas of our lives. His nature is such that His instruction is absolutely true. It is also truthful. Therefore it is worthy of our obedience and should be the course by which our lives are guided. Nothing else makes sense.

Having established the foundation for obedience to the teaching/convictions of the Holy Spirit, John now says that this teaching should be the rule of our life. He states that there is a specific manner in which the Christian faith is to be practiced and a certain way in which one's relationship to Christ should manifest itself. It should be "just as" it has been taught. "Just as" should be understood as "in the manner that," or "according to the course that." The point is that we should be wary of those claiming to be carrying on a relationship to Christ who are living a life which goes against all that the Holy Spirit has taught to us. There will be more similarities than differences between the conduct of those who really are in fellowship with the Father and the Son.

**1 Jn 2:28 | and now, little children, abide in Him, so that if He should appear, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.**

People who know the times and understand they call for from God's people are of great value (1 Chronicles 12:32). The words "and now" indicate that the times, the current state of things, required a certain response from the Church. To John there was a threat to both their individual faith and the faith as a whole that could only be met by Christians rising in mass to stay put in the doctrine and practice which had been handed down through the apostles by Christ. Instead of following a new strain of teaching, the times called for those of the faith to remain loyal to the practice of the faith they had been taught.

Abiding now will result in confidence then, when Jesus returns. How could we possibly feel prepared for facing Him if we disregard His teachings? John desires to provide moorings for the faith of the young Church. So he appeals to the great future event that was the heart of the message of the early Church, the return of Christ. He is the one we will face and who will ultimately pass judgment as the course our lives take. Different teachers that come our way will not. Therefore He is the one we must please and others must be made to conform their expectations to His since he is the head of the Church.

There is a scenario we can fall into that will make us experience regret and shame at Christ's coming, even though we are His children. It is the failure to remain loyal to all that He has said.

**1 Jn 2:29 | If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.**

“The Life” as lived by Jesus is the pursuit of righteousness. To pursue that life is to pursue righteousness. To pursue that life requires belief in the one who lived it. That is the entry level. By believing in Him we are born again, a spiritual rebirth that is of Him. Belief is the result of God's work of grace which has transpired in our lives. Therefore when we see someone pursuing “the life,” we know that they have been born again because that pursuit can only be centered into through new birth.

This is the first of several occurrences of the term “does righteousness.” The Greek word rendered “practices” is ποιῶν. There are several Greek words John had to choose from to express the idea of “doing.” These have overlapping meanings, each with their own subtlety which must not be pressed too hard. This word's meaning is simply “to do,” but when its usages are compared with other “to do” words, its meaning may be shaded towards having in view the object or end of the action. So it is used to distinguish the type of action that leaves a visible result from that which just does something. This distinction could be illustrated in this way. When someone sings a song and finishes, nothing remains except a memory. When someone builds a house and finishes, a clear result is visible to the eye. They have “done” the building of the house. That is a shade of meaning that is possible (not essential), in the word ποιῶν.

So here John might not be talking about just doing righteous deeds in and of themselves, but about bringing about righteousness, righteous objectives, producing a climate of righteousness. A biblical example of this interpretation can be found in 1 Peter 2:22, where ποιῶν is the word used to describe Christ's sinlessness in 1 Peter 2:22. He not only did no sin, but He produced no evil fruit by His life. Since John's concern is leaders and teachers, this verse interpreted in this way serves as a good reminder to ask, “Are these leaders bringing about in others righteousness or unrighteousness?” That's a key question to ask of spiritual guides. What do they bring about? John also uses a present tense, so that continuing action, or repeated and ongoing action could be in view.

Two different words are used for now. There is overlap in the meanings and John may have used different words for stylistic reasons. He may also have been making a precise distinction. εἰδητε is used in the phrase, “If (or since) you know He is righteous...” the conditional phrase at the beginning of the verse. This term refers to knowledge gained through the senses, coming from the word meaning to see. The idea is to see with the mind's eye. Γινώσκετε is used in the middle of the verse in the apodosis, in the phrase, “you know that everyone also...” This is knowledge gained from processing or reflecting on the facts. Again there is much overlap in

meaning in the two words, but there is this subtle distinction as well. It could well be that John was seeking to make the following distinction. Since we know for a fact, on the basis of revelation that He is righteous, then we can know by reason and logical deduction that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

In the verse there is no statement about the one who does not practice righteousness. The verse is simply a statement made about one who does righteous deeds. The context is judging teachers and supposedly mature spiritual leaders not simply individuals. A teacher of spiritual things claiming to be born of Him will be one who brings about righteousness in his own life and in the lives of others. And so we have a good rule by which we discern qualified leaders. We do not have a rule by which to judge fellow believers “true identity.”

# 1 John 3

**1 Jn 3:1 | See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us.**

It is a great blessing to be able to say, “I am a child of God.” It is great love that is manifested in the bestowal of this title because it is more than a title. It is a position of privilege. It is a sharing of all that He has and all that He is. It is a great love because it is done apart from merit on our part, since any righteousness we do is a result of our being born of him as John has just stated. As the readers feel John’s love, he now wants to remind them of God’s love. It is a great love of which we are the privileged recipients and are thus adopted as God’s children.

“Children of God” is not just warm, fuzzy language John chose to use to create a family atmosphere, or to get people to pull together. It is a fact, pure and simple, that describes our standing. It is not an illustration pulled from our world to convey endearment to us. It is a legal reality summarized in two simple words, **καὶ ἐσμὲν**.

“Know” here is **γινώσκει**, knowledge gained by pondering one’s observations. It involves personal perspective and insight that has been acquired. It is a relational word implying time spent not only observing what someone does but gaining insight into why they do it. The world might know us by name, but they do not understand us or our lives, our hearts, and our agenda.

To know Christ in this way is to have perceived facts about God and to understand the heart and agenda behind those facts. This is the path a child of God journeys, while the worldly person is on a completely different path. They may know basic facts about God but they do not know Him in the relational sense, and so cannot know His children. They have never invested the thought required to come to the point of perceiving all the implications of what they know about God. The result is that they have not arrived at the point of a relational knowledge of Him, and so cannot possibly have relationship that involves a total exchange with His children.

**1 Jn 3:2 | Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.**

We currently have a position of privilege, a great one, to be called children of God. But there is more to come. What we are and have now been just the beginning. “The Life” has been manifested. What we will finally be has not been manifested (**φανερω**). This ties in with Paul’s teaching that our life in the Spirit is “the earnest” of our inheritance, that “eye hath not seen nor ear heard the things God has prepared for those who love Him.” Even the resurrection body of Christ does not reveal what

we will be. There are glimpses and clues, just as the Old Testament gave glimpses and clues of the present age.

What we will be has not been manifested, but when Jesus is manifested (same word) we will be like Him. We do not know what we will be, but we know that we will be like Jesus. The image of God will be fully restored to us. Man in his full glory, as he was meant to be is what Christ is and that “model” of man has not been unveiled to us. Just as Moses face glowed when he met God, so there will be great power in the presence of Christ which will instantly change us. In Moses’ face the change was cosmetic but in us there will be a change in substance. Along with that change of body will be a change in the inner man so that we are freed from the presence of sin. We will be like Him in terms of our physical bodies and like Him in terms of our moral character.

This is the Christian teaching on sanctification. It is not simply a matter of a spirit journey or a spiritual destination. It is not simply arriving at a higher level of consciousness. It involves a different body. That body will not be the flesh and blood we know, but it will still be matter, that thing the false teachers of the day were calling evil. Thus, matter is not the source of evil. To diagnose one’s problem of sin by saying its power comes from matter is to miss it.

**1 Jn 3:3 | And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure.**

The cultural thought beginning to influence the believers of the day suggested that sin is inherent in matter. Sin’s power over us they said was unavoidable since our bodies are composed of evil matter. Our ambition should be to not be concerned about indulging the body, since it is matter and so incurably evil. Indulge and enjoy they said, sin was irrelevant. The immaterial soul would be freed from the body and so we would find a higher plane of living.

To follow such thinking was to develop the wrong approach to sin in our lives, and so be enslaved to it. Through this thinking one’s attitude could easily become “God’s just has to deal with my sin habit since I’m utterly powerless.” The result would be a life of waiting for a magic moment when we escape the influence of all matter.

Right thinking teaches that the source of evil lies in the immaterial realm. The Holy Spirit controls that realm, and my body can be made to follow the Spirit’s dictates. Therefore I have a certain responsibility and power with regard to sin. There is something wrong in my physical being, but that is an effect not a cause. I am evil in the immaterial part of my being. That situation the Holy Spirit helps me combat now, and in the future God will rescue me totally from it, and give me a new body that is unscarred by evil.

Here John teaches something about the person who embraces this right thinking. They hope in this inner and outer renewal through Christ which will ultimately lead us

to perfect and absolute holiness. Such a person enters into that inner renewal now, and through the power of the Holy Spirit purifies himself and seeks to be like Christ even now. This inner renewal, or sanctification, John refers to as purifying oneself. The term purify calls to mind so many symbols imbedded in the Jewish worship system. There were myriads of purity rituals, continuous and ongoing. This is pivotal to understanding I John. John is not demanding a state of purity but a process of purification based on proper understanding. He is saying in this statement that a teacher who rightly understands our nature and our destination involves himself in the pursuit of holiness now.

**1 Jn 3:4 | Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.**

Sin as a principle operating in us is the drive to be one's own master apart from the regulation of truth. The law is a revelation of true morality. The one who does sin (ποιεω, perhaps establishes it in and around himself), is living as if the law doesn't exist. Either through ignorance or rebellion, in his lifestyle he is lawless, setting the law aside at the bidding of his own desires. To sin is an offence against the law, truth, and ultimately it is an offense against God. A sinful life is a lawless life.

**1 Jn 3:5 | And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins and in Him there is no sin.**

The purpose of Christ's manifestation and appearance on the earth was to deal decisively with sins. Here, "sins" is likely meant as a reference to the actual acts, individual transgressions of the law. The incarnation did not immediately result in the taking away of sin, meaning the sin principle or the presence of evil. It did take away the penalty of sin, allow for forgiveness, and allow for the new ministry of the Holy Spirit. All of this broke sin's power in such a way as to allow individuals victory over temptation to sin. The sanctification of those who believe, their ability to live a holy life, was all provided for through the incarnation. So Christ's first coming was to take away sins. Sin as a personal force and as a principle will be done away with through the provision of the cross, but that we are still looking for.

When John says that in Christ there is no sin, he probably means that in Him there is not simply a lack of sins, meaning individual misdeeds. By the singular he means that because Jesus is the perfect man, there is no sin nature in Him, what Scripture refers to as "the flesh." He had no inner instinct toward sin.

**1 Jn 3:6 | No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.**

"As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the

Father” (1 John 2:24). That is an important earlier statement by John that helps us understand what he means “abide in Him.” By this earlier statement we see that abiding in Christ refers to being true to the teachings of Christ. There is a relational result that abiding in truth brings about. It results in fellowship, depth of personal relationship, with God and Jesus. Here John is saying that if someone claims to have a close connection and relationship to Christ and God, their life will not be characterized by sin. It is failure to have that fellowship that leads to sin.

What John has said earlier is also true--“if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves.” So all people sin, even mature believers. John’s purpose is to make yet another statement about fellowship with God so that we can rightly discern the truth especially when confronted with false teachers and pseudo-spiritual leaders who claim a special intimacy with God. So here we have a statement which enables us to evaluate all claims to intimacy with God. It also guards against any invasion of doctrine which gives believers license to do evil. That is its intent as shown by the next phrase.

There is a contrast brought out by the second part of the verse which speaks of the one who lives apart from truth and apart from Christ and therefore lives in sin. The verbs “see” and “know” in this second phrase are perfect tenses, indicating a state or ongoing result which has not been arrived at. They speak of the state at which a person arrives when it can be said of them that they have come to perceive Christ for who He is and have come to a point of relational intimacy with Him. They are not synonyms for a believer. They are terms that are relational. They describe mature, seasoned believers who have totally perceived the message of Christ. One who does not “know” in this sense Christ, or “see” Him in this sense, has not yet reached maturity. They should not be looked to as leaders. A lack of obedience is a lack of truth.

### **1 Jn 3:7 | Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous just as He is righteous;**

On this point we are apparently in danger of being deceived. Our vulnerability is alluded to through the way in which John addresses us. We can deduct from this that there will be the presence of teachers and teachings which lead us to believe that sin is not a serious matter. John states the matter plainly because those he is addressing were facing teachers who taught that because sin was done in the material world by our material bodies it is irrelevant and of no particular consequence. John wants to clearly identify the spirit which is behind such a thought. Teaching that brings about righteous living can be traced back to Christ. He pursued righteousness on this earth. Those who occupy themselves with the same task show that they are of the same stuff, kindred in Spirit.

**1 Jn 3:8 | The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil.**

Just as it is possible to discern the Spirit of Christ in someone who brings about righteousness, so the teaching that says that sin is of no consequence can be traced back to the devil. It is he who originated that idea and it is he who lives by it. So the one living by that idea, is living by that spirit and is therefore living by the influence and leading of the devil.

Sin is the devil's trademark and always has been. From the beginning sin has been characteristic of his realm and all his work. When we find sin we have the presence of the devil. He leaves the mark of his influence through sin. Sin shows he has been at work.

Christ's purpose in the incarnation is clearly stated here. Where the devil is working, sin is the result. Since Christ came to destroy his works and does not fail, it is only logical to say that when Christ is working sin will diminish, and righteousness will prevail. Righteousness is the trademark of Christ and its presence shows His presence. He and those working according to His influence produce righteousness.

**1 Jn 3:9 | No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.**

Given the evil one's desire to enslave and keep people from truth, we should expect that an idea would arise within Christianity that sin was of no real consequence. John wants to make an important and a dramatic statement regarding this false notion that was arising in the Christian movement. The statement he makes here has frequently divided Christian thinkers. There are many Christian doctrines represented and at stake in it. But it is a critical statement for the health of the Church.

Literally, John's words are "all the ones born of God sin do not do." The phrase "All the ones born of God," delineates who he is speaking of. Who are those who are "born of God"? In 1 John 5:1 he clearly states that "everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." In both passages he uses a perfect tense of the word rendered born, which signifies completed action resulting in an ongoing state. They have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are sons of God. Whatever he is saying here then, extends to all who believe Jesus to be the Christ. The term "No one" clearly states that there are no exceptions in terms of this observation. It is an observation which extends to all who are a part of God's family. What he says about them is that they do not do sin. The meaning of this is where much of the disagreement occurs.

What does it mean to "do" sin? It cannot mean that a Christian never commits individual acts of sin. That would make the entire book contradictory. Yet it is undeniable that this is what the words say, the person born of God commits no sin.

The phrase “not able to sin” that is found in the second half of the verse adds further to the problem. It begs this question, “In what sense is one who is born of God not able to sin?”

The idea that a believer cannot sin creates two problems. First, the voice of our own experience objects. It teaches us that people born of God can and do sin. Second, and more importantly, if taken in this plain literal way, the verse is unscriptural. It contradicts dozens of verses and contradicts John’s earlier testimony in this letter, that all men, even believer’s sin. John has stated that “If we claim to have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

So what does John mean when he says that “All the ones born of God sin do not do”?

Many interpret John to be saying that Christians do not engage in habitual, patterns of sinful living. This is the meaning assigned the phrase by the NASB and the word “practices” is inserted as the rendering for the term do. This is grammatically possible, in that repetitive action is within the range of the normal uses of the present tense in Greek. So it is plausible from a purely syntactical point of view that John is saying that all who are born of God do not lead sinful lives. Those who embrace this position usually view the verse as addressing the problem of those who profess belief, but are not really believers. If we understand the verse in this way, we are taking the phrase “do sin” to mean a sinful pattern of some sort.

While initially appearing to solve the problem, with only a little thought the problem rears its head again. Who can really say that such a thing is true of them in the absolute sense? For if a person never arrives at a point where they can say they are free of sin then they are in the absolute sense habitual sinners. So though from a grammatical point of view the phrase can be understood this way, such an interpretation does not clear up the problems.

A second way to understand the verse is to understand the meaning of the phrase “born of God” to mean something like “functioning in a born of God manner.” Those who take this position would say that in this verse the one who is fellowshiping with God and so functioning as a born again person, does not commit sin. This has the advantage of aligning the verse itself with the rest of Scripture, no small accomplishment. The disadvantage is that it is not congruous with the plain message of the text, nor with the clear statement of the meaning of the phrase “born of God” in 1 John 5:1, where it says that “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”

A third way of viewing the verse is to let the context we have already noted, particularly that John is speaking to Christians about who they should accept as leaders and authorities in matters of faith, influence how we take the phrase “born of God.” We can view this statement as hyperbole, a deliberate overstatement to drive home the point of verse seven, which was “let no one deceive you.” We are saying that just as Jesus used hyperbole (i.e. if your right eye offend you, pluck it out), John

uses it here to say in effect no one living in sin should be regarded as born of God and given authority to shape your lives.

Granted, it is risky to term something in Scripture hyperbole. Could we not arbitrarily do that with many statements in Scripture? Would we not rob the entire book of its truth? Though there are these dangers, the fact remains that hyperbole is used throughout Scripture. This third view bears further examination.

It is not an overstatement to say that if these words are taken in their plain, ordinary sense the book is hopelessly contradictory. Very often when there is such a problem it is because a figure of speech is involved. It seems legitimate to propose that John used hyperbole here to set forth a very important rule to use when affirming leaders and teachers, a rule that should never be compromised. Teachers who are involved in sinful living are to be regarded as would be one who was “not born again.” In other words they would not be regarded as a valuable source of spiritual guidance.

Setting aside the issue of hyperbole for a moment, a further resolution can be found in the word rendered “do,” which is ποιέω. A particular shade of meaning attached to the usage of this word has been mentioned earlier (See note at 1 John 2:29). ποιέω has a broad range of meaning. In addition to meaning “to do,” it can also focus on the result, what is “brought forth” by the act of doing. Doing sin then could be legitimately understood to mean the reproduction of sin in the lives of others. Taken in this way the message of the verse is that no believer engages in teaching that reproduces evil in the lives of others. The contextual concern of providing a rule and standard by which false teachers could be identified make this a likely possibility.

Tying all of this together, John speaks of “doing sin,” and he is speaking of a continuous ongoing chain-reaction that emanates from the lives of pseudo-spiritual leaders and teachers and is reproduced in others whom they influence and lead. They commit personal acts of sin but more critically they reproduce through their false teaching such acts in the lives of others. They “do” sin and they reproduce it. He adds to this a hyperbolic statement, the practical meaning of which is that those who in this way propagate sin should not even be considered born again in terms of their value as spiritual leaders. The intended use of this verse by John is that it be applied to so called spiritual leaders (note his statements in 1 John 2:26;3:7).

Perhaps in this way the verse would come to have great value over the centuries of time that would transpire before Christ’s return. The Holy Spirit was laying down the rule of Christian practice. Much the same as we might say, “It is not American to be racist!” or “It is not American to be intolerant of divergent religious beliefs!” So God’s desire might have been to say, “It is not born again to live a life of sin!” This would insure that in the centuries of sin and abuse by Christian leaders to follow, it could never be said that such conduct was the accepted practice of anyone who lived the Christian faith.

In all times there have been teachers and teachings, which were supposedly Christian, which not only allowed sin but embraced it and encouraged its practice. It

is very likely that to fend off the horror of such teaching, John would use hyperbole, as Paul did in such cases (Galatians 5:12), to make a dramatic statement to the church about how such teachers and teachings should be regarded. The exact sense in which John is speaking may have been lost with the times.

Two other things should be noted about the last phrase of this verse. John says, “His seed abides in him. He is referring here to the spiritual seed of God, referring to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. That is a remarkable figure of speech which clearly is meant to show that there is an organic change in the life of one who is born again. The Holy Spirit’s restraint is operating in the life of the believer, and a believer who is spiritual and whose life is to be imitated listens to that restraining voice.

John literally says of a born again person “he is not able to sin...” The question was posed earlier, in what sense is this true?. Many conservative theologians would have problems saying, “Christ was not able to sin,” and would prefer to say, “Christ was able not to sin.” To say that any human other than Christ is not able to sin goes against all of Scripture.

The same basic argument used to explain the first phrase of the verse are employed here as well. But it seems that a legitimate way of understanding it is to view it as a deliberate and dramatic overstatement that adds emphasis to John’s purpose in the letter. If it is considered hyperbolic, the meaning of this statement would be something like this; a Christian person who is mature enough to be considered as a guide to others is able to sin, but at great discomfort due to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

**1 Jn 3:10 | By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.**

John gives two tell-tale signs that follow leadership done in the Spirit—righteousness and love. In fact, so reliable is this rule that it makes obvious the distinction between those who are serving God’s purposes and those serving those of the devil. The word rendered “obvious” is the word for revealing or making something manifest, used earlier in the letter to describe the incarnation (1 John 1:2).

It is instructive that when it comes down to stating the test that reveals spiritual identity, the test is based on the question, “Is righteousness present?” Not “Is sin present?” Again, the idea is that of producing righteous fruit, the word “do” be ποιων. The thing which will be present in a legitimate spiritual leader is the fruit of righteousness and it will be found flourishing among those he influences.

This does not mean the children of the devil never do anything good. It simply means that they do not pursue righteousness in and of itself. Behind much supposed good there is quite often some evil, fleshly intent, which makes the good deeds unrighteousness.

The presence of the pursuit of righteousness in a movement is ultimately what authenticates the true spiritual leader's identity, and "manifests" him to others. We must remember in using such tests that they are meant to be applied to those who would lead us. They must be applied in that way, and even then carefully since we cannot see the evil that may lurk in the heart of someone.

The addition of the "nor" statement is a very important one and lines up with the teaching of Jesus about love. This "nor the one..." statement also begins a transition in John's thought. He has discussed protecting ourselves from the dangers without i.e., false teachers. Now he will focus on the dangers arising from within the church and within our own minds.

**1 Jn 3:11 | For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;**

From the beginning probably refers to the beginning of man since John immediately begins to speak of Cain. It is a part of earliest revelation this exhortation to love and has been the primary thing God has called men to in all ages (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40). John is offering the whole of revelation as support for his assertion that it is the presence of love that tips us off regarding someone's spiritual roots. If they and their message is coming from God it will be marked by obedience and the presence of love since the call to love has been the age-old cry of God.

**1 Jn 3:12 | not as Cain who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous.**

It is not easy to determine whether Cain was what we would call "a believer" at the point of his transgression. He certainly believed in God, enough so that he brought a sacrifice. Though it is usually stated that God had given instruction ahead of time on the matter of what was an acceptable sacrifice, this is conjecture. It could just as likely be that He was using this incident as the occasion to teach about acceptable sacrifice. In that case Cain's offering itself would not have been a transgression, though it is possible that it became so due to his motive in offering it. It is certain that his response to correction was outside of the will of God. It is also evident that once the entire matter was over, Cain left the presence of God and so became the father of godless civilization.

The example of Cain provides insight into what it means in John's mind to say of someone "they're of the evil one." It means they go against truth as God has revealed it. This results in action that is against the will of God, follows their own desires, and results in those things that manifest their rebellion. In this sense and in any given moment, a believer can be "of the devil" if they have left the bounds of truth (James 3:13-16).

Envy reigned where love should have. Instead of allowing truth to govern his actions, Cain allowed his own flesh to take over and become the first murderer. He also became a spiritual father to all who would choose to ignore truth and bring the world to the destruction of the deluge. Choosing to do evil over what the truth demands does not negate the influence of truth within us. In the case of Cain the truth of God regarding his sacrifice so haunted him that he drove himself to violence. Sin mastered him once he left the bounds of truth, once he refused to deal with it as God had commanded. When sin gets the upper hand, there is no limit to one's disregard for and distortion of the truth.

**1 Jn 3:13 | Do not marvel, brothers, if the world hates you.**

The thing which happened in the case of Cain is instructive and it continues to happen. There is that haunting, punishing side to truth that is not visible when one conforms to it. But when we get on the wrong side of truth, sin master's us and there is no limit in terms of what it drives us toward. We should not at all find it strange that the world hates us, because of what they have done with respect to the truth. There is an intolerance toward the truth and even violence that begins to breed within the person who rejects the truth.

**1 Jn 3:14 | We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.**

The "lesson of Cain" should come to mind when we observe any who do not love those inside the family of God. Those who do not love are on the wrong side of truth and their reaction is very predictable. Through this John is providing another great test of teachers who would come into the church. Do they love the family of God or do they disdain it, and try to destroy it? Is their regard on their part for those of the truth? If not it is because they are having a reaction to it.

The life and death metaphor is used essentially the same by John as it is by Paul. It is a way of contrasting the regenerate and the unregenerate (John 5:24). A growing love within us for the family of God is an assurance to others that we have crossed over from death into life. We are one with them. If such a thing is absent it is because we have remained in death. The question remains; how much love does one need to have in order to pass this test? The answer to that can be deduced from the second phrase. Love must be present, that's it. John is not so much interested in giving believers a test to impose on themselves as he is of having them impose their experience of Christianity on those who were passing themselves off as spiritual guides and teachers. If anyone did not love the family of God, it is certain that they should not be given influence in the Christian community.

**1 Jn 3:15 | Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has Eternal life abiding in Him.**

In what sense is everyone who hates his brother a murderer? Hate is what drives murder, so that anyone who allows himself to hate has by that developed the inner capacity to murder. Within, they have the same identity as a murderer. Some have suggested that God is equating hatred with murder. That is probably going too far, though both are sin and they are dissimilar only because of a missing action.

In Biblical language the term “brother” is used of a broader family than one’s physical family. In the Old Testament it referred to a fellow Israelite, all who traced their ancestry back to Abraham. In the New Testament this use persists, and it also was adapted to the Church. It came to be used of one’s fellow believers in Jesus Christ. Hatred of a such a brother or sister reflects a severe hardness toward the truth. It is a sign that “the life” is not “abiding” in them. Now, since John has presented Christ as “the eternal life” this is a potent statement about such a person’s spiritual state. But what exactly is meant by having eternal life “abiding in them”?

Some would say quite forcibly, that one who murders is not a part of the family of God and that this verse is proof of that. But we must remember that under such criteria, we would have to say that both Moses and David were not in the family of God. This way of interpreting much of 1John causes the Bible to send very inconsistent messages. We must explore another option, or we must suggest that David and Moses lost their salvation at that moment in their lives when they became murderers. That is a theory that introduces a host of interpretive problems.

John’s gospel sheds some light on this verse and on what happened in the case of Moses and David. There it is recorded that Christ taught “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;” (John 15:5). When one’s relationship and loyalty to Christ deteriorates, it hinders fruitfulness. All the things that should naturally occur in a Christian’s life do not. What led to both Moses actions and those of David was that they assumed control of their own lives rather than living in the light of Yahweh’s truth. In John’s language they moved into the darkness and so did the deeds of darkness. They did not have eternal life abiding in them. They were being controlled by the temporal. Eternal life was the lifestyle John had heard, seen, examined and handled in Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-2). It is a lifestyle where thought and action are shaped by the moment by moment dependence on Yahweh that Christ modeled.

It is absurd to allow the person who has no regard for the family of God to be a person of influence in the family of God. That person cannot serve as a guide in matters of eternal life since they prove that they are living a very temporal life. To hate is to take away life in some way from another. Such a one cannot be trusted as a giver of life.

**1 Jn 3:16 | We know love by this, that he laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

This is a key use of one of the Greek terms for knowledge, γινωσκω. People knew what love was about before Christ. Now we can really say we know it because through His sacrifice we have scaled its heights and plumbed its depths. We may have known all about it but now we know it in its ultimate sense. Acts which may have seemed loving before pale when compared to this standard. He has challenged us to a whole new level of love.

Christ is the standard of love. Until we can say we have gone as far, done as much, stooped as low as Christ, we have not reached the point in our service for God of being able to say, "I've done enough," or "it is finished." His was not just a sacrifice of His physical life. It was a laying aside of His glorious existence. Once He became a man, He remains a man forever. The sacrifice finds its significance not just when we think of its physical dimension, but of its eternal dimension.

In terms of leaders, which is the matter of John's heart along with the lifestyle of God's family, the pursuit of love must be present to have the proper pattern. Spiritual leadership is entered into through a persistent pattern of servant hood. By the use of "we," John calls himself to this lifestyle. No Christian has ever gotten "promoted" to a level where they no longer need to love.

**1 Jn 3:17 | But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him?**

It is highly speculative to contemplate what may have moved John to write these words. Were the false teachers living this kind of lifestyle? Were they endorsing it by example? Those questions we can't answer, but we can say that the danger in John's mind is present and that he saw the church as capable of slipping into such thinking.

While many even among the unregenerate are naturally moved to meet the needs of the poor, it is also quite natural to close our hearts to such needs. John does not say that the presence of concern for the poor is evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. But he raises the issue of the absence of such concern being inconsistent with the experience of God's love. Both things are common in the natural man. Having a closed heart towards the needy should not be present in the spiritual man.

The person who falls into this has lost touch with the significance of the love of God. They have not contemplated either the depth of their need or the magnitude of His condescension or if they have, they have refused to be moved by it. Having been recipients of His love, they have not made the choice to abide by the implications of it and follow its lead.

The love of God demands a different style of living than what we would like to lead. One must constantly contemplate that love to hold in check his own indulgence.

**1 Jn 3:18 | Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but indeed and truth.**

The term “Little children” shows John’s affectionate yet authoritative stance regarding the readers. It gives the command the tone of a fatherly appeal. It reflects a spiritual leader enfolded others to rally them to an important mission.

The love of God at work in us will cause more than our words to be shaped by love. Our deeds will be shaped by love, and they will reflect sincere, authentic love not a cosmetic or obligatory love. The addition of the term “in truth” indicates love that is regulated by all that is true. It includes what is known of the person, of God, of life, of God’s principles, all that is known to be true of God and His creation. Again, we see the importance of truth and its centrality even when it comes to the greatest of virtues, which is love.

**1 Jn 3:19 | We shall know by this that we are of the truth and still assure our hearts before Him.**

Loving deeds serve the needs of those being loved. They also have a great return in the life and heart of the one doing them. When we see them in ourselves they encourage us and tell us that we are making progress in the faith. Obedience always encourages the one who is obedient. When we are obedient we have greater confidence in prayer, a greater sense of the Holy Spirit’s presence and therefore greater boldness in ministry. So the presence of deeds of love in our life gives us greater boldness.

Now we know that the basis of our acceptance by God is Christ’s work on our behalf. We can always have confidence in that. This is a relational confidence toward God, a confidence that we have been faithful to obey God’s prompting. There is no unfinished business with Him. We are assured that we are in tune with His leading and direction especially at those times when we have in some area, failed Him, as the next phrase will tell us. This assurance then is especially critical for our encouragement at times when we confront our own failure and disobedience.

**1 Jn 3:20 | in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.**

There are those times when our failures are so great in our eyes that our inner being is in turmoil and self-condemnation pounds us. At these times those acts of love we enter into will encourage us and comfort us, reminding us of a more healthy, overall perspective of our faith/walk.

Our hearts, meaning our own inner beings, have limited perspective and are prone to errors in judgment. The believer who is living by the truth can have a warped perspective on God’s view of his failings. God is greater than our hearts. That is, God

has a more accurate perspective on us than we have. He knows all things. His knowledge of us allows Him to view us with respect to Christ's work, our deeds from the perspective of eternity, and to critique the thinking which produced these deeds. At those times our deeds of love will be used by Him to assure us that we are His and that we are listening and responding to Him, that we are walking in the truth overall.

John had firsthand knowledge of the fact that God is greater than our hearts. He had often been in situations with Jesus when his heart told him one thing and Jesus had to correct it (Mark 14:31). God is greater than our hearts not only in terms of knowledge but in terms of character and purity. John had experienced the wonder of his entire inner being telling him one thing (Matthew 14:26), and Jesus showing that voice was all wrong. God knows all things and knows when our guilt is too light and when it is too heavy. All those times when our guilt is weighing us down, He will use our faithfulness as demonstrated by our acts of love to assure us that we are living the truth, though our imperfections are clearly visible.

**1 Jn 3:21 | Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God,**

It is not that we are free from sin if our heart does not condemn us (1 Corinthians 4:4). But the fact is that God speaks to us from within our inner being. If, from His greater perspective and full knowledge of us He is not speaking to us about sin, we can be assured that our relationship with Him is in a state of restoration. We should always allow Him to speak first on this matter. We then can respond to what is on His heart, speaking our own hearts to Him. If He is not speaking with regard to sin in our lives, we can be assured that there are no unresolved issues. We can have confidence with respect to our freedom to fellowship with Him as one would a friend with whom there are no unresolved issues.

**1 Jn 3:22 | and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight**

If our heart is not condemning us, we are assured that we are "walking in the truth." We are living the life of faith and dependence on God and we can pray with confidence. He will speak to us as to what to pray for, our heart will be in tune with Him and the result of prayer asked in accordance with His will is always that the prayer is answered. Power in prayer starts with understanding His will and continues with persistence in bringing it about (James 5:16).

God's blessing, his continued assistance and help flow to those who are following His agenda. His agenda is love. We are doing the work that flows from His heart when we pursue love in our motives and actions.

**1 Jn 3:23. | And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.**

This is an important piece of all that John has been saying about doing righteousness, abiding in His word, and so on. When arriving here this statement almost demands that we return to re-interpret what has gone before.

God's great commandment for the human race is to believe in Jesus Christ. His appeal to humanity has always been for such faith. The failure of the Exodus generation was a failure to believe (Hebrews 3:19). Jesus own testimony was, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one whom He has sent" (John 6:29).

To believe in His name is an important idea. It means to believe in his essential identity. In the Hebrew culture, names were given which reflected the parents thoughts, dreams and even prophetic visions for that child. God at times designated names for individuals because of what He knew of them and His plan for them. That was the case with Jesus. God commanded that He be given a specific name, Jesus, meaning "Yahweh Saves." To believe on the name of Jesus then is to believe that He is God's provision for man's need of salvation. That fundamental belief has such broad implications that to believe it leads to a belief in a whole system of doctrinal truths.

To the name Jesus is added here the term Christ. It is the Greek term for "anointed one." This was the term of the promised ruler that was to come out of Israel spoken of throughout the Old Testament. So there is to be recognition of Jesus as the promised Messiah.

The second command John identifies as essential is that we love one another. So we have the command to believe in God's son, and the command to love one another. These two comments are the basis of N.T. Christianity even as the commandment to love God and Love your neighbor as yourself were the foundation of "the law and the prophets." God told us to believe in the Son, who then told us to love one another. Christianity then when stripped of all its trappings comes down to believing in Christ and loving one another. When John speaks of obeying commandments, these are what he is referring to.

**1 Jn 3:24 | The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.**

There is a relational benefit that comes with obedience, that is exercising faith and love. It is that in staying true to these we stay at God's side. At His side we experience His fellowship, we experience his movement and work firsthand. He does not seem distant and far off. We experience not only our relating to Him, but Him relating to us. He abides in us, making Himself and his heart known to us.

The activity of the Holy Spirit moving within us and active within us reminds us that God abides in us, that is, that he is relationally connected with us and that relationship is alive and vital. The Holy Spirit's movement gives us the assurance of God's presence, and our own obedience. Consciousness of His presence is lost through disobedience; the activity is restrained and obscured. We lose the keen awareness of His stirring. We are told that He is quenched and grieved through our disobedience and lack of faith, the same two essentials placed before us in this context.

# 1 John 4

**1 Jn 4:1 | Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirit to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

Having set forth belief and obedience as the things through which we experience the workings of the Holy Spirit, John now deals with the presence and problem of false spirits. If we chose to believe in and obey a false spirit we will experience its leading and its activity and we will enter into the fruit of its workings in and among us. We must always test spirits.

There are those ideas which come into our minds, some placed there by teachers, some as a result of our own thought process, which create the same “spiritual” response in us that the truth does. There is the same inner tugging, the same wonder, the same feeling produced when the Holy Spirit illumines our way with the truth. Yet these ideas are false and their spiritual “energy” comes from demons. It is essential to test all ideas, especially those which seem to create the spiritual type of response. We must at those times test the thing creating that response in us with the question, “Does this spirit come from God?”

Where there is a false prophet there are demons, lending power and a false sense of credibility to their ideas. The teachings of these false prophets have a power to them, energy of a spiritual nature, and for this reason they attract a following. Those who follow them “feel right” about their teachings. There is a registry within them that says, “Here is the way, walk in it.” But it is not the Spirit of God.

There are many of these false prophets John says, who have gone out in the world. The teachings which have such power should not be regarded by us as a few. They are common. They must be tested outside the realm of feelings and spiritual sensation. They must be tested in the realm of the concrete, by the statement of their doctrinal ideas as the following verses show.

**1 Jn 4:2 | By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.**

Again, the testing of spirits must be done at an objective level not subjective, it must be done in the realm of thought and ideas. It is possible to tell beyond doubt the source of spiritual influence as long as we make the test an objective one.

This was a test which the readers could apply in their situation, probably to a specific group of teachers making their rounds in the church. The test they must pass was a doctrinal one. Specifically, do they believe in the humanity of Christ, that in the incarnation Jesus Christ took on real flesh and blood. The spirit that embraces the incarnation in this way is from God.

This raises another question. If a spirit embraces this, and does not embrace other important doctrines, is it to be evaluated as from God? Not necessarily. John's point is most likely made most for some particular case which serves as an example of the broader principle, that spirits must be judged, and that they must be accepted or rejected on the basis of objective truth, doctrine we know to be correct. The first error that began to take root regarding the doctrine of Christ was in the matter of His humanity. That is what John is concerned with. Other errors would come in the ensuing centuries. They could be spotted in the same way, by scrutinizing them by the standard of the truth and the life.

**1 Jn 4:3 | and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.**

Confessing Jesus in this way, as coming in the flesh is the confession that John is referring to here. The lack of confession of Jesus as fully human means that the message is being inspired by a spirit that is not from God.

It is clear from this verse that the early church had a teaching regarding the antichrist. It is clear that they taught that a certain person would come on the world scene who would be the antithesis of Christ, in character, in purpose, and in ambition. The word "spirit" is added in the verse and is accurate, but must not be taken in the sense that the anti-christ is simply a spirit, a kind of spiritual tone prevalent in the age since Christ. John's meaning is that the person known as the antichrist is coming and that the spirit which will give strength to his kingdom is already taking root in the earth. It is a spirit which since Christ has operated in the world. It seeks to erode accurate thinking regarding Christ and by this to veil the truth of the gospel. Its ultimate goal is to shape men's thinking so that they accept another as their Messiah and God. The net effect, engineered by Satan, will be to make Satan earth's ruler in the place of Christ. This Satanic scheme will have a season of success but will be swiftly destroyed at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**1 Jn 4:4 | You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**

John realizes that such spirits, active in the world, keep men from faith. All who come to faith do so because God has lifted the veil that has covered their eyes (2 Corinthians 4). They have overcome the influence of those spirits whose mission is to conceal the truth. Now they must be wise so as not to be led astray from the truth and lose the vibrancy of the life they have entered into.

Ultimately, the Spirit of God is greater than the spirits controlled by the evil one. And ultimately that is the reason individuals come to faith in Christ. Ultimately this great might and power of the Spirit of God will determine the outcome of the spiritual conflict that God allows to rage on the earth.

**1 Jn 4:5 | They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.**

The pronoun “they” refers to the false teachers speaking at the prompting of the evil spirits that dominate the world. These produce earthy teachings as opposed to heavenly. The world is the playground of these spirits and ruling it is all they can hope for. They have no greater hope; it is all that is within their grasp, and that only for a season. The result is that the world is their focus. It is their message.

Those whose roots and ambitions are in the world listen to these messages. The message rings true to them because their thinking involves nothing beyond the world. They have already allowed thoughts of things heavenly to be set aside and chased out. The message of the world is attractive to them.

**1 Jn 4:6 | We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

The pronoun “we” is referring to John and his company first but reaching out and including all who follow the true teaching of Christ. By saying they are “from God” John is expressing the fact that they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit, speaking a message that aligns with the light of truth.

John says that the one who knows God accepts the message of those who are “from God.” These “know God,” that is they are in touch with God’s heart. The result of their fellowship with God is that they recognize the truth and take heed to it. That person lives as God through the apostles had directed him to live. They remain true to the faith as they had learned it. Relational oneness with God leads to recognition and acceptance of the right pattern of doctrine.

The one who is being directed by another spirit, who is not being directed by the Holy Spirit can be spotted because they were out of line with John’s teaching and in our day out of line with the apostolic teaching of the New Testament. They do not recognize the authority of what was originally taught as “the faith” and so they have fallen into error or have deliberately chosen error.

Thus we have a test by which we can discern spirits. It is a test which is as applicable today as it was in John’s day. This is a second test for discerning the origin of spirits. The first was doctrine of Christ, the second willingness to conform to the teachings of Scripture.

**1 Jn 4:7 | Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and every one who loves is born of God and knows God.**

Love has its source in God. It is an activity modeled by God. It is where we get the idea. We would not know love had it not been given by God. In creation He loved

man, and chose him above all other created things as those who would bear his image and carry out his rule and dominion. He did so knowing that humanity would choose to be disobedient to Him and so reject His rule. His foreknowledge caused Him to provide His own Son to bear the guilt of Humanity, so that they might be restored to fellowship with God. This is the greatest demonstration of love ever given. John speaks of love here as Christ modeled and revealed it. He is using the term as Christ used it. He is not suggesting that certain things are true of anyone who has loved someone in the normal human sense of that term.

Two things are said about all who love in this sense. First, they are born of God. By this he means that they have experienced new birth through belief in Jesus Christ (1 John 5:1). Second they know God, that is, they have arrived at the point of experiential knowledge of God, they have reached a level of intimacy with him. Love is a distinguishing mark of fellowship with God.

### **1 Jn 4:8 | The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

The one who does not live out this command has not come to the point in their spiritual experience where it can be said of them that they are intimate with God or have developed a depth of fellowship with Him. Love is a part of God's essence. He is seeking to choreograph it in His family. It is preposterous to think that one could be representing Him and not demonstrate love.

### **1 Jn 4:9 | By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.**

The term "in us" might be taken in a couple of ways. It is the Greek preposition εν. It could be understood as meaning "among us." So we could say that God loved us always, but took the extraordinary step of becoming a man and demonstrating His love for us in the sphere of our existence. The Greek preposition could also be understood as "through" or "by means of." In that case John could be saying that God reveals through us, to all who care to watch, His love for humanity. Either way, God's love was unveiled and made visible in a way that the human race can come to terms with it. It does not remain a mystery, and it does not remain unknown. John is about to state a specific, concrete thing that made God's love clearly known.

The revelation and demonstration of God's love that John speaks of consisted of an act. The act was a very personal action, taken by God the purpose of which was our welfare. It was the sending of His one and only Son. The placing of His Son in the world among the human race was a very deliberate and purposeful act that had a specific result. The result was eternal life, given to us through the action of the Son on our behalf. It was also an eternal way of living, revealed through the Son and made possible through His intercession for the new age of the Holy Spirit. "The life" came to our world through the Son. He demonstrated it and provided all whereby we

enter into the experience of it. Through the Son then we begin living “the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 John 1:2).”

The barriers to that life brought about by the first Adam are removed by Christ, referred to as the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). Through His sacrifice access is gained by us into the sphere of the life shared by the Father and the Son from which the first Adam fell. In the act of the incarnation then is revealed in condensed and concentrated form the intensity of God’s love. It is a love which is patient and calculating. It is a love which went searching and which endured centuries of time and chose to be brought to fruition at just the right moment in the course of human events. It still endures, unwavering and uncompromising as it moves toward its ultimate consummation, when those who have responded to the revelation of that love enter into the realm of eternity where will be revealed the full expression of God’s love.

**1 Jn 4:10 | In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sin.**

In this action by God is the supreme expression of love, so much so that all other expressions of love shrink by comparison. That seems to be the thrust of John’s words. In the plan of God love is clearly the motivation. There can be no other explanation. So much could have been selfishly gained by some other course of action.

In this story one is certainly not struck by the depth of our love for God. That is not the “story line” which jumps off the pages of history. As one reflects on the human race and God’s efforts on behalf of and towards humanity, and then as man’s actions toward God are reflected on, there is no strong and consistent revelation of man’s unwavering love for God! It is a story of a one-sided love often resisted, often scorned and often used. The clear obvious lesson of any analysis of the relationship between man and God, is the astounding nature of God’s love for the fallen and fickle human race.

A love that took specific practical action with regard to our welfare is what we see in the incarnation. Because God loved the fallen human race, because he could not justly gratify that love, he sent his Son to “work it out,” to come between and be that which appeased His holy and just anger. The sending of the Son as the intermediary was not because He could not control His anger, as might be the case in human dealings. It was because on the one hand He could not justly set aside our sentence to gratify his love, and on the other He could not gratify His righteousness if He overlooked our guilt. The sending of His Son was a very intentional and calculated strategy whereby God in all His essence could remain uncompromised as He poured out His love for mankind.

**1 Jn 4:11 | Beloved, if God so loves us we also ought to love one another.**

The commonsense response of the forgiven and beloved Christian community to one another is love. Those who have been so loved should by their behavior show that they are a loved people. In human behavior we note that those who are loved are themselves able to give love. Should not we then who have been so loved by God be able and willing to extend love to one another? We have observed that to whatever degree one has experienced love to that degree he is able to express love. It is then logical to say that one who does not love has not really come to comprehend God's love for him, nor has he fully experienced the work of God's love in his life?

**1 Jn 4:12 | No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.**

The obvious meaning of the first phrase of this verse is that no one has physically seen God since He is spirit and thus not visible. The purpose of this statement being placed here is the question. The thought appears to be building toward verse 20 where the statement is made, "if one does not love his brother who he has seen, he cannot love God who is not seen." This fact is preliminary to that argument. John will develop the thought he is moving toward by showing in several ways the relationship between fellowship with God and love for other members of God's family.

Beginning in this verse are a series of verses in which the Greek word μένω occurs (1 John 12-13, 15-16). It is a word that means to stay or to dwell. John uses it of a state in which one is remaining loyal to Christ, maintaining fellowship on a personal level with Him, and living in harmony with His teachings. It speaks of the place in which a person's spiritual perspective is rooted. These verses will help the readers discern who is leading in the direction they had been taught and grounded in, and who was leading in a different direction. This is to equip them to judge spirits, the command given at the start of this chapter.

Since love is the work of God and sums up in a word what God is doing (1 John 7-8) then as we love we are carrying out His work. In loving as He loves we are doing that which is dear to His heart and carrying out His agenda. He is working through us or in John's terms He is fellowshiping with us and abiding in us. We are maintaining our lifeline to Him, love being a visible sign that this is the case. It can also be said that His highest expectation of us and highest calling for us is being carried out in us. Thus His great love which had as its initial objective our faith, has not been brought to completion in us only by forgiving us. It is completed in us for the present age as He renders us fit for service to Him to carry on His great work of love.

**1 Jn 4:13 | By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**

There are some places in John's epistle where the readers are included with his use of the pronoun "we." There are others where John is using the term "we" of Himself and the core of the early Church—what we refer to as the "Apostolic company." How could the readers be assured that John and this group were the real thing and that the testimony of others was to be subjected to their testimony? That is the subject of the next two verses. He had been stating that by which other teachers should be judged. How were the readers over the centuries to keep relying on John's testimony along with that of the other Apostles, instead of following newer trends?

There were pragmatic experiences that followed John and the other Apostles that proved they were in unique position as the authoritative heads of the Church, uniquely related to and in fellowship with God. Some of these we share in. But their experience in them rightly overshadowed that of the followers in order to authenticate them as our leaders. John will speak of these in this portion of his letter.

First, there was the coming of the Holy Spirit. He was given by God first to the Apostles and their immediate followers (Acts 2:4). We find that He was subsequently given through them to the rest of the Church (Acts 4:31;8:14-15;10:44-45;19:6). Now ever since, believers sense the presence of Him through His activity in our minds. There is a developing spiritual perception within us characterized by conviction of sin, by a growing understanding of what God's will is in the moment, and an increasing ability to discern what is of Him and what is of the world (John 16:8). But all this clearly came from God through the Apostles. We must not forget their authority demonstrated to us through this great blessing from God.

We share the blessing of the Holy Spirit that God released in the Church through the Apostles. The work of the Holy Spirit is the "earnest" of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14), the confirmation of both our present and forthcoming position. This that we sense by way of practical experience is one way we have of assuring ourselves that we are in fellowship with Him. Where there is no conviction of sin, where we have no sense for obeying Him in the detail of our lives, where we are not discerning truth and error, we have reason to doubt our spiritual health. All of this is not John's primary point here. His point is that this originated through the authority of the Apostles and so their word in regard to Church matters still is our standard and guide.

**1 Jn 4:14 | And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the World.**

A second assurance of Apostolic authority is that they were eyewitnesses of Christ. There was information they had by virtue of that experience that is inaccessible to us (2 Corinthians 12:4). We bear witness of Christ. The Apostles beheld and bore witness. Those are two different experiences and two different levels of credibility.

They spoke of what they had seen, we of what we have heard from them. There is in their experience with Christ the ongoing authority of their words.

The confession of and witness to the message of Christ has characterized those who are in fellowship with God ever since the proclamation initiated by the apostle's. Such proclamation is the result of only one thing; the work of God carried out through the Holy Spirit. But the specific testimony of the Apostles is that on which all other proclamation is to be based. The witness of the apostles is paramount in establishing a standard by which the faith is to be practiced. This authority is confirmed by the fact that the Spirit came through them and they were eyewitnesses, students, and close companions of God incarnate.

**1 Jn 4:15 | whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.**

Having started the chapter with the warning to test the spirits, John has moved through a series of statements made to help people do so. These become a means of judging one's own spiritual health. More germane to John's letter, they are a means of discerning the spiritual root of an idea, movement, teacher or teaching. John has spoken in the previous two verses of why his own testimony in these matters can be trusted. Now he turns to how we can discern the trustworthiness of the testimony of other teachers.

He starts with a statement similar to the one in verse two, where he said, "By this you know the Spirit of God:" Yet this statement is different. The presence of this confession that Jesus is the Son of God, is essential for there to be any semblance of God's influence in the movement.. Presence of this confession reveals the presence of the influence of the Holy Spirit, since such a confession is impossible apart from the Him (1 Corinthians 12:3). Therefore it is safe to say that those who make this confession have remained true to God and are articulating truth in line with what we know God has revealed. They are by this demonstrating that they are abiding in God.

**1 Jn 4:16 | And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.**

There is emphasis on the idea of abiding or remaining in this verse. The word occurs three times. This is the last of a string of verses beginning with verse 12 (1 John 4:12) that speak of the idea of remaining or abiding. John's intent is to help us judge our own experience, and to help us spot those who can be trusted as teachers and instructors in the faith. Abide is a word used to express the spiritual state someone is occupying, what the source of their thoughts are. This is the key objective of this section of the letter, to equip the readers to rightly discern spirits (1 John 4:1)

Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ comes about for one reason. We have come to know and understand God's love for us. Our belief is in that love and it is because of that love. To believe in Christ is not simply to believe in a historical figure. It is to believe that He did certain things in our behalf as a result of the love of God. It is to believe that we were sinners, yet God loved us. It is to believe that He, because of that love, could not simply let us rebel, and so devised a plan whereby He Himself would rescue us. And so because of love Christ became a man and ultimately the sacrifice for our sin. To believe in all of this is to come to know and understand the love of God.

Having already stated in verse eight (1 John 4:8) that God is love, and that the one who does not love does not know God, John now makes a statement that shows why this assertion was correct. One knows about God through the intellect. One comes to know God by experience, as fellowship and communion with Him grows. As we abide in Him, that is, as we live in communion with Him and He with us, we perceive His love more deeply and we learn to love more deeply. As we come to know and follow His heart we find we are called to a work of love, the same work of love He is carrying out.

Love is the essence of God. It is not just something He does, though He does act on the basis of His love. He IS love. The one who shapes their actions and reactions by love is the one who is abiding in love, hence in God. Their love is also evidence that they have intimate knowledge of and fellowship with Him. Anyone claiming to know something deep about God can be judged by this test.

**1 Jn 4:17 | By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.**

"By this," meaning by us loving others, God's love has achieved its objective in terms of our present life. We have been reclaimed from a life of living for self and flesh. We are now living with God's objectives in view. His love has done its work in us and we demonstrate our growing maturity "by this," acts of love done for others.

We have confidence in the day of judgment because of that great work done by Christ and applied to us at the moment we believe. Our love for others clearly proves this work of belief in us has transpired. A life punctuated by love of others clearly demonstrates the presence of an influence larger than life.

Positional truth is not the thing primarily in mind here, but behavior and action. The fact that we pursue His desire and agenda for ourselves is what gives us confidence in the day of judgment. We are one with Him in thought and purpose in day to day matters. Ultimately that is what properly prepares us for judgment as Christians. We have our eyes on the same things He does. His purposes and the goals fill our day.

**1 Jn 4:18 | There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.**

Here, the word fear is not speaking of respect or reverence but of being scarred. It is the fear that involves anxiety. Perfect love does not traffic in the realm of fear. That does not mean that God removes all healthy fear from us. It means very simply in this context that as our love for God and one another grows, it has the effect of making us less scared of judgment day, of rejection by God. It means that the more one loves God the less scared they are of Him. It means that as love grows, it becomes more of a factor in shaping our conduct that does our fear of consequences.

Love has as its goal a relational oneness. God's love has as its goal the joining of our hearts and minds with His. His desire is not that we in fear steer clear of Him, and avoid angering Him. His loving desire is that we walk with Him and come to share his heart and design for our lives. In Him is perfectly pure love, which desires that no element of fear be motivating us. In our parental role we do not wish to see our children behave out of fear of consequences or punishment, but out of respect and wisdom. In the same way God wants us to respond to Him because we understand His motive of love in giving His commands. In the beginning of our relationship to Him, there is much fear of consequence. Gradually that fear gives way to respect for the wisdom of His grace and love for us. Thus perfect love casts out fear; it slowly overcomes it and replaces it with a sense of value and respect.

Love has not run its full course in the one who is driven along by fear. Fear can drive us in a number of ways. We can be scared of God's retribution. That is proof that we do not understand His love and grace fully. Or it may be that His love and grace have not yet run their full course in us so that there are elements of our lives yet outside of His control. Therefore there is legitimate ground for our fear of discipline. Either way, we are not perfected in love. The solution to the former is a more accurate and precise understanding of the facts surrounding God's love. The solution to the latter is a greater level of obedience to His speaking voice, the prodding of the Holy Spirit. That is our contribution to the process His love is carrying on in our lives whereby we are reclaimed from a self-directed course of destruction and redirected along a course of God-directed objectives. The one who is seasoned in this journey with Christ has no fear of God or man. They are always aware of God's purposes being fully served in the circumstance of their life. They are at peace with all possible outcomes because they are sure they are living in fellowship with God and so within the sphere of God's love.

**1 Jn 4:19 | We love because He first loved us.**

This is the plain and obvious first cause for all that John has set forth on the distinguishing mark of love. It is a distinguishing mark because it is produced by God's actions alone. Our love for one another is present only because of God's love for us in the beginning event of salvation—justification, and in the process of salvation—sanctification. God's love begins and makes possible our relationship to

Him. Our relationship to Him enables us to let go of all our instincts of self-obsession and to love others. He has brought about a community of people who express love to each other and this movement has spanned millenniums of time.

This verse expresses also the stark reality of the biblical data on our salvation. Jesus taught that no person could come to the Father unless the Father draws them (John 6:44). We come to Him because He has chosen us (John 15:16). Paul's teaching confirms the idea that salvation begins with the act of God (Romans 8:28-30). God's love and His action motivated by that love brings about salvation in and among men. There is no other explanation for it. There will be no member of humankind who is accepted by God for any other reason than this, that He loved us.

**1 Jn 4:20 | If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.**

During Church history there have been those who claim to love God but then do not love people. At times this has even been arrogantly and piously presented as a reservation of all love and devotion for God alone. John is refuting any and all strains of such an idea with this commonsense idea.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He answered that it was to love Yahweh our God. He continued on to speak of the second, to love our neighbor, as being "like it." He meant that it was "like it" in terms of priority and He was alluding to the fact that we cannot show love for God apart from showing love for His people (Matthew 25:41-46). The two things are absolutely inseparable. Jesus in that exchange modeled the fact that one cannot talk about loving God without speaking of loving people.

It is a contradiction to claim love for God and harbor hate for one's brother. Such a person may feel something for God, but it is not worthy of being called love. Genuine love for God can only come as a result of the love of God for us. As we accept that love and are indwelt by His Holy Spirit, our love for God deepens and He produces in us a love for others. Someone who hates his brother proves that the process has not yet moved to the point of him understanding God's love for him. If we do not love others, we are deceiving ourselves to think we love the One who is unseen.

**1 Jn 4:21 | And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.**

John has made several statements about those who are in the community of the faith and love. There is an inseparable connection between the two. He has said these things; that everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, that God is love, that we ought to love one another because He loved us, that if we love God abides in us, that if we love His love is perfected in us, that we abide in love if we love, that if we

love we'll have confidence in the day of judgment, that if we love we'll be like Him in this world.

Finally here, we are told to love simply because it is a commandment, something we are supposed to do. So we love because it makes sense and because there is benefit in it, but also because it is the right thing to do. There are many things God has commanded us to do that hold great benefit for us. However, it is a great act of worship to obey simply because it is the right and reasonable thing for creatures to do with respect to their Creator.

# 1 John 5

**1 Jn 5:1 | Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.**

This is a pivotal statement in terms of the interpretation of this letter. John's definition of who is born of God is spelled out here. This is important. His letter is often taken as a means of determining who is really born again. The logic of those who take it so goes like this; John makes many airtight statements about the kinds of works that characterize born again people. These involve deeds. The rest of Scripture testifies we are saved by faith apart from works. The only way of removing this apparent contradiction is to conclude that when one is truly born again it is such a powerful event that the person's life is changed dramatically so that all of these things become true of them very quickly. It must be that sanctification is predestined, something which any child of God is unable to thwart due to the presence of God's Spirit in them. And so they reason that all those truly saved become holy. It naturally follows that one is saved only when they submit themselves fully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So goes the logic of those who interpret John's letter as a test to determine who is truly born again.

John says in this verse that whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. That's the only requirement for new birth. The full recognition of His rights as Lord, the full recognition of one's sinfulness may come much later, at different times in different people. But one who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the promised One of the Old Testament, is by that act a member of the family of God. The family of God is composed of all who have come to believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the designated ruler of the world, the designated Deliverer and Savior. Belief that Christ is this One, plus nothing is what is required to be born again.

Submission to Christ happens in some immediately. In others it happens rather slowly. It is certain that it happens in none completely. One is born of God not because they have reached a certain state in their experience of Him. They have only believed and granted entrance.

If one has arrived at the point of belief, only one explanation is satisfactory. God's love has done its work in that person. Hand in hand with loving God comes loving those born of Him, His children. To love God is to love what is dear to His heart, and nothing is dearer to His heart than His own children. So loving God is always inseparably linked to loving His children (see under 1 John 4:20).

**1 Jn 5:2 | By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.**

The standard by which we may judge our love for the children of God is to scrutinize our thoughts and conduct toward them by the standard set forth by God in His commands. The commandments of God set forth a standard of proper behavior toward God's children. As we obey His commands and by that show love for God, we find we have treated His Children lovingly. One cannot demonstrate love for God apart from showing love for His children. Jesus had taught this interconnectedness between love for Him and love for His family (1 John 4:20).

**1 Jn 5:3 | For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.**

Obedience is the show of love God is longing to see from us. "To obey is better than sacrifice" were His words to Saul.

In describing God's commandments as not burdensome, John is not suggesting that they aren't difficult to do, nor that they do not require any sacrifice on our part. Rather, he is saying that we practice the love of God when we willingly do his commandments and do not view them as a loathsome burden (Amos 8:5). This is something only His love enables us to do. But it is the only practice of the love of God we are capable of.

This love of God on our part comes about when we come to the point where we really have no other choice. We have traveled far enough that the road of obedience is the only road we wish to travel, the only one that makes any sense at all. We say with Peter, "To whom else shall we go, you have the words of eternal life!" When we arrive at such a point we know we are beginning to practice love for God.

**1 Jn 5:4 | For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith.**

All of Satan's schemes to hold us captive, all the world's allure, all of it is overcome by us when we believe. That is not to say that we are never deceived again, nor is it to say we'll never make a deliberate choice to indulge in the things of the world again. The next phrase defines the sense in which John is speaking.

The moment of belief in Jesus Christ is a remarkably powerful moment. By our faith we have overcome the world. No matter what crisis of faith we might face and no matter how tested we are, we will be clothed in white robes one day because of our faith. It is by faith that His commandments are not burdensome, our faith helps us look to "another country" (Hebrews 11:13-16) and helps us to walk "by faith not by sight" (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10). The presence of our faith is a great victory, and the ongoing practice of it results in continued victory.

### **1 Jn 5:5 | And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

According to the Gnostic thought that was beginning to sprout, one's great dream was to overcome the world, the realm of the seen. The dream was of escaping the confines of matter and becoming one with the gods in spirit. They boasted of special knowledge that could allow them to be over-comers. That thinking was to become very prevalent in the Mediterranean world.

John defines in these verses who it is that overcomes the world. In this verse he restates his idea in a very direct way. In the single act of belief in Jesus as the Son of God, one overcomes all the forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil. That faith, brought about by the meticulous plan, the great power, and the persistent love of God, means that particular individual need never again be shackled by evil. It means that even though through weakness that person may in this life be troubled by the world, yet they will eternally overcome it. It is a remarkable access they are given to a whole new way of living—eternal life.

### **1 Jn 5:6 | 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.**

There have been a few interpretations of this verse put forth over the years. It is admittedly a difficult task to speak definitively about John's purpose in these words.

It seems best to take this as a testimony by John to the humanity of Jesus. The earliest major doctrinal controversy in Christianity concerned the humanity of Jesus. John was an eyewitness of the piercing of Jesus' side after his death by the Roman soldiers (John 19:26, 34-35). What he saw there and recorded in his Gospel caused him to feel the need to immediately testify in his account of the reliability of his own testimony (John 19:35). He saw in that event unmistakable proof of the humanity of Jesus, specifically, that He had a material body like ours in every sense. It responded in death as ours would. When pierced it gave up a flow of blood and water. These were proof that He was human. He had been alive in every normal sense of that term, and then He did die.

### **1 Jn 5:7 | And it is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.**

The Spirit bears witness in our spirit that Jesus is the Son of God. There is material witness of the objective facts, and there is the subjective witness within us of the Holy Spirit that this is the truth. Ultimately this subjective witness with us is the most compelling witness, that which leads to belief. It is the drawing of God to Himself through the Spirit that brings individuals to faith in Jesus. Many people examine the evidence for the Divinity of Jesus Christ. It is those enabled by the Spirit of God that come to believe.

In addition to this inner witness, the Spirit's witness has become objective, written revelation. John was inspired by the Spirit to record the account of water and blood flowing from the pierced body of Jesus. There are numerous other events that the Spirit led human authors to recall as significant and record in writing which point to Jesus' humanity and His Divinity.

**1 Jn 5:8 | There are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.**

In Jewish tradition, two witnesses constituted admissible evidence. The fact that there are three witnesses makes the case for Christ compelling. All three witnesses point to the same truth, that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and was the Son of God. The water and blood give physical evidence. The Spirit's voice not only speaks within but, through the teaching of the apostles, became the written word. So the truth has been given objective form so as to be scrutinized and analyzed. The physical evidence and the written accounts, the inner compelling voice of the Spirit all point to the same thing, that Jesus, the Son of God, became flesh and lived among us.

**1 Jn 5:9 | If we receive the witness of man, the witness of God is greater; For the witness of God is this, that he has borne witness concerning His Son.**

John makes a very common sense type statement that no one who believed in God would argue with. There are three things that point to the fact that Jesus was human, one more "witness" than was necessary under Jewish law. Now such evidence is accepted by man, but it is after all still strong evidence only by human standards. Is not the testimony of God greater? If testimony from man is solid and compelling, what about that from God who cannot be deceived or deceive? The natural answer is, "Certainly!"

John had been an eyewitness of this witness of God concerning Jesus on two occasions. One which we know was distinguishable to him on the mount of transfiguration, where he had heard, seen and beheld God's dramatic testimony concerning his Son. On that mountain he saw Christ glorified, a physical phenomenon John saw with His eyes involving Jesus physical body. Now some Gnostics would teach that Jesus was simply human until His baptism when the Divine nature descended on Him. But John saw that God's confirmation of Jesus was linked inseparably to his body. It was glorified. God's witness was clear, the MAN Jesus was His beloved Son, and they were to listen to Him!"

Another incident in which God's voice thundered His approval of Christ is recorded by John (John 12:28). This was apparently not distinguishable to all who were present at that time. But it was to John. This was a voice that came from heaven, a statement by Yahweh that He would glorify His name through the events that were to transpire in connection with the death of Jesus.

The witness of God in this way that we read of and the witness within us given by His Spirit are compelling. As stated before, it is ultimately that witness that comes from within that compels us to believe.

**1 Jn 5:10 | The one who believes in the son of God has the witness within himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His son.**

The witness referred to here is the witness of God the Holy Spirit. Once there is belief, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer. He becomes the abiding witness of God within us in all things including the identity of Christ. So once belief has occurred that belief gets stronger because of the continual witness of the Holy Spirit to the truth from within us.

As earlier in the book (1 John 1:10), John speaks of the serious matter of not agreeing with the witness of God through the Holy Spirit. It is not a matter of simply disagreeing with God as one might a friend. Anyone can be very sincerely wrong due to limited knowledge about a matter. We understand that in the course of human relationships. People can be simply wrong with no deceit involved.

God is different. God by virtue of who He is knows all. A mistake on His part would be intentional deceit. And so to not believe God's witness in any matter is to call Him a liar since He cannot be misinformed. It is deeply offensive. To allege this is to make Him one who fabricates such deception. It is to suggest something horrible about His essence. Therefore the final rejection of the Holy Spirit's witness within us as to the truth about Jesus Christ is the ultimate blasphemy. It is the sin which is unpardonable (Matthew 12:31-32). As to the finality of that rejection, God knows when it is final.

**1 Jn 5:11 | And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.**

Eternal life, both in terms of time and quality have been given to us. That life which was only with the Father has been made available to us through Jesus. This is John's original theme. It has been given to us in the sense that through Christ God has granted all who will believe free access into His presence. All that had to be done to qualify us for the experience of that life He has done. All the barriers that stood between us and such a life have been removed. All of this was given when God gave His Son. The life has also been given to us in the sense that it has been lived out for us to see. Through Christ it has been modeled. It has been given to us internally as well, by means of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Eternal Life, that is Christ as He existed with the Father, was given as well since in the incarnation Jesus became a man and remains a man forever, and this was essential so that we could receive the Eternal Life.

**1 Jn 5:12 | He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son does not have the life.**

To believe in Christ is to have eternal life in the sense of access to Him as the source of that life. It is to have all spiritual blessings made available to you. To abide in Christ is to experience the Eternal life in terms of its quality (1 John 3:22-26)

The eternal life only comes through the Son. It can be found no other way. It can be experienced no other way. Some may claim deep spiritual knowledge and experiences, but if they do not through belief and obedience experience vibrant relationship to the Son they do not have the experience they think they have. They have not entered the Eternal Life (1 John 3:22-26).

**1 Jn 5:13 | These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.**

This is the last statement of purpose given by John for this letter. It is clear from the statement that the letter is written to those who had believed. That is important in terms of interpreting the book. The idea that it is written to unbelievers who have deceived themselves into thinking they have eternal life is on weak ground due to this statement. The purpose of the book is clearly to keep believers on course, enjoying fellowship with God.

This statement of purpose is followed by a string of statements about what “we know” (1 John 15, 18-20). These likely are meant to be conclusions we can make that are based on the truths John has emphasized in this letter and truths set forth in apostolic teaching. The word know will be very prevalent as the letter is drawn to a close. It is the word *οιδαμεν* which comes from a word meaning to see. In the perfect tense it refers to what has been learned and so known through observation. It is what has been observed to be true.

John wanted them to know that they had already laid hold of truth, and they already had in their grasp the things that false teachers were only dreaming of. There was no need for the readers to search further or to gain some new knowledge in order to lay hold of the deeper relationship to God. They only had to practice what they clearly had come to know, and hang onto what had been committed to them. He wanted them confident and secure in their perception of their position before God. He did not want them dissuaded from the belief and practice the Apostles had established among them.

**1 Jn 5:14 | And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will He hears us.**

Again, John wanted his readers confident of their position about God, not searching for greater or deeper access. So he begins to speak of what our position allows us to do in terms of communication.

There is only one limit that we must understand and seek in terms of our petitions to God. We must allow Him his rightful place as the final decision maker and submit to His will and plan. We must ask according to His will, but we have confidence that when we do so He hears us. The next verse must be taken along with this verse as well.

**1 Jn 5:15 | 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,**

This completes the thought of the previous verse, that God hears us when we make requests that are according to His will. This verse is John's continued description of the fact that we have absolute and complete confidence not only to be in God's presence but to ask specific things of him. For Him to hear is to grant these requests. So God's hearing is equated with His granting. Those things that are God's will, once asked for, are ours. John asserts that we have those things rather than saying we will be given them. So as believers we have moved from the position of our prayers being an abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 15:8;28:9), to the point where we have access to His presence and complete freedom to ask from His boundless resources.

Some might think, "Will not His will be done anyway, regardless of our prayers?" To this we must admit to being somewhat lost for words. It is very complex and difficult subject. It is of course possible, even likely that God will bring about His will regardless of our individual participation in prayer. But it seems equally possible that God does nothing without first laying that thing on the heart of someone in order that they might pray for it. This latter scenario appears more likely in view of the fact that prayer is commanded so often in Scripture. This also makes prayer that is according to the prodding's of the Holy Spirit very critical in the economy of God. We must ask would God command prayer to the degree He has and waste our time with it if it had no net effect? While that would certainly be His right, it is not like Him.

As is often the case, the truth lies somewhere between extremes on this matter. There are things done by the sovereign decree of God unbeknownst to us. There are other matters that He has willed to do which come about through our prayer. That is what makes prayer so critical. We must grow in our ability to perceive His heart so that we know how to pray effectively. What constitutes His heart in a matter is that which should shape our prayers, and such prayers will be answered.

**1 Jn 5:16 | If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life and those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say he should make request for this.**

Having spoken of the effectiveness of prayer and our confidence in it, John now speaks of a practical issue in prayer, that of caring for our fellow believers through it. The situation he addresses is our prayer for another believer who is involved in sin. In calling us to prayer for such believers John is likely not talking about a one-time sin, but a pattern of sinfulness engaged in continually over time with no repentance.

Now there are some such patterns we can get into which God judges by physical death (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). John's instruction pertains to a pattern of sinfulness which is not of the nature which would lead God to take that person's life. The indefinite article "a" is confusing here. It is probably best to understand it without that indefinite article, simply as "sin leading unto death." John is not speaking of a particular sin which is of such a nature that it is always punishable by death. We need not scour Scripture to find what that sin is. It is probably best to view this as a continued sinfulness that takes a believer so far down a path away from God that they become trapped, far from His presence. In this case God ends their life. Prayer for recovery and repentance for such persons will go unanswered.

It is God's will that believers straying into such a pattern of sinfulness be rescued and returned to usefulness. A prayer for such a person will be answered. God will listen and answer for the sake of the one praying not for the sake of the guilty one. They will find escape and rescue though they themselves may have been blind, due to the prayers of their fellow believer who interceded in their behalf. Our prayers for one another should be fervent and faithful especially when we see each other straying into such a situation.

Again the idea of "sin leading unto death" should be understood without the indefinite article. There is not a need to search for a particular "mortal sin," or to label specific sins as such. There is sin which can entangle us and lead to our death through the disciplinary action of God. Since that is a matter sovereignly decided and decreed by God we should not pray against it. That would be a prayer against the will of God, certain not to be answered. There are times and situations where it is against God's will for us to pray for others (Jeremiah 7:16;11:14;14:11).

**1 Jn 5:17 | All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.**

John wants a couple of things clear. One is that all unrighteousness is sin. We are not to suppose that the absence of consequences for example, clears us of sin. Anything done by us which conflicts with the righteous character of God is sin. It is a broad, broad circle of thoughts and actions. There is sin apart from those things we regard as severe, and it includes good things done for the wrong motivation, or done outside the will of God.

This verse and the previous ones indicate that there is sinfulness that is viewed by God as less severe than others. While none is tolerable in the absolute sense, and the slightest amount is enough to condemn us, there is sin which God does not view as needing as drastic or immediate response on His part.

**1 Jn 5:18 | We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.**

Whatever John means by this it is something he is very sure of. This is something “we know.” John could not mean these words in their most absolute sense since he has stated early on that anyone who says they are without sin is calling God a liar, and is deceiving himself as well. He has also just been talking about praying for a brother who sins and we believe that a pattern of sin is what John has in mind there. So John obviously believes that brothers, those born of God, commit sin and that they can fall into sinful patterns.

The actual wording of the text is this, “We know that everyone born of God does not sin, but the one that has been born of God is keeping him and the evil one does not touch him.” A question in the interpretation of this verse is who is the one who is keeping believers from being touched by the evil one? This can be viewed as being the person themselves, who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, keep themselves from the evil one. This interpretation is reflected in the King James Bible. The person keeping believers can also be viewed as Christ. In his Gospel John presents Jesus as the who keeps the believer from being taken by the evil one (John 10:25-30). This is reflected in the New American Standard Bible and many others. Both interpretations are legitimate in terms of the grammar, and both have biblical basis. One’s perseverance would not be possible apart from the work of Christ, both as the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2; John 17:11-15). It is also true that we play a role in keeping ourselves from the influence of Satan by the practical choices we make (James 4:7). It would seem best to understand John as emphasizing here Christ’s work in our behalf to keep us from the evil one. In whatever sense it can be said that believers do not sin, it is clear from Scripture that this state is the result of the work of Christ that then must be appropriated by faith on an individual moment by moment basis.

It is problematical any direction one chooses to take in the interpretation of this verse. It contains similar thought to that stated in 1 John 3:9-10 where it is said that “no one who is born of God practices sin.” There we suggested that this idea should be considered in the entire context of the letter. That context suggests that believers do sin (1 John 1:10) and even fall into patterns of sin (1 John 5:16). That context clearly has John trying to protect the readers against false teachers, dangerous and deceptive spiritual leaders, and false pathways to spirituality. Through statements like this he is laying out a strict standard for leaders in Christianity and saying in effect, “No bonified spiritual leader lives a life of Sin.” So this should be understood as having particular application to determining who should be trusted as an example

of a life of fellowship with God—as a credible witness to truth. John should be understood as saying, “No one living the life we as apostles have instructed you in sins.” The underlying truth to this idea is that sin reveals that fellowship with God has been lost. This idea, stated in this absolute sense, has great value in determining the maturity of one who might become a person of influence.

John goes on to say here that the person who is born of God, meaning the believer, is kept by the individual born of God, likely meaning Christ, in such a way that the evil one does not touch him. Touch here is a word that means to touch for the purpose of hanging onto. We might understand it as meaning “grab a hold of.” Believers are not isolated from the evil one’s influence and power. Touch should not be taken in this way. Rather, we are shielded from Satan’s full fury through Christ. We can fall under periods of severe trial and temptations but if obedient we will not become enslaved by Satan again.

When considered in light of John’s letter, this is what we can say we know. No one living the born-of-God life sins. They sin because they cease having fellowship with God. Therefore when we see a pattern of sinfulness in someone, we can be certain that they are not mature spiritual leaders who are living life in fellowship with God.

**1 Jn 5:19 | We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.**

Who does John mean here when he says, “we.” Is he referring to himself and the recognized authorities who stand clearly behind him as he writes this letter, as in the first part of Chapter 1? Or does “we” include those, plus all who are believers, thinking rightly in terms of the truths. It appears that as the letter has moved along, this later group is who John means by “we.” This then, John is saying, is common knowledge among all who properly see truth. We are of God, meaning we are born of God, we have as the source of directions in our lives God, and God is the source of what we embrace as truth. The world, on the other hand, “lies in the evil one,” that is, in the sphere of his power and influence. Thus they are in darkness, outside of the realm of the truth. This is the second great fact John wants to conclude with, the first being that no one born of God sins, that there is keeping power in the present work of Jesus Christ.

**1 Jn 5:20 | We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.**

This is the last of a series of statements John has made involving what we know. John wants to leave with his readers as he closes several statements about the coming of the Son of God. The first great statement about Him is that we know He has come. This is not even open to question, as the false teachers were suggesting.

We know that He has come. That is an absolute fact to be taken in the literal sense. He has come in real life flesh and blood, not in some spiritual way.

We do not need secret knowledge, and we are not on the outside looking in and wondering what God is doing. On the contrary, we have been given understanding. We have no need of obtaining special “gnosis.” This is a very direct counterattack on those teachings which would evolve into Gnosticism.

The purpose of the understanding Christ has imparted is that we might know God. This is another direct assault on the false teachers who claimed that the Christians needed to gain a special spiritual understanding from them if they were to truly know God.

Not only do we know Him who is true but we have been placed in union with him, in intimate connection, fellowship, and communication with Him. Not only has John refuted the claims of the false teachers, but by this statement engages them in a truthful and legitimate bit of one-ups-man-ship. The Christian, who knows the truth and walks in it has no need for their “special knowledge” and indeed would be taking a step backwards to embrace it. The believer is one with Christ, organically united through the Holy Spirit with the Triune God.

There are other gods in man’s minds, and many are engaged in the pursuit of them. Some men love elusive gods who are the products of their own imagination. They teach such gods and in through their teaching get their fleshly need status and image met. They are self-appointed authorities in spiritual matters. Knowledge begins and ends with them! But these gods are not real. They are imagined. There is only one true God and one source of eternal life—a quality of life men long for and seek to find. John says we have that kind of life as our treasured procession through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And so John has defined in this letter “the life.” The thing he set out to do he has done and has ended with this simple statement of the facts as he has seen, looked upon, touched, and handled them.

### **1 Jn 5:21 | “Little Children, guard yourselves from idols.”**

There is one final safeguard which would keep all the believers who would read this letter from straying from the truth. It is this practice of guarding themselves against idols. There are myriads of idols, from organized, well-articulated schemes involving multiple deities, to the worship and elevation of oneself. It is very easy for something to spring up in us and be allowed to occupy a place in our thought and lives that only Christ should occupy. That is the essence of idolatry and we must guard ourselves with diligence against it.

There is a common thread in all the various forms of idolatry. In each strain there is great appeal to the flesh, in particular, the idol of self-indulgence. This is, in the final analysis, the motivator in any such thought or movement. It is the appeal in all false doctrine and partial truth. Even our Christianity can be practiced in an idolatrous

way, where God and His Church serve our interests and needs in some way. We must guard ourselves against all such idols—all that is apart from fellowship with God and submission to His will.

For the most part, this set of study notes uses the New American Standard Bible (NASB 1995).