

# 1 JOHN

## INTRODUCTION

This introduction includes material applicable to all three of John's epistles, the entire corpus of John's writings actually being one in every practical sense. The three epistles considered here are intimately united with the gospel and are best understood and appreciated in that connection.

Of the first epistle, Daniel Steele, *Half Hours with St. John's Epistles*, p. xxi, wrote, "In the estimation of deeply spiritual minds, it holds the highest place;" and Erich Haupt, *The First Epistle of John*, LXV, xi, declared that, "One feels himself oppressed by the majesty of the thoughts of this epistle, which are like heavenly music in the reader's ears." John Wesley called it the, "Deepest part of the Holy Scriptures."

A careful study of the majestic passages of these epistles reveals that such praise is duly deserved. There is no other writing in which the presentation of sacred truth so overflows and abounds beyond the immediate situation to which it was first addressed.

Robert Law, *ISBE*, p. 1712, wrote, "The writer constantly lifts up against the error he combats, the simple, sublime and satisfying facts and principles of the Christian revelation, so lifts up every question at issue into the light of eternal truth, that the epistle pursues its course through the ages, beginning to the church of God the vision and the inspiration of the Divine."

It is sheer genius alone, no, inspiration, that enabled the writer to express some of the profoundest thoughts ever known to mankind.

## TO WHOM THEY WERE WRITTEN

The first epistle has no address, salutation or signature, and is considered by some not to be a letter in any sense. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, p. 902, called it a tract, and in the introduction to the *New Catholic Bible*, it is referred to as, "A circular letter." Nevertheless, there are good reasons for calling it a letter. The frequent and direct personal address in

the second person and the powerful love and intensity of the author evident throughout manifest all the qualities of a genuine letter.

John Wesley, *op. cit.*, p. 902, said here John speaks to the, “Christians of that age, and to the whole Christian church in all succeeding ages.”

The two briefer epistles are addressed to “the elect lady” and “to Gaius;” but neither of them has a signature. The second epistle is addressed to “the elect lady,” which likely refers to a church. The third epistle is addressed to “Gaius.”

## **AUTHORSHIP**

The conviction followed in this study views all of these letters as written by the apostle John the son of Zebedee.

A. Plummer, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 22, 1 John, p. 1, wrote, “The four writings, the Fourth Gospel and these three Epistles, are too closely linked together to be departed, and assigned, some to one author and some to another. And if they are all by one writer, that writer, beyond all reasonable doubt, is St. John the apostle. No other person has been suggested who fits into the very complex position with even tolerable exactness.”

## **INTERNAL EVIDENCE**

The internal witness of authenticity in all of the Literature of John is fully convincing. The mind and personality of the Son of Zebedee dominate every line.

## **UNITY OF JOHN’S LITERATURE**

The relation of the book of Revelation to this question will be treated in the introduction to that book; the phase of it being discussed here concerns the interrelation between the epistles and between them and the gospel. That all of them are by a common author is evident to practically everyone who ever studied them. J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 1053, noted that, “When compared with the Fourth Gospel, the conclusion that they are the work of one hand, is well-nigh irresistible.” David Smith, *The Expositors Greek*

New Testament, Vol. V, p. 154, declared, "It hardly admits of reasonable doubt that the gospel and the Epistles are from one pen."

## **BACKGROUND**

The occasion for these epistles is suggested by their evident purpose, including that of refuting error which threatened the church.

## **PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLES**

The purpose was compound, including: the refutation of false philosophies, the inculcation of brotherly love in a climate where it might have been waning, apostolic witnessing to eternal truth, the laying down of principals for the testing of faith. There is a clear contrast between the gospel and the epistles to evoke faith (John 20:31), the epistles provide criteria for the judging of faith, "That you may know you have eternal life." (verse 5:13)

## **REGARDING THE DATE**

We do not hesitate to place all of these letters in the years preceding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

## **OUTLINE**

Each of the New Testament books is somewhat like a complicated, many stranded rope of multi-colored threads surfacing repeatedly throughout its length. 1 John is particularly like this. The threads include: truth and falsehood, light and darkness, Christ and the antichrist, children of God and children of the devil, hatred of the brethren, possession of the Spirit, salvation in Christ, Christ the Paraclete, false charity, false doctrine, God's commandments, etc. No other book in the Bible treats so many doctrines so concisely and so well. All of these and other themes are woven into the fabric of this epistle.

How grateful, therefore, every Christian should be that, as Brook Foss Westcott, the Epistles of St. John, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, p. xxx, wrote, "This very practical epistle is ours today as the practical and moral application of the gospel." A. Plummer, Commentary on the Greek Text, Epistles of St. John, p. 36, wrote, "The

gospel of John gives us the theology of Christ, and the First Epistle the ethics of the Christian.”

## **CHAPTER 1**

The beautiful prologue (verses 1-4) is like the one in John’s gospel, having the profoundest dimensions and embryonically stating the theme as: “God manifested in Jesus Christ, that man may have fellowship with the Father through the Son.”

The remaining six verses are part of a complicated paragraph running through chapter 2:28 and which begins with “God, is light” (verse 5), the first of three epic statements about God which are usually cited by scholars as marking in a rough sense the three major divisions of 1 John. The other two are “God is righteous” (verse 2:29) and “God is love” (verses 4:7-8). As noted in the introduction, however, a satisfactory classical outline of this letter is hardly possible.

### **Verse 1**

It will be seen that this verse is not a complete sentence, the entire four verses of the prologue being, “but one highly compressed and complicated sentence in the Greek.” This complexity has led to different opinions as to how it should be translated.

“What was . . .” This neuter pronoun seems opposed to the usual view that “Word of Life” here is a reference to Jesus Christ; therefore some render it “word of life,” meaning “the message;” however “Word of Life,” meaning Jesus Christ, is far better. Leon Morris, *Ibid.*, wrote, “John goes on to speak of hearing, seeing, and even touching, which makes it necessary for us to think of Jesus.”

“From the beginning . . .” James Macknight, *Macknight on the Epistles*, Vol. VI , 1 John, p. 24 thought that the beginning of the gospel age is meant rather than the beginning of all things.” Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 1261, pointed out, the gospel did not begin with the Incarnation. “It was always in God’s plan.” Paul used such expressions as “from times eternal” and “before the world was” regarding the gospel; and these considerations as well as the thundering echoes of the gospel prologue with which this passage had close affinity

convince us that J. W. Roberts, *The Letters of John*, p. 20, wrote, “John is referring to Christ and to His existence with the Father from eternity. In 2:13, he will speak of Christ as, “One who was from the beginning.”

“What we have heard . . .” Who are the “we” of this clause? The conviction here is that the apostolic eyewitnesses of Christ throughout His ministry and of His death, burial and resurrection are those meant.

Heard . . . seen . . . handled . . . such terms designate the holy apostles and perhaps a few others who might have been eyewitnesses. (Luke 1:2) It is the apostles who are primarily the ones meant here. It means those believers who actually saw Jesus in the flesh.

“We Christians talking to each other” did not “develop” our holy religion; it was revealed, and conveyed to us by competent and authentic witnesses, the Incarnate God in Christ being the source of all of it.

“What we have seen with our eyes . . .” Mere hearsay evidence formed no part of the basic Christian teaching. The apostles recounted what they had heard, seen, beheld (more intensive investigation than merely seeing,) and even handled. On the other hand, they did handle Christ. See the Savior’s invitation for them to do so in Luke 24:39.

“Concerning the Word of life . . .” Those intent on declaring the message of the gospel and not Christ Himself as the subject of this prologue prefer the rendition “word of life,” but these should be rejected. The same considerations that required the capitalization of “Word” in the gospel also require the capitalization of “Word” here. *It is the same word*, the words “of life” not altering that fact.

Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 1261, wrote, “While this term (Word of Life) might well describe the gospel, we must bear in mind that Jesus is called “the Word,” and that in Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:1, 4)

## **Verse 2**

This verse is parenthetical, but it regards the very thing in John’s mind from the first verse, namely, the Holy One, the same who in the beginning was “with God” and “was God” (John 1:1), called in the gospel “the Word” and here “the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).

“The life was manifested . . . “ “Manifested” is a term frequently used in the New Testament of the appearance of the Son of God in flesh. (1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 1:20 and 1 John 3:5, 8).

“We have seen and bear witness . . .” By this, John refers to his gospel, to which, in a sense, this letter is an appendix. His “witness” or “testimony” is incorporated in that which he wrote. Again, “we” refers to the apostles. James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 27, paraphrased the words here, “We apostles” who accompanied Him during His abode on earth, etc.,”

“Bear witness,” means to proclaim, testify, or bear testimony, such words appearing no less than nineteen times in these epistles.

### Verse 3

“What we have seen and heard we proclaim . . .” The word “proclaim” is here repeated from verse 2, indicating the close unity of the whole passage. J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 23, wrote, “The proclamation (declared) need not refer to the Gospel of John specifically. It is the substance of all gospel or apostolic preaching.” “What we have seen . . .” This repeated stress upon the eyewitness nature of the apostolic gospel is important as it affirms dogmatically that the writer is himself one of the eyewitnesses.

“We proclaim to you also . . .” “Also” may be construed as applicable to the proclamation. R. W. Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 609, wrote, “Readers thus being informed that this letter is supplementary to the basic witness of the gospel.” David Smith, *Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, Vol V, p. 170 wrote: “It also means ‘you also’ who have not seen Jesus.”

“That you also may have fellowship with us . . .” Fellowship is from the Greek word *koinonia*. J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 24, wrote, “It means a close relationship or harmonious association as partners or sharers of the gospel.” Note also that a definite purpose of the epistle is the maintenance and extension of Christian fellowship—a fellowship which was threatened by the rise of heresies and the ensuing bitterness and strife which resulted. The purpose of the apostles regarding this essential fellowship of Christians is as, John R. W. Stott, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 19, p. 64, wrote, “Rebukes much of our modern evangelism and church life.”

“Indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ . . .” Oneness with God in Christ is the basis of Christian fellowship, and it cannot exist without it. That is why the doctrinal and ethical nature of the Christian message should continually be from the pulpit; because in this essential basis is the principal of cohesion that binds Christians first to God in Christ and then to each other.

Any congregation or church which depends upon a superficial social camaraderie to replace the word and doctrine as its cohesive power blunders fatally. If there would be fellowship, first let the heresies be denied and thwarted and the ethical behavior of Christians restored. This was exactly John’s purpose in this letter.

“Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ . . .” The equal dignity of Jesus Christ with the Father is clear in John’s association of their names together at the very outset of his letter.

#### **Verse 4**

“We write . . .” It has been debated whether this applies primarily to the whole apostolic message just referred to in the prologue or to the epistle about to follow. John R. W. Stott, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 19, p. 64, is likely correct in referring both to the apostolic proclamation, “*Declare we*” and, “*Write we*” refer to the same message.”

#### **NOTE REGARDING: ETERNAL LIFE**

A little further attention to the subject of eternal life is appropriate. It is well known that both in the gospel and the epistles John often speaks of eternal life as the present possession of Christians. John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27, has given a thorough discussion of this in his commentary. He cited many passages that indicate that, “In some sense, John sees the Christian as enjoying eternal life here and now.” He concluded that, “The eternal life which the believer has (present tense) is to be interpreted not as quantitative (everlasting) but as qualitative.” Those qualities of the Christian’s present “eternal life” are evident in the declarations that he “has passed from death into life,” that he is a

“partaker of the Divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), and that he arises from baptism to walk “in newness of life.”

The Christian’s possession of eternal life now and here must be understood in the sense of his enjoying the blessed *promise* of it. The *earnest* of it (Ephesians 1:13) which he *now has* sheds forth in his heart many qualities of the ultimate eternal life that shall crown the efforts of the faithful in heaven; and, in that possession of the earnest, the Christian certainly enjoys *qualitatively* the eternal life *yet to come*; but it should always be remembered that in no sense should the earnest (which of the whole is only a very small part) ever to be equated with the entirety of that eternal life, which according to the blessed promise of the Christ Himself is the ultimate reward of the faithful in Christ.

Not all the joys of eternal life are ours now; nor can it be thought, even of those fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22f) which we already possess, that they have the same fullness, quality, and intensity of the eternal life to come.

It is more accurate to view the present possession of eternal life as *prospective*. It is ours in the sense of our possession of the blessed promise and confident expectation of receiving the fulfillment of it at “the last day.”

Paul’s statement that it would be “better” to depart and be with the Christ; John’s declaration that, “It is not yet made manifest what we shall be” (John 3:2); the absolute inability of any Christian ever to rise completely above all sin; the fact that it has never even entered into the heart of man (1 Corinthians 2:9) the things that God prepared for them that love Him; the constant attendance upon human footsteps of sorrow, pain, and tribulations;—all such considerations deny the quality of that eternal life in Christians now as having any complete correspondence to the eternal life given on the last day to them who shall be invited to, “Enter into the joy of the Lord.” (Matthew 25:23) “Entering in” cannot be equated in any complete sense with “You have already entered.”

## Verse 5

“God is light . . .” R. W. Orr, op. cit., p. 609, wrote, “We have in the words “God is light” an actual saying of Jesus Christ repeated by Him at various times.” He based this upon the fact that the statement in chapter 3:11, that we should, “Love one another,” was indeed an actual saying of Jesus recorded in the gospels.



It has the same authority either way. A. Plummer, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 22, 1 John, p. 4, wrote, "To the Christians alone, God is revealed as light, absolutely free from everything material, impure, obscure, or gloomy." Light is a symbol of all that is lovely, beautiful, holy, good, desirable, righteous and lovable.

To the pagans, God was hatred, vengeance and fear; to the ignorant God was a God of darkness, an unknown Being to be propitiated, not a Person to be loved; to the philosopher, God was an abstraction, an idea, having no connection at all with man; to the Jew, God was a God that hides Himself and a consuming fire.

"In Him there is no darkness at all . . ." Darkness, contrasting with light, is a symbol of all that is wicked, ignorant, gloomy, shameful, depraved and perverted. Paul described the deeds of the wicked as the "works of darkness." And there are several kinds of darkness. A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 4, cited, "Physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual darkness." Note: John did not say that there is no darkness in God's presence, but that there is no darkness "in Him."

Now this verse has its application to the problem of fellowship because the false teachers were walking in a moral darkness of the worst intensity, while at the same time claiming to be "in God." It is preposterous for one to claim fellowship with God while walking in darkness.

"The message we have heard from Him . . ." John most likely referred to the personal instruction which He and the other apostles had received from Christ Himself.

## **Verse 6**

David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 171, identified the false teachers refuted by this as, "The Nicolaitans who held to the heresy of antinomianism (opposition to one law or another)."

"And do not practice the truth . . ." This very statement is found in John 3:21 and in the Qumran scrolls. "The truth can be a quality of action as well as of speech."

The false claim in this verse is that of affirming that we walk with God even while we are walking in darkness. “Walk” in this passage, as frequently in the New Testament, is an idiom for the totality of human conduct.

### Verse 7

“If we walk in the light . . .” When the light from God, as revealed in Christ Jesus and the preaching of the apostles, is entered and walked in by the Christians, Charles C. Ryrie, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, p. 1007, wrote, “*Walking in the light* shows up their sins and frailties, revealing the need for constant cleansing.” For those who walk in the light, the continual, ceaseless and effective cleansing through the blood of Christ is the means of their continuing in a state of absolute perfection. This cleansing, however, is not necessarily automatic.

J. W. Roberts, *Ibid.*, wrote, “It is based upon confession, penitence, renewal (verse 9), and keeping His commandments (chapter 2:3).”

“Fellowship with one another . . .” This fellowship is also with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (verse 3). This fellowship stands for membership in the corporate spiritual body of Jesus Christ. Thus the cleansing here mentioned is not from “old sins” prior to conversion, but from the accrual of sins daily by the Christian.

“The blood of Jesus His Son . . .” All forgiveness for mortals, derives from this source.

“Cleanses us from all sins . . .” Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 1262, wrote, “All sin means every act of sin.”

This great verse is the source of incredible joy, assurance and consolation to the child of God. He never needs to fear that some impulsive, unintentional, or atypical conduct might overtake him with the result of eternal condemnation. His walking “in the light” can be established by the long term directional thrust of his whole life upon earth and cannot be contradicted and negated by any temporary or insignificant lapse.

## Verse 8

“If we say we have no sin . . .” This is the second false claim John refuted, the first being that of verse 6. Here the error is that of claiming inherent sinless perfection, the absence of any need of cleaning through the blood of Christ. Entire religions are founded upon just such claims. “There is no sin”—this is the proposition that underlies a great deal of current thinking. John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 77, and others have supposed that John might also have had in mind, “The Gnostic subtlety that sin was a matter of the flesh and did not touch or defile the spirit.”

“If we say . . .” is an expression of remarkable interest, because the apostle here identified himself with the false teachers, not through any agreement with them, but out of a delicate regard for his readers.

Irenaeus, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, On heresies I. 6. 2, p. 324, has a description of such views, which although later associated with the heretic whose name was given in error, nevertheless existed early in the first century wrote, “They hold that they shall be entirely and undoubtedly saved, by no means of conduct, but because they are spiritual by nature. It is impossible that spiritual substance (and by this they mean themselves) should ever come under the power of corruption, whatever the sort of actions they indulged. For as gold submersed in filth, loses not on that account its beauty, but retains its own native qualities, filth having no power to injure gold, so they affirm that they cannot in any measure suffer hurt, or lose their spiritual substance, whatever the material actions in which they may be involved.”

This ancient heresy exists today in a much more sophisticated form in what is heralded as salvation “by faith alone..” Man’s presumptuous blindness in denying the existence of sin, either as a principle, or as existent within himself, is self-deception at its worst. The Lord’s Prayer which enjoined the petitions for daily bread and forgiveness, both assumed and implied the need of daily prayers for forgiveness. David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 172, wrote, “Woe to the soul which presumes to think that he can approach God in any other way than as a sinner asking mercy.”

## Verse 9

“If we confess our sins . . .” To whom shall sins be confessed? Certainly, the usual concept of a confessional in a church, where confession is a one-way street, is not what is meant here. Macknight paraphrased this: “If we confess our sins to God with a firm resolution to forsake them, etc.”

The confession of sins by Christians to each other even, is a practice that can be very unrewarding and hurtful. Currently, there are outcroppings of a practice fervidly religious groups of holding confessionals in which the most sensual and reprehensible conduct is unreservedly reported openly and publicly within such groups. In such a context that is bragging about sins, not confessing them; and it cannot be possible that John had any such thing in mind. There are no New Testament examples of a religious service being built around any such orgy of self-revelation. Confessing of sins “one to another” among Christians means an admission of guilt where it exists as a barrier to their fellowship, a mutual sharing of blame, and a restoration of the broken harmony.

It is difficult for man’s ego to admit blame and guilt, society as a whole being hardly capable of any such admission. More and more, the trend is to deny sin exists. Drunkards have merely contracted an unfortunate disease, *alcoholism!*

Adultery and philanders are *schizophrenic!* Thieves, murders, outlaw, etc. are not criminals at all, but *anti-social*, a state induced by society itself! Sinful behavior is not that at all, but the *natural response* to one’s heredity, environment, deprivation or other things beyond the sinner’s control. The apostolic word for all such thinking is self-deception

“Our sins . . .” It is not the principle of sin merely that is to be acknowledged but the plurality of sins. This has been misunderstood as meaning “all our sins publicly;” but no such meaning is in it.

The right course is not repetitious confession of all the sins one can remember, but the admission of sin on the successive occasions when the believer stumbles.

“God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins . . .” It is a false view that construes this as meaning that God would not be just and righteous if He did not forgive us wicked sinners! God does not prove His righteousness by

forgiving sinners, who in any just frame of reference must be accounted as worthy of eternal death. No that is not what John meant. J. W. Roberts, op. cit., p. 35, has the truth thus, “He is faithful in that He will not go back on the promise He made in Christ Jesus.” John R. W. Stott, op. cit., p. 77, also has a wonderful word on this, “He is *faithful* to forgive us because He has promised to do so, and *just* because His Son died for our sins.”

In the forgiveness of Christians of their sins and His continual cleansing them from such sins, God displays loyalty to the sacred covenant He Himself established. Furthermore, the theoretical grounds, the rational basis, upon which it is just for God to forgive sins is established in the Person and sacrifice of the Son of God. God may justly forgive us, because Christ paid the penalty that was due. The justice of God in allowing our participation in the benefits of that sacrifice is vindicated and proved by the manner of incorporating those to be forgiven into the spiritual body of Christ, and then justifying them, not in their own sinful identities, but as Christ and in Christ.

### **Verse 10**

“If we say that we have not sinned . . . “ John is still dealing with evil heresies that have encroached upon the Christian fellowship. This is the most blatant and offensive of all the false theories. Amos N. Wilder, op. cit., p. 225, wrote, “To go to the length of denying past sin and present guilt, is not only to becloud ourselves with sophistry but to give the lie to God Himself.”

God gave His only begotten Son upon the cross that man might be saved from sin, a salvation that was impossible for any man apart from God’s redeeming act. If man had not been sinful and utterly helpless to achieve salvation for himself, all of the heavenly outpourings of God’s merciful visitation in the person of His Son was unnecessary; the crucifixion was a useless murder; and every promise of the gospel is essentially a lie. John’s language here is certainly not too strong.

Men who deny their need of redemption from sin, through the pretense of not ever having sinned, are of all men most guilty and contemptible. John R. W. Stott, op. cit., p. 79, wrote, “To say that we have not sinned is not just to tell a

deliberate lie, or to be self-deceived, but actually to accuse God of lying, to *make Him a liar.*”

“His word is not in us . . .” Characteristic of John’s writing’s is his use of such words as “word” and “truth:” to stand for the whole body of gospel teaching. Moreover, “the truth” or “the word” in John’s view was not some indefinite and nebulous goal pursued by the Christians seeking to know it; but it was something which they, already had, already walked in, already obeyed. The reference, of course is to the basic gospel of the New Testament which is perfect, complete, final, and sufficient. It is not to be added to nor taken from. Such is John’s conception of the message which he and other apostles delivered to men that they might be saved.

## CHAPTER 2

### Verse 1

In this verse, John seems definitely to have had in mind the possible perversion of the teachings he had just written. David Smith, the Expositor’s Greek New Testament, Vol V, p. 172, wrote, “If we can never in this life be done with sin, why strive after holiness?” and “If escape is so easy, why dread falling into sin?”

The promise of forgiveness of sins (chapter 1:9) and the mention of its universality (chapter 1:8, 10) might indeed, on the surface, be thought to encourage a light view of sin. As R. W. Orr, A New testament Commentary, p. 610, wrote, “Some might say, “I may as well commit sin; everyone else does; God will forgive me; what else is He for?”

John contradicted all such false views. Furthermore, the force of this passage may not be diminished by the interpretation that “sin” in this passage means, “a life of sin.” Orr, Ibid., wrote, “Both verbs are aorists; acts of sin, rather than a sinful course of life, are in view.”

“My little children . . .” It is generally admitted that John here used “little children” as a designation of the whole congregation, the repeated use of the word, especially the use of two *different* words for children, namely, *paidia* and *teknia* seems to suggest a different meaning later in the chapter. *Paidia* is the

word used in verses 13 and 18. The other word is used in 2:12, 28, 3:7, 18, 4:4, and 5:21.

”That you may not sin . . .” Despite the fact that John had just admitted that no one was able to be sinless, he nevertheless stated without equivocation that, “The hallmark of the Christian life is the absence of sin.” (Blaney, Harvey J. S., *Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10, p. 359)

“Advocate with the Father . . .” “Advocate is exactly the same word translated “Comforter” in John 14:16, 26, 15:26 and 16:7). In those passages, the Comforter refers to the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send to be “with the Christians,” especially the apostles; but here the Comforter refers to the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send to be “with the Christians’ especially the apostles; but here the Comforter is the Christ who is “with the Father.”

The Comforter is for the advantage and encouragement of the Christians, Christ with the Father, and the Holy Spirit with the Christians. Christ himself made this perfectly plain when he said, “He shall give you another Comforter” (John 14:16)? Even in that passage, it is clear that Christ Himself is the other one.

## **Verse 2**

“The propitiation . . .” Although this word appears frequently in the LXX, it is found only here and in chapter 4:10 in the whole New Testament. (James Macknight, *Macknight on the Epistles, 1 John*, p. 40)

The anger and wrath of Almighty God were indeed turned away by the sufferings of Christ. The Greek word to be translated by one of the words (*propitiation*, or *expiation*) is *hilasmos*, the primary meaning being “the removal of wrath.” (Leon Morris, *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, p. 1263) It is this element of the meaning which some would like to get rid of. However, there is a Divine wrath against every form of sin (Romans 1:18), and God’s forgiveness is not merely the ignoring of this wrath. “Expiation” carries the meaning that Christ’s blood indeed procured for men the forgiveness of sins, but it leaves out the connection with God’s wrath. Full agreement here is felt with Stott, Morris and others who preferred “propitiation.”

“Propitiation” means the “removal of wrath,” and “expiation” means the “removal of guilt;” but in view of the fact of God’s wrath being a reality mentioned countless times in the New Testament, it would appear to be far better to retain the word that includes “removal of wrath” in its meaning.

“And not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world . . .” “The *sins* of the whole world” is actually the meaning implied in the last clause. Inherent in a statement like this is the fact that the same basis for forgiving one is also the basis for forgiving all sins. There is no limit whatever to the satisfaction that Christ was provided as the basis for forgiving sins.

It is not implied here that sins are forgiven unconditionally, either those of persons now saved or of the whole world in general. We must therefore reject such a notion as this, “W. M. Sinclair, Elliott’s Bible commentary, Vol. VIII, p. 476, wrote, “Multitudes may be saved through this redemption who never heard of Christ.” Universalism is an attractive thesis for many, but there is no hint of such a thing in the New Testament.

### **Verse 3**

Contrary to the criterion accepted by many for determining if they are or are not saved, this denies that a person’s “feelings” in such a question can be trusted. Amos N. Wilder, *Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. XII p. 226, wrote, “It is all too easy to fall into illusions about ourselves if we make too much of our religious feelings, even those of an elevated kind.”

Keeping the commandments of God is the prerequisite and the test either of loving God (John 14:15) or of knowing God. James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p.41 supposed that John here was teaching against “the Nicolaitans and Gnostics who affirmed that the only thing necessary to eternal life was the knowledge of the true God.”

“This we know . . .” Similar words are used several times in this letter to introduce “tests” by which the validity of one’s faith might be tested. (2:5, 29, 3:19, 24, 4:2, 6, 13, and 5:2) In the last analysis, it is keeping the commandments of the Lord, walking in the light, doing the truth, obeying the word, etc., which are the final determinations of whether one is saved or lost. Which commandments are meant? All of them.



To keep God's commandments is equivalent to keeping His word, and Harvey J. S. Blaney, op. cit., p. 363, wrote, "And this means the truth of God as it is in Christ."

The obligation extends to the entirety of the New Testament revelation.

#### **Verse 4**

This is the negative of the same teaching given in verse 3. John's converse statement of the same principle here is blunt, powerful, and incapable of being misunderstood. It reminds one of Jesus' saying, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

All talk of knowing God, loving God, or even of "believing" or "having faith" is meaningless in the mouths of people who dishonor the commandments of Lord through disobedience and failure to do the work of faith." It is even more than meaningless; it is falsehood.

#### **Verse 5**

"The love of God has truly been perfected . . ." Here is another glimpse of that absolute perfection which is the goal of all Christian living, mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 5:48. Although unattainable by humans in their own strength, it will nevertheless be achieved in them and for them by means of their being "in Christ" and thereby partaking of the absolute perfection of the Savior Himself. (Colossians 1:28)

"Love of God . . ." J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 1056, wrote, "This is objective, referring not to God's love of men, but to "man's love to God."

"I have come to know Him . . ." The grammatical structure makes "God" the antecedent of "Him" in this place, still the meaning is "in Christ," no man ever having been "in God" by any other means than that of his having been baptized into the spiritual body of Christ. Being "in God" and "in Christ" are exactly one and the same thing.

The idea of the corporate body of Christ was not developed either by Paul or by John but is derived from the Lord Himself who gave the foundation of it in

such teaching as that of His being the vine, the apostles being the branches, and all Christians abiding “in Him,” that is “in the true vine (John 15). Since one enters “Him” through primary obedience (baptism), it is the true continuity of that holy relationship that John here declared us to “know” *if we keep His word*.

Before leaving this verse, we should note that the love (*agape*) is one of the leading concepts, occurring again and again in John’s work. In this letter alone, “it occurs 18 times, more than in any other New Testament book, 1 Corinthians being 2nd with 14 times. Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 1263, wrote, “In a book so short this is very significant.” As used in this place, the love of God is not a mere emotional response, “It is the response lived out in obedience. Love delights to do God’s will.”

### **Verse 6**

Claiming to be “in Christ” carries the obligation of the claimant to exhibit the true likeness of Christ in his behavior. Leon Morris, *Ibid.* wrote, “Obedience, not feelings” is the true test of union; and the Christian who is really such has less to tell of *experiences* and special visitations.”

### **Verse 7**

“Not writing a new commandment . . . but an old commandment . . .” The old commandment is here identified as “the word which you have heard,” meaning the gospel of Christ; and this automatically gives the meaning of “which you have heard from the beginning.” The beginning in view here is the beginning of the gospel.

### **Verse 8**

“A new commandment . . .” The new commandment must almost certainly be identified with Jesus’ words when He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34)

The Old Testament had taught God’s people to love each other, and the new element here is the qualifier *even as I have loved you!* The Old Testament knew nothing of such love as that, for Christ had not yet revealed it.

“From the beginning” here being best understood as “from the first of your Christian lives.” Why did John stress the newness of it? He may have had in mind the word of Christ Himself who declared that, “The kingdom of heaven is like a head of the household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old.” (Matthew 13:52)

The above view seems correct since it answers all of the questions that naturally arise with reference to the verse; but while holding to the above explanation, we also notice another.

#### ANOTHER EXPLANATION

“Paul W. Hoon, Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. XII, p. 233, wrote, “The contrast between the old and new is partly a contrast between the old and new covenants.” To love God and one’s neighbor summed up all the law and the prophets, according to Jesus Himself (Mark 12:29-31); and, of course, our Lord bound upon all men the same basic obligations.

R. W. Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 611, pointed out, “In a single sentence, John used the word *truth* in three different senses.” (2 John 1:2)

Paul also used the word “Israel” in two different senses in a single sentence, (Romans 11:25-26). In any case, such a view does no violence to the Scripture. The thing John apparently had in mind was the proposition that what his readers needed was no new teaching, but a renewal of the teaching they already had.

In the current era, the church needs no new doctrine or philosophy, but a renewal in men’s hearts of those teachings received from the beginning of the church. And those great basics of the Christian gospel are always new, exciting and glorious in the hearts of those joyfully receiving them; and yet they are also ancient.

#### **Verse 9**

“The one who says . . .” introduces the error he was about to expose. Note also the contrast between light and darkness. Christians are the children of light and walk in the light, but the wicked are children of darkness and walk in darkness.

“Hates his brother is in the darkness until now . . .” It is a mistake to understand John as merely refuting the erroneous teaching of the Gnostics. While it may be true enough that Gnostics might have seduced many Christians of that era into receiving a lifestyle of “loveless arrogance,” the great teachings of the apostle were not merely a reaction to such things. He was not merely reacting; he was proclaiming the tremendous truths already revealed by Jesus nearly a whole generation previously. In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “But If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness, if therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matthew 6:23)

The metaphor of light and darkness goes back to Christ Himself. Paul likewise received and used the same metaphor, in his message in Ephesians 4:17-18. Verse 18 reading, “Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.” He also wrote in Romans 13:12: “Lay aside the deeds of darkness.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:5 he wrote: “We are not of night, nor of darkness.” And in 2 Corinthians 6:14 he wrote: “What fellowship has light with darkness.”

“One who says . . .” W. M. Sinclair, op. cit., p. 478, wrote, “This is the fifth time in this epistle that John pointed out a possible inconsistency between profession and conduct.” (1:6, 8, 10, 2:4, 4:20)

### **Verse 10**

“The one who loves his brother . . .” This speaks of genuine love, the existence of that emotion and attitude called *agape* in the New Testament. “Abides in the light . . .” There can hardly be any doubt that John had in mind the great declaration of Jesus Christ that, “I am the light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness” (John 8:12), and that this means abiding in Christ, a thought recurring repeatedly in John 15:1-10.

The love of brethren appearing in this verse is not a love tinged with passion or self-seeking; but it is “the pure disinterested seeking for another’s welfare, of which Christ was the great example.” (W. M. Sinclair, op. cit., p. 478)

This is a far different thing from that humanistic love which is coming more and more to be the religion of our non-Christian world. Such love, cultivated for its own sake and without regard for Christ must never ever prove

to be artificial, powerless and disappointing. The fruit of the Holy Spirit cannot be nourished and kept alive apart from the life-giving Spirit Himself.

“There is no cause for stumbling in him . . .” One whose life is motivated and controlled by true love will not only walk in the light himself, but his actions will not be the cause of stumbling or failure in others.

### **Verse 11**

The threefold mention of darkness is an impressive comment upon hatred of a brother. Hatred deadens and destroys the soul itself, blinds the eyes, stops the ears, hardens the heart and petrifies the central functions of reason and intelligence; and those who indulge in it receive, “In themselves the recompense of their error” (Romans 1:27), becoming in their own persons the just reward of such wickedness.

Notice the progressive power of three successive antitheses in verses 9-11. The antithesis of verse 9 is verse 10, and the antithesis of verse 10 is verse 11, the argument growing stronger with each new antithesis. The conclusions are arranged in an ascending order of power. Verse 9 has “is in darkness;” verse 10 has “abiding in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling; and verse 11 has a triple predicate: “is in darkness,” “walks in darkness,” and “knows not know where he is going.”

### **Verse 12**

“Little children . . .” is usually thought to be John’s loving designation of the whole church to which he wrote.

“Because your sins are forgiven you . . .” The great purpose of redemption in Christ is precisely this, the forgiveness of sins. Man’s great problem is sin; and, with the sin problem fully resolved in Christ Jesus, man has the ability to solve other problems himself. The word for children here is *teknia*.

### **Verse 13**

Having addressed the entire group of Christians in verse 12 as “little children,” John here singled out three age groups: Fathers, young men, and children, arranged quite logically in a descending order, and using a different

word for “children” (*paidia*). There has never been any good explanation of why John used different words for children.

It is by no means clear why many object to understanding children (especially in verse 13) in the ordinary sense. Many children who have reached an age of accountability are still “little children;” and those who had obeyed the gospel when John wrote were here included with young men and fathers as full participants in the total benefits of Christianity.

The primary purpose of the whole passage is that of showing the full participation of various age groups is also derived from the synonymous nature of the affirmations made concerning each. There is no essential difference in them:

- (1) Of children (meaning the whole church), “your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.”
- (2) Of fathers, “you know Him who is from the beginning.”
- (3) Of young men, “you have overcome the evil one.”
- (4) Of little children (literally), “you know the Father.”

The one and identical meaning of all these statements is that the persons indicated are walking in the light, enjoying salvation, possessed a knowledge of God and were abiding in Christ.

#### **Verse 14**

It is no problem that the essential truth of this verse repeats what had just been written. Christ himself repeated over and over again the great messages of the kingdom.

“Do not love the world . . .” God so “loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16), but “world” here has a different meaning. John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 101, wrote, “It is an inclusive term for all those who are in the kingdom of darkness and have not been born of God.”

F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 132, noted the difference thus, “It is the world-system organized in rebellion against God which is in view—the current climate of opinion, as we might say.” He also observed that the word “love” is different here from that used in John 3:16. Bruce, *Ibid.*, wrote, “In John

3:16, it is self-sacrificing love; here it is acquisitive love.” John will further explain his meaning in the next verse.

“Love of the world . . . love of the Father . . .” This strongly suggests the “love of God” contrasted with the love of mammon in Matthew 6:24; and John’s statement that the love of the Father is not in one who loves the world corresponds with Jesus’ declaration that, “No man can serve two masters.” (Matthew 6:24) Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 238, pointed out what he called John’s little trick of “emphasizing a word by simply repeating it. He used *world* three times in this verse and another three times in the next two verses.” John used this word “more than twenty times in this epistle, and in more than one sense. Paul W. Hoon, *op. cit.*, p. 238, thought that the “world” has the sense of creation as contrasted with the Creator.”

### **Verse 16**

“For all that is in the world . . . is not from the Father . . .” This has the effect of explaining what John meant by his use of “world” in verse 15. It is that aspect of it which is “not in the Father.” It is therefore incorrect to accept “world” in these verses as meaning God’s glorious natural creation, described by the Father Himself as “good.” (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25)

Jesus said, “The world loves its own (John 15:19); Paul said, “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2); and John declared that, “The whole world lies in the evil one” (1 John 5:19). It is clear that John was here speaking of that phase of the world of men which is antagonistic to God.

“Lust of the flesh . . . lust of the eyes . . . the boastful pride of life . . .” For ages, students of the New Testament have seen in this triad suggestions of the triple temptation of Eve: the fruit was good to eat . . . beautiful to see . . . would make one as God, knowing good and evil; and likewise the triple temptation of Christ: He was hungry . . . Satan sowed Him all the kingdoms of the world . . . such an exhibition of Jesus’ power as that of leaping from the top of the temple unharmed would have been a vain glorious triumph. From such comparisons, the things mentioned by John in this verse have come to be called “the three avenues of temptation.”

The sins in view have been variously classified: sensuality, materialism, and ostentation. R. W. Orr, op. cit., p. 612, wrote, “They are: *Voluptus* (sensuality), *avaritia* (avarice), *superbia* (vainglory).”

“Lust of the flesh . . .” All temptations which have their roots in appetites and needs of the body are included in this; but the appetites of the body are not in themselves sinful. Therefore, “flesh” is use here in “the ethical sense, meaning the old nature of man, or his capacity to do that which is displeasing to God.” (Charles C. Ryrie, op. cit., p. 1013)

“Lust of the eyes . . .” The eyes have been called the gateway to the soul, hence the point of entry for many temptations. A. Plummer, op. cit., p. 24, wrote, “In John’s day, the impure and brutal spectacles of the theater and the arena would have supplied abundant illustrations of these.” It is no less true of our own times.

“Boastful pride of life . . .” The central lust of the ego itself is indicated by this. The utterly selfish instinct in all human life that insists upon achieving the fulfillment of the person itself, the inherent passion of the soul to do its own will, fulfill its own desires, glorify its own ego, and to occupy the inner control-center of life—that is the pride of life. Salvation in Christ requires that this be denied. James Macknight, op. cit., p.50, wrote, “John means all things pertaining to this life, of which men of the world boast, and by which their pride is gratified: such as titles, offices, lands, noble birth, honorable relations, and the rest, whose efficacy to puff up men with pride and to them insolent, is not of God.”

### **Verse 17**

All of the vain things that so charm, seduce and dominate the lives of men during their brief pilgrimage upon earth are actually endowed with no more permanence than a marriage. Whatever glory or eminence may come to man is only for the fraction of a moment; he builds for himself a house, a palace or an empire; but the whirling suns brush him into the grave, and where is he? Whatever achievement, success or honor may have been place upon his head for an instant some distinction or accolade, tomorrow cannot remember it. This tragic quality of all human glory is the reason why the apostles taught Christians



to look to the unseen, the invisible realities of hope and faith in Christ for their true fulfillment. As Paul put it: “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18)

Paul’s words are an excellent supplement to what John wrote in this verse.

### **Verse 18**

“It is the last hour . . .” The apostles had asked Christ to tell them when the end of the world was coming, when the temple would be destroyed, and when Christ would come.

Jesus did deny them altogether any answer as to the time of His Second Coming. (Matthew 24:36, 42)

“The last hour” here has no reference whatever to the Second Coming and must be referred either to the destruction of Jerusalem or the end of the world.

Jesus failed (purposefully) to distinguish for His apostles that these two events (the end of all things and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem) would be separated in time by thousands of years, it may be legitimately supposed that the apostles might have thought they would come at the same time; but, even more significantly, *no apostle ever said so*.

In the providence of God, the destruction of Jerusalem was foreordained to be a type of the overthrow of the whole world; and in giving the signs that would precede the first event, Christ of necessity gave in those very signs the sign of the end of the world; but it was necessary for Christ to make the signs of Jerusalem’s overthrow plain enough for the Christians to be forewarned and to enable them to escape from the city before its destruction. Otherwise, Satan might have accomplished the total destruction of the church itself in that disaster. Heeding those signs which Jesus had given, John here prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem (perhaps supposing also that the end of the world was at hand, a supposition that he did not state, even if He thought it). And what sign did He stress? This was the very sign that Jesus had definitely connected with the destruction of the temple. “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible even the “elect.” (Matthew 24:24) It was also indicated by Christ as being a signal for

the “elect” to “flee out of Judaea,” (Matthew 24:16), to avoid “the end of the world?” Certainly not! To avoid the disaster of Jerusalem? Of course! Thus it is absolutely certain that John in this passage was not warning Christians to get ready for the end of the world, but to get ready to flee the city of Jerusalem.

Christians did flee Jerusalem, not a single one of “the elect;” losing his life in the holocaust that overthrew the city in 70 A. D.

The “antichrists in this passage are plural; the “lawless one” is singular; Christ associated the antichrists, or false Christ’s with the need for the elect to flee out of Judaea (Matthew 24:16); whereas, Paul associated “the lawless one” with the coming of the Lord,” an association that John refrained from making here. Neither the “man of sin” nor the “lawless one” of Paul’s writings has any connection whatever with what John wrote here. It was long after John wrote that, “the name of antichrist was appropriated to that great adversary of Christ ‘the man of sin.’ (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Harvey J. S. Blaney, op. cit., p. 372, wrote, “John’s antichrist “falls far short of Paul’s ‘son of perdition.’”

“Just as you heard that that antichrist is coming . . .” Although only the singular is used here, it is clear from what John at once wrote that there were many of these. Where had the Christians heard of this? From the teachings of Christ as recorded in Matthew 24.

“It is the last hour . . .” Before leaving this, the error of the rendition should be noted. As John R. W, Stott, op. cit., p. 108, wrote, “This phrase should be translated “a last hour.” Westcott makes much of this and writes that the omission of the definite article “seems to mark the general character of the period and not its specific relation to ‘end.’ It was a period of critical change.” Leon Morris, op. cit., p. 1264, also stressed the same thing, saying, “There is no article with *hour*. John is not saying *it is the last hour*, but that *it is a last hour*.” There is no hint whatever of the Second Coming in this verse.

It is true of course that those who suppose that the apostles “expected” the coming of Christ to take place concurrently with the destruction of Jerusalem are probably correct in that supposition. Why? Because Jesus Himself so mingled the prophecies of the two events that such a supposition might easily have followed. However, the true exegesis of the New Testament does not consist in reading into its sacred texts what men suppose the apostles thought.

But rather consists in studying what they wrote; and John wrote nothing here, either of the judgment or the Second Coming of Christ.

### Verse 19

It is plain that the “antichrists” were Christians who had defected from the truth. Their departure from the apostles and from the church indicated their hostility to the truth. Many of these were no doubt teaching the most shameful errors, justifying, or rationalizing the most wicked and dissolute behavior on the basis of Gnostic or other false teachings they had adopted.

Such a verse as this, of course, is made use of as a crutch for the proposition that a person “once saved is always saved;” however, it should be carefully noted that John did not here write of the false teachers that they *never had been* of us,” but that they *are not* of us. Their departure from the faith became final at some point prior to their leaving; but there is no suggestion by the apostle that those who departed were ever truly converted at the beginning of their Christian association. The fallen angels were not wicked from the beginning but became so; and Judas was not wicked when the Lord chose him as an apostle, but he fell “through transgression.”

### Verse 20

Leon Morris, *op. cit.* p. 1264, wrote, “This is just another way of saying that all of them had received the gift of the Holy Spirit.” That is, the earnest of the Holy Spirit, which is given to all believers in Christ following their repentance and baptism into Christ. (Acts 2:38f)

“And you all know . . .” The Christians had been adequately enlightened on all these things before they could become Christians. (Jeremiah 31:31-35) Thus he refuted the boasts of the false teachers that they had any vital new truth that could have benefited anyone. When men hear and obey the gospel of Christ, they have already reached the zenith of all knowledge as it regards the eternal redemption of the soul.

### Verse 21

Jeremiah had prophesied that under the new covenant, “All would know the Lord, from the least to the greatest of them,” the simple reason behind this being that one must know the truth in all of its essential aspects before he can even become a Christian. (Jeremiah 31:31ff)

The “lie” mentioned here is, “Any doctrine contrary to that taught by the apostles of Christ.” (James Macknight, *Ibid.*)

### Verse 22

A comparison with 4:15 and 5:1f suggests that the type of denial was that of refusing to accept the complete union of God with Jesus Christ. Certain Gnostics and Docetists theorized that Jesus was only a man, the natural son of Joseph, and that “Christ” descended upon him and inhabited His body at the time of His baptism, deserted Him for the crucifixion, etc. The exalted view of Christ in John’s writings and throughout the New Testament refutes such nonsense fully. The Christian believes and confesses that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, that He is one with the Father, that He, in fact, “was God,” that of His own volition He entered our earth life by means of the incarnation, that He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, and He was born and passed through all the phases of human life without sin, that the power of the godhead dwelt in Him bodily during His ministry enabling the mighty works which were done by Him, that He gave His life a ransom for all in His crucifixion, and that He Himself arose from the grave, commissioned His apostles, ascended to the Father where He was before, and that He will come again to judge the quick and the dead at the consummation of all things.

John was saying in this verse that any denial of such things is falsehood, and that such liars are antichrist. No distinction between *the Christ* and *Jesus* is of the truth, but belongs rather to the heresy of the Cerinthians. (David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 181)

### Verse 23

The denial of the Son of God, through failure to confess Him, results in the loss of the Father, because only the Divine Son, can reveal the Father. “No one

comes to God but by Me,” Jesus said. The meaningful confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God leads to a full knowledge of God in the forgiveness of sins.

#### **Verse 24**

“Which you heard from the beginning . . .” This is a reference to the gospel truth as proclaimed by the holy apostles of Christ, and as revealed in the sacred New Testament. Absolute and unwavering loyalty and devotion to that message and to that alone, is here commanded; and the reward of doing so is indicated, that is, those obeying shall abide in the Son, and in the Father.

“You also will abide in the Son and in the Father . . .” This is a reference to the corporate body of Christ, a conception that was announced by the Lord Himself in the analogy of the true vine. (John 15:1-10) Thus John takes his place alongside Paul in the presentation of salvation “in Christ.”

If the church of Christ in the present time would renew its vitality and increase the effectiveness of its evangelism, then let it return to a greater emphasis upon that which we have heard “from the beginning.”

#### **Verse 25**

No other religion, not any philosophy, nor any code of ethics, nothing whatever, throughout the long course of human history has ever promised eternal life; but this eternal life “in Christ” is the promise of our holy religion. It is not one of the side-effects or fringe benefits of the faith, but the essential heart of it. It cannot be merited by men, nor earned; but it is given to all who are “in God and in Christ,” and are “found in Him” (Philippians 3:9) when the probation of life is over. John himself spelled this out in these epic words, “And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! ”Yes.” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow with them.” (Revelation 14:13) Inherent in this precious and exceedingly great promise is the fact of its being conditional, the primary condition being that of abiding in God and abiding in Christ, that in turn being conditional, everything in the last analysis being contingent upon whether or not men hear and obey the original gospel, that is, “Abide in that which you have heard from the beginning.”

## Verse 26

This is John's reminder that he is still discussing the subject of the antichrists and their false teachings, a crisis which he met by a profound and forceful reiteration of what he himself and all of the apostles had preached from the very beginning of Christianity. Christians must still meet philosophical deceit and cunning perversions of the holy faith in exactly the same manner.

## Verse 27

"The anointing which you received from Him abides in you . . ." Although this is speaking of the Holy Spirit (verse 20), it is clear from the last clause where the neuter pronoun and past tense are used that he is referring to the written records of the gospel. It was *that* which they had been taught; and it was *that* which was abiding in them, there being no difference whatever in the word of God dwelling in Christians and the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

It was that original gospel which was alone sufficient for all their needs, enabling John to say, "You need not that anyone teach you." The holy gospel has already given all of the teaching that Christians will ever need.

That it is that gospel (we now call it the New Testament) of which John taught in this verse is proved by careful reading of it:

That the gospel is no lie. It is the truth. It taught you.  
As a consequence of its teachings, you abide in Him.

J. W. Roberts, *The Letters of John*, p. 72, stated, "It is obvious that John does not mean that each individual has his own channel of communications by means of the Holy Spirit." Furthermore, John did not teach that Christians had no need for further study. The whole passage must be understood as a plea for the all-sufficiency of the gospel as the complete and effective refutation of heresies. John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 115, wrote, "The only safeguard against lies is to have abiding in us both the Word that we heard from the beginning and the anointing that we received from Him."

## Verse 28

“Abide in Him . . .” is actually the whole point of this letter. “If He should appear . . .” This shows that John was by no means certain that such a period as “a last hour” which he had already positively identified as coming soon, would also include the coming of Christ; but there is a suggestion in this that he might have thought it very possible. Note, however, that he made no assertion regarding the Second Coming, except this, that if it did turn out that the Lord was manifested in the events John knew were so shortly coming to pass, the Christians should strive to be ready for the Lord.

Abide in Him that . . . we may have boldness . . .” Such boldness will result from the identification of Christians with their Lord. Those who are “in Him” and “abide in Him” until His coming, or until death, will indeed be amply supplied with boldness in His presence.

It will be observed that John used a number of expressions having a great similarity:

- (1) We are in Him (God) (verse 5).
- (2) A new commandment is true in Him and in you (verse 8).
- (3) He that loves . . . abides in the light (verse 9).
- (4) The word of God abides in you (verse 17).
- (5) Let that (the word of the gospel) abide in you (verse 24).
- (6) You also shall abide in the Son (verse 24).
- (7) ...and (you shall abide in the Father, also (verse 24).
- (8) The Anointing...abides in you (verse 27).
- (9) You abide in Him (verse 27).
- (10) My little children abide in Him (verse 28).

In all of these passages and a dozen others like them in John’s letters the meaning is identical. Could there be any conceivable difference between one who was abiding “in the light” and another who was abiding “in the word of God,” or “in God,” or “in Christ,” or in the Holy Spirit? Conversely, could there be any distinction between persons “walking in the truth” (as in 3 John verse 3) and those in whom the “word of God abides”?

## Verse 29

“He is righteous . . .” is a clear reference to Jesus Christ whose coming was just mentioned; however, “born of Him” in the very next clause means, “born of God.”

The word of God is the word of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17); and was it not the Holy Spirit who guided the apostles (including John himself) into all truth? (John 14:16, 16:13)

The great wealth of John’s thoughts in this glorious chapter contrasts with the poverty of language itself (not the apostle’s lack), which is incapable of any complete revelation to men of the marvelous and glorious nature of the salvation which the eternal Father has made available to men in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## CHAPTER 3

This entire chapter, including also the last verse of chapter 2, is a discussion dealing principally with the children of God. We cannot find agreement with those who make this section a treatise on the “love of God,” although of course, that subject is prominently mentioned. Aside from the opening verse, love is not mentioned till verse 11, and there it is not the love of God, but God’s command that we should love one another.

R. W. Orr, A New Testament Commentary, p. 614 gives us an outline of this chapter.

### THE CHILDREN OF GOD

- I. The Divine nature is manifested in God’s children (verses 1-18).
  - A. In their being like Christ (verses 1-3).
  - B. In doing right (verses 4-10).
  - C. In loving the brethren (verses 11-18).
- II. It is by practical obedience that we have reassurance and confidence (verses 19-24).
  - A. Our love should be genuine (verse 19).
  - B. A good conscience results in confidence (verses 20-21).
  - C. Answer to prayer depends on obedience (verse 22).



D. Three earmarks of true children: love, obedience, and faith (verses 23-24).

Amos N. Wilder, *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. XII, p. 251, wrote, "It is this conception (of the children of God) that here enters this epistle and dominates the whole present section (verse 1-24)."

### **Verse 1**

"How great a love the Father has bestowed upon us . . ." Christ used the expression, "My Father," and taught His disciples to pray, "our Father" but the meaning here "includes both." (James William Russell, *Compact Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 601)

"That we should be called children of God . . ." God would not have become a man, unless it had been true that man had been created in God's image. The most glorious truth the world has ever received is in this invitation or "call" of God to become His children.

"And we are . . ." It is no empty title. The believers "in Christ" are genuine children of the Father in heaven. The word rendered "children" is *tekna*, that is related to God by the new birth; and this a closer relationship than that indicated by *uioi* (Paul's word, stressing the analogy of adoption.) (Harvey J. S. Blaney, *op. cit.*, p. 376)

While no doubt true, in a sense, such a comment should not obscure the fact that "adoption" in Paul's usage carries all of the full benefits and privileges of sons by generation, having also the advantage of illuminating the truth that sonship is all of grace.

### **Verse 1b.**

The reason for the world's hatred of Christians lies in their hostility to all truth and righteousness. They did not recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God. John's statement here, that the world did not know Him, means that, "Although they saw the human Jesus, they did not recognize Him as the Son of God." (J. W. Roberts, *the Letters of John*, p. 77)

In connection with the rejection of Himself, Christ foretold the hatred of His followers (John 16:3); and in the holocaust so soon coming upon Christians, the same root hatred of the light was assigned here as the reason behind it.

### **Verse 2**

“It has not appeared as yet that we shall be . . .” W. N. Sinclair, Ellicott’s Bible Commentary, p. 482, thought that John made this statement in response to questions which Christians had raised, regarding their future state; and it may well be true. Men have always been curious regarding such things. “But we cannot say. It is not good for us to know.” We shall be like Christ, and that must be enough for us.

“If He should appear . . .” Leon Morris, New Bible Commentary, Revised, p. 1264, wrote, “Grammatically, “He” should mean the Father; but it is impossible to think this is not a reference to Christ.” J. W. Roberts, op. cit., p. 78 wrote: “What John is clearly saying is that our likeness to the Godhead will be realized in the coming of Christ.”

“We shall be like Him . . . because we shall see Him . . .” A. Plummer, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 22, 1 John, p. 71, wrote, “This does not mean that seeing God (Christ) is a proof of our being like Him, but the cause of our being so.”

All men shall see Him in the final judgment, but the view of the wicked shall be transient.

### **Verse 3**

“And every one who has this hope fixed on Him . . .” This means, “Everyone who hopes in Christ.” The great obligation of every person in Christ is to exhibit the righteousness and purity so perfectly exemplified in Him. There is another glimpse in this of the “perfection” that God requires of His children. Being as pure as Christ is pure is the same as being, “Perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), or being “Holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15, 16. This idea, or goal, of absolute perfection is unattainable in human strength; but it is achieved for Christians and ascribed to them by reason of their having denied themselves, being baptized “into Christ,” and thus made

partakers of His sinless perfection. Men are saved, not in their own identity, but “as Christ,” and “in Christ,” and are cleansed automatically by the blood of Christ as long as they remain so.

All Christians should strive to achieve and maintain the very highest state of purity and perfection of which they are capable. Sin can never be a casual business with the Christian.

#### **Verse 4**

“Sin is lawlessness . . .” “Sin is the transgression of the law.” And what law is in view? W. N. Sinclair, *op. cit.* p. 483, wrote, “He is thinking of the Law of Moses.” Nor can we agree with Harvey J. S. Blaney, *op. cit.*; p. 378, that, “Transgression of the law of love,” alone is meant. A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 71, wrote, “It means the Law of God in the fullest sense, not Moses’s law, but transgression of the will of God.”

It is “the Law of Christ,” which sin transgresses; and that may not be limited to any classification of Jesus’ commandments, but includes, “All things whatsoever I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-19) The proposition that “We are not under law but grace,” while true enough as related to the Law of Moses, does not relax any of the Law of Christ.

#### **Verse 5**

“In Him there is no sin . . .” Even the sins of Christians who are “in Christ” are cleansed automatically by the blood of Christ as long as they so remain. There is no compatibility whatever between Christ and sin.

“He appeared in order to take away sins . . .” For more on what Christ came into our world to do see 1 Peter 1:19.

“And in Him there is no sin . . .” Christ committed no sin (1 Peter 2:22); He was holy, guileless, undefiled, and separated from sinners (Hebrews 7:26); He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21); He was without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19).

## Verse 6

Many of the scholars assure us, based upon the Greek verbs used here, that “sin” in this context means, “leads a life of sin.” “No one who abides in Him . . .” This is the key to the sinlessness of Christians, since their sins are forgiven continually through the power of the blood of Christ (1:7). It is only in such a sense as this that any child of God was ever sinless.

## Verse 7

In this verse, there is a strong suggestion that some of the false teachers who were troubling the church of that era were teaching that one could be saved without living a pure and godly life.

What John said here is, “Make no mistake about it, living the Christian life is the one and only proof of a person’s being a Christian.”

“Just as He is righteous . . . “ This is possible only through perfect unity with and identification with Christ who is truly righteous. Nothing short of the perfect righteousness of Christ can ever save anyone. Let every man decide, therefore, if he will dare to appear before God in judgment clad in his own personal righteousness which he alone thinks is sufficient and efficacious.

## Verse 8

“The devil . . .” Any willful or continual commission of deeds which are contrary to the will of God reveals the sinner for what he is, a child of the devil. It is a false view that explains away John’s powerful words here as an “impression he received from the Law of Moses,” due to his Jewish background!

A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 72, wrote. “For every single time the devil is mentioned in the Old Testament, he is spoken of twenty times in any gospel or epistle.” Someone wrote a question to F. F. Bruce, asking, “How can a child of God be of the devil?” Bruce replied, “He cannot, that is the point John is making.”

For a child of God who might commit a sin occasionally, John had already written of the provision that God has made for that contingency (2:1-2). Here again, “does sin” refers to deliberate choice and continuity in sin.

“The devil has sinned from the beginning . . .” This does not mean from the beginning of time, nor from the beginning of Satan’s existence, nor from the beginning of the Christian age, but “from the beginning of human sin” in the Garden of Eden. Jesus said of Satan that, “He was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44); and these texts shed a great deal of light on the purpose of the evil one. By Christ’s denomination of him as “a murderer,” the purpose of Satan to accomplish the death of Adam and Eve is evident; and from John’s mention of the devil’s sinning from that same time shows that Satan’s deception of Eve was a diabolical and sinful act. It was for that sin that God pronounced the curse upon Satan.

#### **REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF SATAN**

The Scriptures do not give a categorical answer to the question of Satan’s origin; but Ezekiel 28:12-19 has the nearest approach to an answer. If, as usually thought, “King of Tyre” in that passage refers to Satan, who had been “in Eden,” who was lifted up because of his beauty, who “was created,” who was perfect in his ways “till iniquity was found” in him, whose heart “was lifted up” because of his beauty, who was “corrupted” because of his wisdom, etc., then the origin of Satan is revealed in that remarkable passage.

It is wrong to think of Satan’s sharing, in any manner, the control of the universe with God. That he was a leader of a band of rebellious angels would appear to be a proper deduction from Jesus’ mention of “Satan and his angels” (Matthew 25:41), leading to the supposition that Satan himself was, at first, an angel of God who led some of his fellow-angels into rebellion. This is an awesome subject, and little more than a few suggestions may confidently be offered. That there is indeed a being of greater magnitude of powers, and inveterate enemy of mankind, the prince of this world, the ruler of the world’s darkness, a prince of evil, who has organized and directed the wickedness of mankind is a fact so plainly set forth in the New Testament that only an unbeliever may deny it. The Lord’s Prayer is a constant testimonial to the existence of Satan: “Deliver us from the evil one!”

Charles Gore, *The Epistles of John*, p. 144-145 wrote, “Like the rest of the New Testament authors, John had no doubt that behind the rebel wills of men

there is a master-rebel, who sinned before they were in being, and who, as the enemy of all good, is called the devil, the slanderer, Satan, or the adversary.”

### Verse 9

“No one who is born of God practices sin . . .” This is a reference to the new birth, “born of God.” “Practices sin . . .” As long as one who has believed in Christ, repented of sin, and has been baptized into Christ, and in consequence of such obedience has received the earnest of the Holy Spirit,—as long as such a person continues in that status, he will not sin.

What is the reason for such a change? “Because His seed abides in him . . .” The New Testament supplies abundant proof of what the “seed” is which is mentioned here. It is the word of God. Paul instructed the Colossians in chapter 3:16, to let “The word of Christ” dwell in them richly, etc., and John had in mind the same thing here. “The seed is the word of God.” (Luke 8:11)

In speaking of the new birth, Peter also mentioned the “incorruptible seed,” which he promptly identified as “the word of God, which lives and abides forever.” (1 Peter 1:23) It is the word of God which is eternal, incorruptible and continually abiding in Christian hearts. This word is no mere “dead letter,” but “living, active . . . and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

If the child of God will walk fully in that holy light, he will be effectively restrained from all sin.

God, however, has given men the freedom of their will; and a failure of the human will can always result in the commission of sin.

“And he cannot sin, because he is born of God . . .” This statement has been alleged to teach a whole anthology of errors, such as:

- (1) The meaning is restricted to what Roman Catholic writers call “mortal” sins, and does not apply to ordinary sins!
- (2) What is sinful in unbelievers (as adultery, greed, theft, etc.) is not sinful to Christians!
- (3) It is only the “old nature that sins;” the new man in Christ cannot sin.

The new man is not connected in any manner with the old man!  
("My old nature did it; I didn't.")

- (4) John is here only holding up the ideal, or goal of the Christian life, not really meaning that the Christian cannot sin.
- (5) It means that Christians cannot "consent to sin," that is, deliberately and purposefully walk in forbidden paths.
- (6) It means that Christians cannot continue in a life of sin.

### Verse 10

"By this the children of God . . ." has the meaning that Christians may be identified by their conduct. Any and all transgressions of the Law of Christ deny such transgressors any status whatever as children of God. People who do not make a serious and consistent effort to do what the New Testament teaches that Christians *should do* are "the children of the devil."

A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 73, wrote, "This teaching about the devil is not at all agreeable to those who dwell exclusively upon the sunny aspects of the world and of life, and would shut their eyes to what is dark and terrible. They like to hear of a Being who is all gracious and loving . . . the devil?" They wish to suppose that he belongs to the world's infancy, and disappears as we know more!"

"Children of God . . . children of the devil . . ." Charles C. Ryrie, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, p. 1020, wrote, "This is the only place in the New Testament where these two expressions stand side by side;" and they correspond perfectly with the grand cleavage of humanity into two, and only two classes: the and chaff, the good and the bad, the sheep and the goats, those on the right hand and those on the left hand, the good fishes and the rejects, the builder on the rock and the builder on the sand, lovers of God lovers of mammon, the wheat and the tares, the ready and the unready, the faithful and the unfaithful, the children of God and the children of the devil. It is easy to rationalize sin as "goodness" in the making, etc." but it appears in the New Testament that these two classes are radical opposites and totally irreconcilable.

“The one who does not love his brother . . . ” This is cited as a particular instance of Christian character, and not as the sum total of it, much in the same manner that Paul often spoke of “faith in Christ.”

“His brother . . . ” Does this mean everyman on earth, or does it have special reference to the Christian’s brother in the faith? Despite learned opinion to the contrary, the conviction here is that it is the “brother in Christ” which is meant.

A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 73, wrote, “It means mankind at large” citing the example of the good Samaritan as Jesus’ example of “who is my neighbor?” James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 72, also stated that the passage, “Signifies all mankind, who are all brethren by virtue of their common nature and their descent from Adam.”

The brotherhood of all men is, of course, a fact “in Adam;” but the particular view point of the New Testament is that of “brotherhood in Christ;” and there is a world of difference in these.

Paul did not go about among the churches raising a collection for the oppressed brethren in the ghettos of Rome, but for the “poor saints” in Jerusalem. Although there is a true sense in which the Christian loves every man on earth, it can never be the same as that for the beloved “in Christ.”

Love of the world in general will issue in deeds, charities and benefits to “all men,” to the extent that these may contribute to their redemption; but the apostolic restriction is sternly laid on this in words, “As we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

There is clearly a difference between the love of brethren and the love of the whole world. We believe that Harvey J. S. Blaney, *op. cit.*, p. 380, is correct in the view that, “Brother here means a brother Christian, as a representative of all Christians, rather than of all men.” The love of Christians is a mutual love (verse 11), and no such love is possible for the world which hates Christians (verse 13).



### **Verse 11**

“You have heard from the beginning . . .” The unchanging nature of the Christian revelation is inherent in this. Not even the apostles busied themselves with the production of “new ideas” regarding man’s redemption. The great basics of Christianity are unchanging, fixed and permanent. J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 88, wrote, “When false teachers brought forth new and esoteric (secret) doctrines about faith and morals, their very newness refuted them.”

“That we should love one another . . .” The mutuality of the love mentioned here is a denial that John is speaking of the Christians unilaterally loving all men. This distinction is important, because much of the current theology tends alarmingly toward mere “humanism” as the one and all of Christian teaching.

True Christianity, and the righteousness of Christians in any adequate sense, cannot mean merely the manifestation of an attitude of sweet reasonableness toward the human race. As John will point out before the chapter ends, it is the acceptance of all, that Jesus taught which must characterize the response of Christians.

### **Verse 12**

The story of Cain is recorded in Genesis 4:iff, where Cain’s wickedness (which long preceded the murder of Abel) at last issued in his offering being rejected by God. In the ensuing hatred of Abel, Cain killed his brother. It is an important point to remember why God rejected Cain’s offering. John R. W. Stott, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 19, p. 140, wrote, “If Cain had done well, his offering would have been accepted. (Genesis 4:7) According to Hebrews 11:4, it was by “faith” that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain . . . we may assume that God had revealed His will to the two brothers . . . By faith Abel obeyed . . . Cain was willfully disobedient.”

“Cain who was of the evil one . . .” It is a mistake to suppose that God punished Cain merely for making a mistake in the worship. This reveals that Cain was controlled by evil principles. J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 89, wrote, “It is inferred here that even before Cain slew Abel, there was something in the

actions of the brothers that revealed their difference.” The New Testament reveals that Abel was righteous and that Cain’s works were evil.

“And slew his brother . . .” This sheds further light upon what is recorded in Genesis 4, where it is recorded merely that Cain rose up and slew his brother. The word John used in this place properly means: “slaughtered,” “butchered,” “by cutting the throat (*jugulare*) like an ox in shambles.”

“And for what reason did he say him . . .” It was not for an offense of Abel’s against his brother, but simply and only because, “Cain’s works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.”

Thus quite early in human history the hatred of darkness against the light was revealed. Cain was the example of the world’s eternal opposition to truth and righteousness. J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p.89, was of the opinion that John’s choice of Cain as his example of evil could very possibly have been due to the fact that the odious heresy of the Cainites (which flourished a little later) might already have made its appearance at the time he wrote. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies I*, 31 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol I. p. 358 wrote, “The heroes worshipped by this monstrous system were Cain, Korah, the Sodomites and Judas Iscariot. They advocated such nonsense by means of a Gospel of Judas.”

They taught that men could not be saved till they had passed through every kind of experience, even the most vile, claiming that an angel attended their orgies and urged them on to incur pollution. Out of their debaucheries, they claimed to have “perfect knowledge,” and did not shrink to rush into such actions as it is unlawful even to name.”

### **Verse 13**

The apostle Peter wrote a similar warning (1 Peter 4:12), and Jesus Christ had repeatedly warned the apostles of the unyielding hostility of the world (John 15: 18, 19, 25, 16:1ff, 17:14). Cain with his murderous attitude toward his brother who was righteous is the prototype of all the unregenerated men who ever lived. Although it is natural for the non-Christian world to hate Christians, it is not the business or intention of Christians to seek or encourage such hatred; but, rather, it is the purpose of God’s children so to live and deport themselves as to disarm such hatreds and win the lost to Christ. In keeping with that purpose, Christians

should diligently eliminate from their lives all lack of amiability, (friendliness) carefully avoiding all behavior that might justly incur the world's hostility.

The reason why the wicked hated the righteous is that which William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 85, wrote, "The good man is a walking rebuke to the evil man, even if he never speaks a word to him. His life passes a silent judgment."

Alcibiades, a debauchee, said to Socrates, "I hate you; because every time I meet you, you show me what I am." (William Barclay, *Ibid.*) A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 73, wrote, "There is still a Cain, the world, hating its Abel, the church."

#### **Verse 14**

"We know that we have passed out of death into life . . ." The true test of Christian achievement is not world opinion, but holy love within the heart. "Passed out of" is from a word that means, "passing from one form of government to another, and was used of transition from one place to another." (David Smith, *op. cit.*, p.186) It is akin to the word "migrated."

"Death into life . . ." This strongly reflects the teaching of Jesus who said, "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live." (John 5:25) All of the New Testament writers reflect the same thought. The old sinful life is death; the new joy in Christ Jesus is life.

"He who does not love . . ." One whose heart is not healed, opened and expanded by love is still abiding in the old life which is death.

#### **Verse 15**

W. N. Sinclair, *op. cit.*, p. 485, wrote, "John's full argument is: where love is not, there is hatred, where hatred is, there is murder, where murder is, there can be no eternal life." An argument like this is squarely founded upon the teaching of God who equated the deprecatory word, the contemptuous epithet, and anger in the heart against a brother, with murder. (Matthew 5:21-22)

#### **Verse 16**

In such a verse as this the unattainability of the full Christian ideal is starkly clear. John did not here command Christians to lay down their lives for

each other, but he thundered the principle that they ought to do it. Why? Because Christ did so for us. If the exhibition of such a love as this is the final test to be met before one can be saved, we must be convinced that heaven is going to be sparsely settled! Such an ethic is very much like that set forth in the parable of the good Samaritan, being simply beyond that which the vast majority of Christian people have ever dared to attempt.

In the light of this verse, who could ever imagine that he merited salvation, or that he had earned it? We believe that John's purpose here was primarily that of illuminating this truth. Knowing human weakness and inability to survive such a test (at least in the general sense), God, in His providence, has most infrequently made it a test of Christian fidelity. There are other tests of love, however; and John will immediately turn to one of them.

### **Verse 17**

J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 93, wrote, "This is a much more common and practical test, which all may be called upon to meet, Christian "philanthropy" (love of mankind). A stingy Christian is a contradiction of terms. There is no use of one's imagining that he has the kind of love that would give up life for a brother, if the countless opportunities of aiding those in distress find no adequate response within him. In a sense, it is even more difficult to aid the poor and the needy than to suffer martyrdom. David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 186, wrote, "Martyrdom is heroic and exhilarating; the difficulty lies in doing the little things, making the petty sacrifices and self-denials with no one notices and no one applauds."

John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, p. 34, wrote, "Give to him that asketh thee . . ." Give and lend to any so far (but no further), for God never contradicts himself as is consistent with thy engagements to thy creditors, thy family, and the household of faith."

Such a comment reveals the serious question of priorities which makes this one of the most difficult Christian commandments; and yet it is one that every child of God must receive and obey.

## Verse 18

The prohibition here is not against expressions of love and concern for others; for, in their place, these are beautiful and helpful. What is forbidden is the substitution of loving words for needed assistance, which is here called loving “in word.” An even worse error is that of merely using the vocabulary of love without any sincerity whatever, that is, talking of a love and concern for others without either the desire or any intention of doing anything except talking about it. This is called by John, “Loving . . . with the tongue.” The world is loaded with “word lovers” and “tongue lovers!” Christians are expected to love “in deed and in truth.”

## Verses 19-20

In this verse, “heart” is used with the meaning of “conscience.” John Wesley, *Ibid.*, wrote, “The heart in St. John’s language is *conscience*; the word *conscience* is not found in his writings.” J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 1057 wrote: “Opinion is much divided on whether these verses are meant to inspire awe, or afford consolation.” There does not seem to be any way of arriving at an absolute certainty on this point.

## AFFORDING CONSOLATION

J. R. Dummelow, *Ibid* paraphrased this saying, “We shall then still our heart in whatsoever it may condemn us, because we are in fellowship with God, and that fact assures us of His sovereign mercy.”

David Smith *op. cit.*, p. 187, explained the meaning writing, “The foregoing exhortation may have awakened a misgiving in our minds, Am I loving as I ought.” Our failures in duty and service rise up before us, and “our heart condemns us.” So the apostle furnishes a grand assurance. The assurance is:

- (1) the worst that is in us is known to God, and
- (2) God sees the deepest things, and these are the real things. If our *intention* is to do His will, he takes account of that.”

## INSPIRING AWE

William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 86, wrote, “It could mean: since our hearts condemn us and God is infinitely greater than our hearts, God must condemn us even more. If we take it that way, it leaves us only with fear of God and with nothing to say but, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

The main objection to this interpretation as stated by John. R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 148, who thought that the emphatic purpose of the paragraph was that of healing wounded hearts and not that of “opening wounds wider . . . and striking terror into their hearts.”

We dare to hope that this meaning is correct. It could be that the blessed Spirit who inspired these precious words intended a certain ambiguity (two or more meanings).

### Verse 21

Whatever consolation may have been intended in the preceding verses, a greater consolation is promised for the Christian who will keep his conscience clean.

### Verse 22

“Whatever we ask we receive . . .” James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 78, wrote, “This declaration is limited by the conditions, which in other passages of Scripture, are made necessary to our petitions being granted by God. There is in this verse the *implied* condition that it is the prayers of the *obedient* which are answered.

### Verse 23

“Believe in the name . . . and love one another . . .” John Wesley, *op. cit.*, p. 913, wrote, “To believe and love—this is the greatest and most important command that ever issued from the throne of glory.”

The inclusion here of faith “in the name“ of Christ shows that “the commandments” mentioned in the preceding verse are “not only, or chiefly moral. They include the whole spectrum of Christian duty. It is a gross mistake to consider Christianity as chiefly an ethical code, though it is *also* that. Belief

or faith in this passage also “carries an overtone of commitment” and actually means fidelity, or faithfulness.

These last two verses of the chapter (23-24) carry frequent references to the farewell discourses of Jesus. (John 13, 15) Obedience to Divine commands, continuity in faith and love, promised answer to prayer, abiding in God, and the gift of the Spirit are among these.

“His commandment . . . “ R. W. Orr, *op. cit.*, p.616, pointed out that “believe and love,” as used in this verse, have the meaning of “trust and obey.” William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p.88, also agreed to this, “When we put these two commandments together, we find the great truth that the Christian’s life depends on right belief and right conduct combined.”

#### **Verse 24**

“Abides in Him, and He in him . . .” This refers to the Christian’s abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in the Christian. It is not however, some mystical experience which is meant by this; John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p.151, wrote, “Its indispensable accompaniments are the confession of Jesus as the Son of God come in the flesh, and a consistent life of holiness and love.”

In this connection, it is also appropriate to point out that no one was ever truly “in Christ” who was not baptized “into Him,” as the New Testament repeatedly affirms. (Romans 6:3-5, Galatians 3:26-27, 1 Corinthians 12:13)

“And we know by this that He abides in us . . .” This is only another way of saying, “Hereby we know we are truly Christians.”

“By the Spirit which He has given us . . .” James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 79, wrote that in Christians, this refers to, “The influence of the Spirit renewing their nature, sanctifying their wills, and directing their actions.” We have called this the “Gift Ordinary” of the Holy Spirit, given to Christians as an earnest in consequence of subsequently to their being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38ff and Ephesians 1:13). This is also called in the New Testament the “earnest” of the Holy Spirit.

In the wonderful words of this great chapter, the apostle John has revealed the true secret of the wonderful life in Christ, a life so glorious that it is

appropriately described as a transfer from darkness to light, and as passing from death to life.

The basics of it are profoundly simple. These are: the acceptance of Jesus Christ as God's only begotten Son, the confession of His name, being baptized into Him, abiding "in Him," having "Him abide in" us, and responding to His great love by loving all men of the whole world, and "the brethren in Christ" with even a more fervent love.

Such a life is the greatest adventure that human life on earth can offer, and those who dare to accept the challenge shall receive a final reward of eternal life with God in heaven.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is a great deal of "repeat" in this chapter, but additional truth appears with regard to testing the spirits (verses 1-6), and there is more extended teaching on love. God is love, love as a test, love of one another, the love of God, and God's love of us, etc. are all stressed (verse 7:21). One of the features of this whole epistle is the presentation of a number of tests regarding the genuineness of Christian life. R. W. Orr, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 617, wrote, "These have been organized by some and classified as the tests of:

- (1) obedience,
- (2) love, and
- (3) faith." However, they are not separate tests, but each partakes of the nature of the others.

<b>THE TEST</b>	<b>WHAT IS PROVED</b>
Everyone that does righteousness (2:29)	Is born of Him.
We know that He abides in us (3:24)	By the Spirit which He gave us.
Everyone that loves (4:7)	Is born of God and knows God.



If we love one another (4:12)	God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.
We know we abide in Him, and He in us (4:13)	Because He has given us His Spirit
Confessing Jesus as the Son of God (4:15)	God abides in him, and he in God.
Believing that Jesus is the Christ (5:1)	That one is born of God.
If we keep His commandments (5:3)	We love God.

Such tests have a prominent place in this chapter. They are not separate tests, actually, but a composite, each of the above Scriptures being, in a sense, commentary on each one of the others. The unity of the tests is seen in the fact that “keeping His commandments,” “loving one another,” “doing righteousness,” “possessing the Holy Spirit,” all amount to one and the same thing.

### Verse 1

“Do not believe every spirit . . .” Charles C. Ryrie, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, p. 1033, wrote, “The literal meaning of this is *stop believing*; evidently some of John’s readers were being carried away by Gnostic teaching.”

“Every spirit . . .” means every false prophet, or every false teacher pretending, or seeming, to be inspired. It is a gross misinterpretation of this passage to understand John here as “speaking not of men, but of *spirits*.” (Amos N. Wilder, *Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. XII*, p. 274)

The final clause of the verse states flatly that the “false prophets” were in view. Such men pretended to be prophets of God speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Harvey J. S. Blaney, *Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. 10*, p. 387, was correct in identifying the false prophets of this verse with the antichrists of chapter 2:18.” The test which Christ gave for recognizing such false teachers was, “By

their fruits you shall know them.” That test should be added to the ones John was about to cite here.

“Whether they are from God . . .” The expression “of God” is used seven times in these first seven verses. William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 92, wrote, “It is of the first importance to attach a precise meaning to this phrase . . . it means *has its origin in God*.”

”Test the spirits . . .” This admonition to establish the validity of the claims of any teacher claiming God as the origin of his message, was directed to the whole church. Every Christian is responsible for checking out the claims of allegedly inspired teachers, as noted by W. N. Sinclair, *Ellicott’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. VIII, p. 487, who wrote, “This examination of truth and error is inculcated on all alike, not merely on an ordained or materially separate class.”

The nature of the doctrine taught by the evil teachers is easy to read in the apostle’s refutation of it in the following verses.

David Smith, *Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, Vol. V, p. 189, wrote, “The Cerentian heresy had much to say about the “spirit,” boasting a larger spirituality. Starting with the theological postulate of an irreconcilable antagonism between matter and spirit, it denied the possibility of the Incarnation, and drew a distinction between Jesus and Christ. Its spirit was not the Spirit of Truth, but the spirit of error.”

## Verse 2

R. W. Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 617, wrote, “The confession here is a Christian creed in brief compass.” Orr *Ibid*: “Affirmed that a “better translation” of this verse is, “Every spirit which confesses Jesus as Christ come in the flesh is of God.” Leon Morris, *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, p. 1267, wrote, “The reference to flesh puts emphasis on the Incarnation.” David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 189, also preferred the translation advocated by Orr, adding that, “It is an accurate definition of the doctrine denied by the Cerentians,” and thus a perfect refutation of it.

This verse is actually a thumbnail summary of Christian doctrine. Charles C. Ryrie, *op. cit.*, p. 1023, wrote, “From this verse, we are not to suppose that this

was the only test of orthodoxy; but it is a major one, and it was the most necessary one for the error of John's day."

The true teaching of this verse was paraphrased by John R. W. Stott, Tyndale Commentaries, Vol. 19, p. 154, who wrote, "Far from coming upon Jesus at the baptism and leaving Him before the cross, the Christ actually *came in the flesh* and never laid it aside." The entire Christian religion is unified and bound together. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ made this the dogmatic foundation of the church.

### Verse 3

The person of the Son of God is the center of all true religion. No matter how attractive a system may be, no matter how skillfully it may be advocated by personable and attractive personnel, no matter how imposing are the names of "authorities" associated with it, no matter how popular it may become—any and every religion or philosophy that is not anchored in both the eternal deity of Jesus Christ and in His historical humanity is false, having its origin in Satan, not in God.

The New Catholic Bible, New Testament, p. 317, translated this verse, "Every spirit that severs Jesus is not from God, but of Antichrist," admitting in the footnote, that this is not the best rendition of the Greek. The heresy of the age was that of making a "severance" between Jesus as a man, and the Christ."

### Verse 4

"You . . ." John R. W. Stott, op. cit., p. 157, pointed out that each of the verses 4, 5 and 6 begins with an emphatic personal pronoun: (verse 4) you (*hemeis*), (verse 5) they (*autoi*) and (verse 6) we (*hemeis*)." These refer respectively to (4) John's readers in general, (5) to the false teachers, and (6) to John the apostle and other apostolic witnesses of Christ and the revelation of His doctrine to mankind. This distinction is important.

"Have overcome . . ." A. Plummer, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 22, 1 John, p. 103, wrote, "By refusing to listen to false teachers, the sheep have overcome them, conquered them; the seducers have gone out, unable to hold their own within the fold."

“He who is in the world . . .” is a reference to the devil, “the prince of this world.” (W. N. Sinclair, op. cit., p. 487) It also includes the meaning that the indwelling God in Christian hearts is greater than any particular advocate of Satan’s teaching.

Leon Morris was impressed that, “Apart from Revelation, where it is used 17 times, 1 John used the verb to *overcome* more often than any other book (6 times).”

"He who is in you . . ." This is a clear reference to the fact of God's indwelling, or being “in” Christians, a truth which is no different in any manner from Christ or the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

### Verse 5

“They are from the world . . .” This is another in a series of tests by which evil teachers could be recognized and refused. In the early church, there were persons supernaturally endowed with the ability to “discern spirits,” that is, the ability to know which were of God and which were not. (1 Corinthians 12:10)

Other tests already stressed in this first paragraph of the chapter were:

- (1) the test of confessing that Jesus was the Christ who came in the flesh,
- (2) the test of whether or not they were indwelt by the father (verse 4),  
and
- (3) the test of their life-style.

The false teachers were worldly, concerned chiefly with material and temporal things, living in pride and ostentations, being “of the world.” These tests are still valid.

“The world listen to them . . .” This is not surprising. John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, p. 914, wrote, “These false teachers speak from the same principle, wisdom, and spirit of the world, and, of consequence, the world approvingly hears them.” In our times, the false teacher speaks the wisdom of the world, reasons from the worldly frame of reference, quotes its philosophers, heeds its authorities, accommodates to its theology, all the while neglecting to declare emphatically the precious teachings of the apostles of Christ as revealed in the New Testament.

## Verse 6

“We are from God . . . listens to us . . .” The apostle’s high claim in this is that of “speaking for God in Christ,” as one of the plenary representatives of the Son of God on earth and as one of the eye witnesses of that full gospel which he declared, including his personal and firsthand knowledge of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The point of this verse is: that if false teachers do not agree with the apostles of Christ, they are liars. Everything that was ever advocated in the name of Christianity must pass this test.

John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 158, wrote that no private teacher could afford to say, as John said here that: “Whoever knows God agrees with me; and only those who are not of God disagree with me.” In today’s circumstances, this means that those who are of God and those who are not of God are revealed, absolutely, by whether or not their teachings agrees with the New Testament.

“By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error . . .” This is the fourth test of the false teachers, to be considered along with the three tests mentioned in the preceding verse.

## Verse 7

Here, of course, is another test, that is, the love of “one another,” *such love* being of God Himself. One stands in amazement at a comment on this like the following: James William Russell, *Compact Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 603, who wrote, “Every one” here includes all the human beings in whose nature love is or ever has been, whether they ever heard of God or Christ or not.”

Such a comment is typical of much of the nonsense that has been written on this section of John’s letter. “Love one another” is neither sexual love (*eros*) nor animal affection (*philo*) but *Christian* love (*agape*). This is a love known only “in Christ,” being the gift of God Himself, having no connection whatever with mere humanism. John’s repeated stress of such Christian love in this epistle might have been due to the fact as supposed by James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 90, who wrote that, “Some of the Jewish converts, retaining their ancient prejudices, still considered it their duty to hate the heathen,” even those who had accepted Christianity.

## Verse 8

“God is love . . .” This profoundly beautiful and encouraging statement about the Father must rank, along with others, as one of the grandest in all Scripture. John Wesley, *op. cit.*, p. 914, wrote, “Love is God’s reigning attribute that sheds an amiable glory upon all of His other perfections.” William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 98, called this, “Probably the greatest single statement about God in the whole Bible. It is amazing how many doors that single statement unlocks and how many questions it answers.”

However, Amos N. Wilder, *op. cit.*, p. 280, cautioned that, “God’s nature is not exhausted by the quality of love.” God is light (1:5), and spirit (John 4:24), and (considering the oneness of the Father with the Son) He is life, and truth (John 14:6). Moreover, “our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29)

Some hail this verse, as if it said, “Love is God; and here is a God we can all handle; bring on the love!” Many who read these precious words of John do not seem to be aware of the holy and self-sacrificing love about which John wrote. God’s love for mankind and his glorious attribute of love do not in any manner alter or negate the revelation that the “wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18), nor the revelation concerning God that He, “Will judge the world in righteousness.” (Acts 17:31)

The proper view of God’s love must be big enough to understand that His final judgment and overthrow of wickedness will be, in itself, a mark of “eternal love.”

No one in the whole world ever knew that God is love until it was revealed from heaven and written in the New Testament. H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Epistles of John*, p. 138, wrote, “It is here, and nowhere else; it is not found in all the literature of mankind.”

## Verse 9

The marginal reading “in our case” instead of “in us” appears as the true meaning, since it is God’s sending His Son to die for the sins of the whole world which is the manifestation spoken of, that not being something “in us” but “in our case,” or on our behalf.

“His only begotten Son . . .” This is a better rendition than that of making it read merely “only Son.” “Only Son” would therefore mean that God has no other sons. yet all Christians are “sons of God.” “Only begotten” conveys that essential meaning of “uniqueness.” It is therefore a most happy and appropriate translation which reads “only begotten Son.”

“That we might live through Him . . .” The great purpose of that visitation from the Dayspring from of High was that, through obedience to the Son of God, men might have the blessing of eternal life.

### **Verse 10**

“In this is love . . .” This carries the thought, “notice just what love actually is.” John defined it, even in God’s love, as being not merely a sentimental fondness for the human race, but a gracious, unselfish and unmerited act of Divine giving of His “only begotten Son” to save men from eternal death.

David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 191, wrote, “The love which proves His children of God is not native to our hearts. It is inspired by the amazing love of God manifested in the Incarnation, the infinite Sacrifice of His Son’s life and death.”

“To be the propitiation for our sins . . .” The objection that “propitiation” leaves out of view the love of God is not well taken. James Denney, “The Death of Christ” p. 152, wrote, “So far from finding any kind of contrast between love and propitiation, the apostle can convey no idea of love to anyone, except by pointing to the propitiation.”

### **Verse 11**

In his chapter, John repeated over and over again many of the closely related topics he had already mentioned, each time going a little farther, giving a slightly different antithesis, stressing a little different aspect, or urging a closer attention—all in such a marvelous way that, at last, his meaning becomes incontrovertible. In this verse, Christians’ loving each other is motivated by the overwhelming majesty of the love of God Himself.

“One another . . .” is incapable of meaning “everybody on earth,” although of course, the love of very Christian reaches out to the ends of the world, but not in the intensity commanded here.

## Verse 12

“No one has beheld God at any time . . .” Harvey J. S. Blaney, *op. cit.*, p. 391, was probably correct in seeing this as a warning to Christians against, “Trying to know God in any other way than the one he is describing.”

Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 1268, wrote, “John is not here discounting the visions of God reported in the Old Testament, but meaning that those visions were partial and incomplete. It is in Christ that we see God. (John 14:9)

“If we love one another . . .” Love of the brethren is the primary meaning of this. A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 104, wrote, “Our love toward God is perfected and brought to maturity by the exercise of love towards our brethren in Him (Christ).”

The warning in this verse to the effect that the revelation of God is available to those only in Christ is widely needed. All such things as astrology, spiritism, witchcraft and Satanism are basically ways of finding a so-called “reality” apart from Biblical revelation.

There is nothing out there which might enlighten or bless men. The true revelation has already been given through Him, who is “the way, the truth and the life.”

“God abides in us . . .” Why make excursions into deserts or dark rooms, or explore the mysteries of esoteric cults, or plunge into the abyss through drugs or alcohol when God Himself will take up residence in the very soul of one who will through living open up room for Him who is love.

## Verse 13

In this paragraph (verses 12-16), the indwelling God is mentioned three times, and the reciprocal nature of it (He in us, we in Him) is stressed twice.

The evidence of God’s indwelling is differently stated as follows:

- (1) Verse 13, “He has given us of His Spirit.”
- (2) Verse 15, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God.”
- (3) Verse 16, “One who abides in love.”

“Because He has given us of His Spirit . . .” it should be carefully noted that the Christian's possession of the Spirit of God is an “evidence of,” not an “antecedent cause” of God’s indwelling our hearts.



There are no less than eight different New Testament designations of that inner presence which differentiates Christians from the world, as set forth in Paul's writings; and John in this letter added to that list the fact that God's love abides in Christians, and Christians abide in God's love.

With regard to the question of prior conditions to be fulfilled by the believer before the indwelling of God, the reception of the Spirit, the indwelling Christ, etc., Peter's summary of this on the Day of Pentecost stands as the eternal answer, binding both on earth and in heaven. To believers who desire the forgiveness of their sins and the indwelling Spirit, the commandment of God is, "Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 118, has another beautiful word regarding 1 John, which in a little wider sense, is applicable to all the New Testament books, wrote: "John's thought pattern continues to retrace ideas and to pick up them like an orchestra does the strains of a melody in order to develop them more fully."

#### **Verse 14**

"And we . . ." This might be an editorial "we," for the apostle John, or as David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 192, thought, "A reference to John and the rest of the apostles who were eyewitnesses." The words "bear witness" indicate that the latter meaning is the true one.

A tremendous weight of Christian truth is concentrated in this verse. "The Father has sent the Son . . ." The entire story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is here reduced to one line.

"To be the Savior of the world . . ." The world's being lost in sin is implied; otherwise no Savior would have been required. Many do not seem to realize that they are lost without Christ. It is wrong to think of being saved, as if it meant, merely, to go to heaven when one dies. Men are lost *now*; they need redemption *now*. We (all men) need salvation from ourselves, from our habits, our temptations, anxieties, fears, frustrations, and uncertainties. One does not have to wait until he dies to be lost; every man without Christ is *already lost*.

Only in the world's Savior can human life be endowed with that purpose, significance, and vitality, without which, human life tends to wretchedness and misery. In Christ all is changed. Life in Him is so exceedingly rich that John called it "eternal life," thus naming it after the ultimate reward which is the eternal hope of that life, and the great motivator of it here and now.

### Verse 15

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God . . ." The primary pre-requirements of salvation, that is, the so-called "plan of salvation" is meant by this. The New Testament reveals that "obeying the gospel" as the New Testament writers called it, meant believing in Christ, repenting of one's sins, confessing the Son of God, and being baptized "into Christ." As a consequence of such primary obedience, and subsequent to it, the Holy Spirit was given, not to make men sons of God, but because upon such initial faith and obedience they became sons of God. (Galatians 4:6) There are two possible meanings of John's words here, and both of them may be correct.

- (1) He refers to the Christian's obedience of the gospel at the time he became a Christian, the confession of faith in Christ, of course, being a prominent part of conversion. If this is what was in the apostle's mind, the meaning of it is almost identical with Peter's words on Pentecost (Acts 2:38f), Peter's "gift of the Holy Spirit" meaning exactly the same thing in that passage that John meant by "God abides in him" here. There can be no difference in these.
- (2) If, as J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 119, thought, "John was speaking of a time in the lives of Christians long after their conversion, then he may be "saying that if this confession can be sincerely repeated by the believer, that God abides in him, and he in God."

It is conversion itself, and primary obedience of the gospel to which this verse undoubtedly refers. This somewhat sudden mention of initial Christian obedience, after all John had been saying, and continued to say about "love," reminds us what William Hurte, *Restoration of New Testament Christianity*, p. 489, wrote, "With John, love always includes obedience to all God's

commandments; and where obedience is not manifested, love is not. Even with God, love was not mere sympathy, but sending His Son to be the propitiation.”

### **Verse 16**

“Know and have believed the love which God has for us . . . “ Leon Morris, op. cit., p. 1268, declared, “*Believing and knowing the love* is certainly a very unusual expression.” It is perhaps John’s way of referring to one’s knowing and believing the whole thesis and system of Christianity, which might be summed up, really, as “knowing and believing the love of God.” What a beautiful way to express it!

“Abides in love . . .” is in this verse equated to “Abides in God,” making the expressions synonymous.

Note: It is undeniable that the New Testament teaches that Christians are in God, in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and in love in the sense of abiding in love; and at the same time the New Testament reveals that each of these: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and love, all abide, indwell, or reside in *Christians*.

### **Verse 17**

“May have confidence . . .” One grand dividend received from a love-oriented and love-motivated life is a dramatic decrease of fear, both with reverence to earthly fears and those regarding the ultimate summons of all men to the judgment of God.

“In the day of judgment . . .” John, like the Lord Jesus, did not speak of many judgments, but only one.

“As He is, so also are we in this world . . .” It is Christ whom the Christians resemble, and therefore He is the one referred to here. Since all Christians are in the business of being like Christ, to the extent of denying themselves and seeking total identity with Him “in Christ” and “as Christ,” to the extent that this is achieved, through having love like Him, it becomes also a pledge of our likeness to Him in glory, the same being the firm ground of overcoming fear.

### Verse 18

The apostle John here presents one after another, “All but impossible levels of Christian attainment.” (Amos N. Wilder, op. cit., p. 286). They are:

- (1) the love of all men with a self-sacrificing love like that of Christ,
- (2) the living of a life free from every sin,
- (3) confidence in the hour of the final judgment when men are pleading for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them, and
- (4) the banishment of all fear, and notice that last phrase *made perfect in love*. Is this anything less than the total God-like perfection enjoined by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:48?

To those who are “in Christ” and who abide in Him, loving Him obeying Him to the fullest extent of human ability—to all such persons shall be given and certified the very blessing in view here and thus “in Christ” they may attain the unattainable!

### Verse 19

Christ was not crucified in order to persuade God to love men, but because God already loved mankind, the Divine love preceding the entire program of redemption, and even more, existing in the heart of God even before the world was.

One great purpose of the cross was that of persuading men to receive the salvation of God which He was so willing to give. Another truth evident in this is that, J. W. Roberts, op. cit., p. 123, wrote, “Our love (whether of God or men) is a plain duty to us, since God first loved us.

It should be considered by all that the very fact of God’s loving sinful and fallen humanity provides a powerful incentive for all perceptive souls to do likewise. Why did God love fallen and sinful men? Even their being sinful did not change the fact that they had been designed and created in the image of the Father; and through God’s provident mercy, all of the moral and eternal consequences of their sins were *potentially removable*, through the means God revealed.

Moreover, the disaster which had fallen upon humanity in the events of the Fall, which had actually been brought upon them by the seduction and

skillful cunning of their inveterate enemy, Satan. God pitied those human creatures, that were so heartlessly betrayed and ruined by the sadistic moral rape of their innocence in Eden; and pity is never very far from love. And should not similar considerations today lead every Christian in the direction of loving all men, every man, who like himself is a victim of sin, and yet is potentially an heir of eternal glory as a beneficiary of the blood of Christ? Leon Morris *op. cit.* p. 1268, wrote, "Such love flows from the nature of the lover, and not from the worthiness of the one loved." The great redemptive purpose of God in Christ is that of making His children like Himself, and therefore, not to love is to negate our own redemption. A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, wrote, "After God's love in giving His Son for us, it would be monstrous not to love."

### **Verse 20**

If men have any proper knowledge at all of God, they cannot fail, at the same time, to be aware of God-like qualities manifested in all human life, even in the unregenerated; for all men were made in God's image, irrespective of the eroding and defacing influence of sin. Failure to *see this*, with its consequent inclination to love men, is proof that the one so blind knows nothing of God and therefore does not love God.

In all times, people have found it easier to love mankind "away over there" in some foreign situation, than to love neighbors close to home. This truth reveals that if we do not love the man on our door step, we do not love any man who is unknown to us in any personal sense; and the same thing is true with loving God. The true test is found in the way we respond to people whom we know and with whom we associate, and whom, in many cases, we see every day.

In this verse, it is clear why John so boldly introduced the proposition in verse 12, that, "No man has seen God at any time." He was leading up to the argument here.

In struggling to understand and walk in the light of a verse like this, many will encounter problems. One wrote to F. F. Bruce *Answers to Questions*, p. 133, the following question, "I have a difficulty; it is not easy to love some of our brothers and sisters . . . their inconsistencies which we cannot help seeing . . . It seems much easier to love God, knowing how much He has done for us."

Who has not encountered the same difficulty? Bruce's answer pointed out

- (1) that love in the sense intended here is not sentimentality, or feeling, but a conscious recognition of our necessity to do all that is consistent with the true welfare of others, also
- (2) this attitude does not come automatically, but that it is developed and grows in hearts attuned to God's will.
- (3) It is also aided by the Christian's realization that he himself has "inconsistencies" and much worse; and that he has been forgiven; and that we who have lost such an intolerable burden of guilt in the love of Christ can best show our appreciation of so great a boon by forgiving and loving others.

If what one is contradicts what one says, he is a liar.

One who claims to know God and walks in darkness is a liar.

One who "knows God" but denies the Son of God is a liar.

One who pretends to love God and hates his brother is a liar.

The last three of the above statements are rally phases of the first proposition stated; John R. W. Stott, *op. cit.*, p. 170, called these, "The three black lies of 1 John, in the aggregate contradicting the: moral, doctrinal, and social basics of Christianity."

### **Verse 21**

This verse almost certainly relates to the great summary of all the law and the prophets as given by Jesus Christ in these words contained in (Mark 12:29-31).

That Almighty God desires that His human creation should love Him is one of the most revealing statements in Scripture. That purposeful desire of God lies back of all that God ever revealed, all that He ever did, to redeem mankind. How universally do men tend to fall short of the basic love! John Wesley, *op. cit.*, p. 916, wrote, "The bigot loves those who embrace his opinions," and receives his peculiar bias or prejudice; and he loves them for that, not for Christ.

Concerning Jesus' joining in this verse and in the gospels these twin commandments to love God and love one's neighbor, John R. W. Stott, op. cit., p.171, remarked, "What Christ has joined, let no man sever."

A. Plummer's summation of John's thoughts here is as follows, "Here is the Divine command to love, not only the invisible God, but the visible brother in whom the invisible God dwells. Sight may hinder as well as help; it is hard to love what is squalid and hideous. In such cases, let us remember the Divine command; let us remember the Divinity which the most debased humanity contains."

May our attitude toward this holy commandment be that of freely confessing that the total fulfillment of it lies utterly beyond our unaided human strength to accomplish it; but may we also preempt unto that holy purpose the blessed promise of the apostle, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) "Through Him?" Yes, in Christ," in whom we shall at last be presented before the Father in perfection!

What a wonderful world this would be, and what an incredible sweetness would pervade it, if even any appreciable percentage of its population would live by the principles laid down in this chapter of the word of God!

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout this epistle, John repeatedly emphasized the three tests: faith, obedience and love. All three were stressed in chapter 2, and most of chapter 3 was devoted to obedience and love. Chapter 4 emphasized faith and love. The three go together, however, as is evident throughout the letter. In the opening paragraph of this chapter (verses 1-5), "faith" (or belief) occurs in verses 1, 4, and 5, "love" in verses 1, 2, and 3 and "obey" (keep His commandments) in verses 2 and 3.

Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, however, is established upon testimony, the testimony of three witnesses, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the second paragraph (verses 6-12) lays strong emphasis upon these. Another paragraph is related to boldness in prayer (except in cases where "sin

unto death” is present (verses 13-17); and the letter is concluded by a brief summary and exhortation (verses 18-21).

### Verse 1

“Whoever believes . . .” also implies obedience or fidelity, there being no intimation whatever in a statement like this that mere faith, or faith only, is equivalent to the new birth. “Believes” in this place, as frequently in the New Testament, is a synecdoche for a number of closely related actions involved in conversion.

“That Jesus is the Christ . . .” Christianity is grounded in the absolute proposition that Jesus of Nazareth was (is) the Dayspring from on high, God incarnate in human flesh, the promised Messiah of the Hebrews, the “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15) who would crush the head of the serpent, whose “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,” (Micah 5:2) That incarnate deity identified in the New Testament as “Jesus Christ” is man’s unique Savior, and only those who manifest an obedient faith in Him can receive the inestimable privilege of the new birth.

“The child born of Him . . .” That is, has received the new birth, being “raised to walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-5)

“Whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him . . .” In other words, whoever loves God, being himself a child of God, loves not God alone but all of God’s other children also. John’s argument here is a type of compound syllogism called “*sorites*,” but with some of the steps omitted. The entire argument would be something like this:

- (1) Everyone with obedient faith in Christ is a child of God.
- (2) Every child of God loves the Father.  
Therefore, everyone with obedient faith loves God.
- (3) Everyone with obedient faith loves God.
- (4) Everyone that loves God loves God’s children.  
Therefore, everyone with obedient faith loves the children of God.



## Verse 2

John echoed here the teachings of the Master who declared that, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15) Love of God, therefore, is the type of regard for the Father that issues in keeping His word and obeying the commandments He gave. The same is true of love for the brethren. John R. W. Stott, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 19, p. 173, wrote, “It is practical and active, and expresses itself in deed and in truth, that is, in sacrificial service.”

True Christian love, therefore, is that which proceeds from the love of God, and leads us to obey all His commandments.”

## Verse 3

There is no need here to defend John with the declaration that, “He was not a legalist,” or to oppose him by alleging, that Paul’s teaching is opposed to this. The notion that, “In Paul’s terms Law of Christ means freedom from law,” (Amos N. Wilder, Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. XII, p. 291, wrote, “It is nothing but a popular error. Not only John and Paul, but Christ and all of the holy apostles constantly reiterated the fundamental thesis of the New Testament that the people who do the will of God will be saved; and the people who do not do it will be lost. If men believe that they can by-pass this fundamental truth by means of some theological device, they are mistaken.

“His commandments are not burdensome . . .” There are at least three ways which John’s words are profoundly true.

(1) As compared with the onerous burdens of the Law of Moses, called by the apostles themselves “a yoke of bondage with neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.” (Acts 15:10) The Law of Christ is one of incredible freedom.

(2) For that soul who is truly born again, the Lord’s commandments are in complete harmony with the natural impulses of his new life in Christ. W. M. Sinclair, Ellicott’s Bible Commentary, Vol. VIII, p. 490, wrote, “We are perfect, we should not find them commands at all, for they would be our natural impulses. The more sincerely we serve God, the more enjoyment we shall derive

from obeying Him. Only to those whose inclinations are distorted, perverted and corrupted by sin can God's laws seem irksome."

(3) Despite the fact of there being genuine obligations in Christian service, called by Jesus Himself, "My yoke" (Matthew 11:19), it is in the nature of those precious obligations that they make all other burdens lighter. Christ's service is the yoke," the carrying device, which extends the wearer to carry unavoidable burdens of life which otherwise would be impossible and would destroy him.

Concerning this whole verse, William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 103, wrote, "John reverts to an idea that is never far from the surface of his mind. *Obedience is the only proof of love.*" We might add that it is likewise the only proof of faith.

#### **Verse 4**

"Whatever is born of God . . ." J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 1057, wrote, "It is not the man but his birth from God which conquers." The new birth gives one entry into the kingdom of God. (John 3:5f) In order to enter, one must be born of water and of the Spirit, that is, be baptized into Christ and receive the Holy Spirit.

"The victory that has overcome the world—our faith . . . "The world" of that era was the domain of the Caesar's. To all outward appearances, imperial Rome must have looked like the victor. There was not a force on earth (except that of which John wrote) who could stand against Rome, all the nations of the known world of that day being merely the slaves and vassals of the tyrant on the Tiber. Between that organized oppression and the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ there could be no neutrality; either Christ was Lord and would prove Himself so to be, or the self-appointed "gods" of the imperial purple would win the field. The conflict was very near to being joined when John wrote these words. The terrible persecutions would soon begin under Nero and would last intermittently for nearly 250 years. Eusebius tells us of the final outrage that occurred in the reign of Galerius Augustus: Christians were flogged till the flesh hung from their bones . . . salt or vinegar was poured in their wounds . . . their flesh was cut off bit by bit to feed waiting animals . . . they were eaten piecemeal

by starved beasts . . . their fingers were pierced with sharp reeds under their nails . . . their eyes were gouged out . . . they were suspended by a hand or foot . . . some had molten lead poured down their throats . . . they were beheaded, beaten to death with clubs or crucified . . . some were torn asunder by being tied to bent branches of trees. This quotation is from Eusebius by Will Durant, who complained that this could not be verified by pagan sources. Why should pagans have admitted such deeds?

William Durant also stated that the persecutions mentioned above lasted for eight years, involving the death of at least 1500 and the brutal abuse of many thousands more; but as the brutalities multiplied, the pagan population was stirred . . . good citizens expressed themselves against the most ferocious oppression in Roman history . . . the people turned against the government . . . many pagans risked death to hide or protect Christians . . . (and then it happened)! In 311 Galerius, suffering from a mortal illness, convinced of failure, and implored by his wife to make his piece with the undefeated God of the Christians, promulgated an edict of toleration, recognizing Christianity as a lawful religion, and asked the prayers of the Christians in return for “our most gentle clemency!”

Will Durant, *Ibid.*, summed up the terrible conflict that lasted nearly a quarter of a millennium with the words, “Caesar and Christ had met in the arena and Christ had won!”

## **Verse 5**

It was the basic, fundamental conviction of Christians regarding who Christ was and is that fed the springs of their courage and determination. They did not believe, merely, that Christ was some great and wonderful teacher, but that He was God come in the flesh, the lawful ruler of heaven and earth, the Holy One who would at the last day raise all the dead who ever lived and appoint every soul his everlasting destiny. The very expression “Son of God” carries with it the idea of equality with God; and so the Jews of Jesus’ day understood it: therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him . . . because He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal to God. (John 5:18) Christ confessed under oath that He was the Son of God (Mark 14:62), and the

Pharisees made that the crime for which they demanded His crucifixion (John 19:7).

Knowing that He would be put to death for this claim, Jesus carefully avoided making it until He would choose to do so before the Sanhedrin, except in circumstances where His enemies were powerless to use it as the basis of a legal charge of blasphemy. Thus, He spoke freely to the woman at the well of Samaria (John 4) and to the man healed of congenital blindness (John 9), flatly declaring to the latter that He was indeed the Son of God. (John 9:35-37) In those two cases, the woman being a Samaritan, and the blind man having been thrown out of the synagogue, neither could be recruited by the Sanhedrin as a witness against Christ.

### **Verse 6**

From the time of Tertullian, the more discerning scholars have referred these words to the baptism of Christ *in water* (as the Greek reads here), and to His crucifixion (aptly described as His coming “in the blood”). Some have seen a reference here to John 19:34. It undoubtedly suggested to the apostle the two grand ordinances of the Christian religion: baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as indicated by specific reference to them two verses later. However the matter at hand in this verse related to the heresy of the Cerinthians who admitted that Jesus was the Christ *after His baptism*, but denied that He was Christ in His crucifixion.

Again from Bruce, *Ibid.* p. 134, who wrote, “From their point of view, Christ came by water, but not by blood. Therefore, John emphasized that He came “not with water only, but with the water and with the “blood” with the clear meaning that Jesus was proclaimed as the Son of God as truly in His death as He was in His baptism.”

### **Verse 7**

The apostle could have been referring to the witness of the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove and alighting and remaining upon Him at the time of Jesus’ baptism, thus witnessing to the divinity and godhead of Jesus; or, he might have reference to his own inspired testimony. It should be remem-

bered that he was one of the twelve to whom Jesus promised that the “Spirit would guide them into all truth.” (John 16:13) R. W. Orr, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 619, wrote, “The present tense might be significant here;” and that would seem to make the second alternative the preferable view.

### Verse 8

“There are three that bear witness . . .” Note the use of the present tense, that indicated the three agreeing witnesses as giving their testimony at the time of John’s writing and continuously thereafter.

“The Spirit . . .” There is no doubt regarding the identity of this witness. Of the many claims in our own times regarding people claiming to “have the Spirit,” not any one of them, nor all of them put together, has ever produced a single line of intelligible teaching regarding the holy religion of Christ. In a lesser sense, of course, the earnest of the Holy Spirit given to all believers in Christ on condition of and subsequent to their repentance and baptism imparts the blessed fruit of love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, etc. (Galatians 5:22)

“And the water . . .” John here spoke of the water as “witnessing” in the present tense. How could this be true? The grand initiatory rite of the Christian religion is a continual witness in all generations of the essential facts of the gospel, namely, the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God. The very form of the ordinance with its burial and resurrection to walk in newness of life was designed for that very purpose; and how Satan does hate it! In all ages and communities, a believer’s baptism “into Christ” declares the gospel message. As James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 112 stated it: “*The water* is the rite of baptism regularly administered in the Christian church to the end of the world.”

“And the blood . . .” Macknight, *Ibid.* wrote, “*The blood* signifies the commemoration of the shedding of the blood of Christ for the remission of sins, in the Lord’s Supper.” As the apostle Paul declared, “For as often as you eat this bread, and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26), thus clearly designating this grand ordinance of the religion of Christ as a continuing witness of the holy gospel until the end of time, “Until He comes.”

### **Verse 9**

The meaning would appear to be that: dramatic and powerful as are the witnesses of the great Christian ordinances to the validity and authenticity of the Christian religion, the greater witness is that of God Himself through the word of Christ and the apostles, the witness which is the heritage of all men in the New Testament. The witness of God (the New Testament) requires that all men accept Jesus as the Son of God, a fact that John would state immediately.

### **Verse 10**

“Has the witness in himself . . .” The earnest of the Spirit in Christian hearts is indicated by this (Ephesians 1:13), that holy influence which issues in love, joy, and peace. The practical meaning of this is that the Christian experience corroborates the validity of Christianity in the lives of those who accept it and walk in the light of it.

“The one who does not believe God has made Him a liar . . .” It is no light matter to refuse to believe the Divine testimony of the Holy Scriptures.

“He who does not believe God has made Him a liar . . .” It is no light matter to refuse to believe the divine testimony of the Holy Scriptures. “He who has not believed has been judged already . . .” (John 3:18) Profound deductions flow out of a passage like this:

- (1) The testimony of God regarding His Son is sufficient.
- (2) Rejection of it is equivalent to giving God Himself the lie.
- (3) The wrath of God is revealed against unbelief.

### **Verse 11**

All of God’s witness for thousands of years in the Bible, all the messages through the holy prophets, all the typical significance of Judaism, and whatever else God did in His dealings with the human race were all directed to a single purpose: the identification of Jesus Christ as His only begotten Son and that priceless gift of eternal life which He brought to men.

“Eternal life . . .” How utterly beyond all human comprehension is such a thing as eternal life! To live forever in joy in God’s very presence, to know the Creator, to see the Savior face to face, to know as we are known—such

conceptions can be understood only in part. And yet, this is the essential central message of the faith in Christ.

“This life is in His Son . . .” Here is John’s equivalent of the apostle Paul’s “in Christ,” having exactly the same meaning as a reference to the corporate body of Christians who believed God’s testimony that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and who have been united with Christ in baptism, being baptized “into Him.” (Galatians 3:26-27)

In a word, eternal life for mankind is promised only to those who are “in Christ” and who shall be “found in Him” (Philippians 3:9) at the end of probation.

### **Verse 12**

“He who has the Son . . .” means “he that is a Christian.” “Has the life . . .” This means “eternal life,” but the present possession of it must not be understood as the totality of it. The eternal life promised the faithful followers of Jesus Christ is a life uninterrupted by death. Certain qualities of the life eternal, however, are experienced by Christians in the fruits of the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:22)

A. Plummer, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 22, 1 John, p. 141, wrote, “Eternal life is not granted to the whole world, or even to all Christians *en masse*; it is given to individuals, soul by soul. according as each does or does not accept the Son of God.”

### **Verse 13**

“These things I have written . . .” This has reference to the epistle. At the beginning of the letter, John explained the purpose of his writing thus, “The things we write, that our joy may be made full, 1:4.” Their joy (both John’s and that of his readers) would be made full in the certain knowledge of the possession of eternal life.

“To you who believe in the name of the Son of God . . .” Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 1269, wrote, “This is the only place in the whole letter where He speaks of believing on the name, that is, in His full person, all that the name stands for.”

### **Verse 14**

“This is the confidence . . .” This is the forth mention of boldness in this epistle as pertaining to the judgment in 2:28, 4:17, and as pertaining to prayer, here, and in 3:21-22. In a large degree, the Christian is himself responsible for maintaining a confident and winning attitude, an attitude to which he is fully entitled by the glorious endowments and promises of faith. It is therefore incumbent upon him to speak enthusiastically of his faith and of joyful service in the Lord, much in the same manner of a good athlete who “talks a good game” with his associates during a contest. The grounds of such confidence, which John cited in connection with his admonition is that, after all, our God will answer our prayers! No greater promise could be imagined.

“If we ask according to His will . . .” God’s promise of answering prayer, however, is not a blank check, the qualification laid down here being only one of number of Scriptural limitations on it. Others are: prayers must be offered in faith (Mark 11:24), in the name of Jesus (John 14:14), and by one abiding in Christ. (John 15:7)

Only those who have been forgiven (Mark 11:5); and only those who will not use their blessings for the gratification of their lusts and passions (James 4:3), may properly claim in confidence the answer of their prayers.

### **Verse 15**

Perhaps the principal confidence to be derived from this promise is simply that, “We simply know that from all He has promised that He does not ignore our requests.” (J. W. Roberts, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 139)

When it may appear that our prayers have not been answered, we can be positively certain that the reason is harmonious with God’s love of His children, and that it is grounded in what God knows is best for them.

### **Verse 16**

“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death . . .” This would be any kind of sin except apostasy; but what makes this passage difficult is the problem of Christian brothers monitoring each other’s behavior. The



ability always to know when a brother is sinning is not in Christians; and that fact limits the admonition here to what is clearly visible to all and unmistakable.

“And God will for him give life to those . . .” Before Christians may be forgiven of their sins, they themselves must repent and ask the Father’s mercy and pardon; therefore, God’s giving life for them that sin cannot be solely upon the grounds of another’s asking it.

“Who commit sin not leading to death . . .” There are a number of New Testament passages that deal with the “sin not unto death,” namely the passage here, 1 Corinthians 11:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 1 Timothy 5:6, Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-27, 2 Peter 2:20-21, and Mark 3:29—with parallel in Matthew.

Briefly stated, the sin unto death is that which results in the total apostasy of the sinner, leading to a state which is hopeless, not because of any imitation on God’s part, but because of the will of the sinner not to accept pardon.

“I do not say that he should make request . . .” John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, p. 919, wrote that this carries the meaning of, “Let him not pray for it.”

We have already pointed out that in all ordinary circumstances, no Christian could possibly know whether or not one had committed a sin “unto death;” and with that in mind, the interpretation of F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 134, on this difficult passage is certainly to be studied. He wrote, “I suggest that sin unto death is quite literally a sin with death as its consequence; and the only way in which it may be known that a sin is “unto death” is if death actually ensues. What John is doing in that case, is to make it plain, that he does not advocate praying for the dead.”

Bruce’s understanding of this seems to this writer the most reasonable of all the explanations encountered. Bruce admitted the possibility that apostasy could be the thing in view, adding, “But this I doubt.” The explanation advocated by him would certainly solve the problem of a brother’s “seeing” whether or not sin was “unto death;” and, in the context, that would appear to be determinative.

A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 142, and others who favor the view that apostasy is meant, have written some very helpful words regarding the power of apostates to rebel against God and spurn His love. For example he wrote the following,

“The prayer of one human being can never cancel another’s free will. If God’s will does not override man’s will, neither can a fellow-man’s prayer. When a human will has been firmly and persistently set in opposition to the divine will, our intercession will be of no avail.”

James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 118, limited the meaning of this verse to those mentioned in James 4:14f, affirming that this verse is directed not to ordinary Christians at all but to, “Any spiritual man (endowed with the charismatic gift of healing diseases); and the brother for whom the spiritual man was to ask life, was not every brother who had sinned, but the brother only who had been punished with a mortal disease; but who having repented of his sin, it was not a sin unto death; and that the life to be asked and received on behalf of such a brother was not eternal life at all, but a miraculous recovery from the mortal disease from which he was suffering.”

In support of his thesis, which may indeed be correct, James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 118, argued the clause, “And God will give him life for them” could not possibly refer to eternal life, since, “Nowhere in Scripture is eternal life promised to be given to any sinner, at the asking of another.” (*Ibid.*, p. 119)

Having given three different interpretations of this difficult Scripture, we shall leave it as one that might reasonably bear any of the three explanations. Before leaving this verse, it should be pointed out, however, that, “To divide sins, on the authority of this passage, into venial and mortal classifications, is to misunderstand the whole argument of the epistle and to seduce the conscience. John only, means that though prayer can do much for an erring brother, there is a willfulness against which it would be powerless; for even prayer is not stronger than free-will.” (W. M. Sinclair, *op. cit.*, p. 493)

### **Verse 17**

After all that John had written in this letter regarding the Divine prohibition against Christian’s sinning, it is clear from this that he fully allowed for the fact of sin, even in the most devoted heart. Charles C. Ryrie, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, p. 1028, is no doubt correct in seeing this verse as a “warning against the lax thinking that some sins are permissible and others (unto death) not. Any sin is unrighteousness, contrary to the will of God; and is

sin, however mild it may be thought to be, is potentially capable of causing death of the soul; and the manner of the two major clauses of this sentence being balanced against each other indicates that John had the very thing in mind here. In connection with this, it will be remembered that “an eternal sin” (Mark 3:28-29) indicates a multiplicity of transgressions that must be considered potentially “eternal sins.” In fact, any sin whatever that might be loved more than the Lord, could prove to be “eternal.”

### **Verse 18**

“No one who is born of God sins . . .” This may not, in any absolute sense, be said of any Christian; and yet John affirmed it here. How then is it the truth? Simply because, in the broad outlines of the Christ-centered life it is profoundly true in the relative, if not in the absolute sense. William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 121, wrote, “The heathen is the man who has been defeated by sin and has accepted defeat. The Christian is the man who may sin but never accepts the fact of defeat.”

“Born of God keeps him . . .” It is in only a very limited way in which any one can “keep himself.” The concept of Jesus keeping them whom He has received from the Father is completely in harmony with John 17:12.

The Christian’s safety is not of himself but of the Lord. Jesus promised that He would be with His followers, “Even to the end of the age,” (Matthew 28:20) and a glimpse of that providence is in this.

“And the evil one touches him not . . .” On almost every page of the New Testament, the spiritual foe of Christians is identified, not as a mere principle, but as personal, intelligent, malignant and cunning. Current theology which does not take this into account is hopelessly crippled. In the modern departure from New Testament teaching on this subject lies much of the incompetence which has fallen upon so-called “Christianity” today.

### **Verse 19**

“We know . . .” This is the second of three great certainties stressed by the apostle in verses 18-20.

- (1) We know that we are guarded from the evil one by Jesus Christ our Lord.
- (2) We know that we belong to God in a hostile, Satan dominated world.
- (3) We know the great basic of divine revelation, especially the Incarnation of God in Christ.

“That we are of God . . .” To what other source, indeed, could the joyful life in Jesus be attributed? Those who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come are in no doubt whatever regarding the fountain source of their blessings.

“The whole world . . .” Here the word “world” does not apply to the natural creation at all, but to the evil inhabitants of the world who continue under the domination of the evil one. James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 124, defined these as the, “Idolaters, infidels, and wicked men, who having made themselves the subjects of the devil . . . *they lie under the wicked one*, and are under his dominion.”

“Lies in *the power* of the evil one . . .” John Calvin (quoted by A. Plummer) *op. cit.*, p. 143, wrote, “By saying that it lies in the evil one, he represented it as being under the dominion of Satan.” Of particular interest is the word “Lies” as used here.

James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 125, wrote, “Because Homer used the word (Lies) to denote the bodies of men lying on the ground slain, Doddridge thinks the apostle, by using the word here, represents the wicked men of the world as lying slain by the devil, to give us an affecting idea of the miserable and helpless state of mankind fallen by the stroke of that malicious merciless enemy.”

Paul’s references to being dead in trespasses and sins, etc., are also fully in harmony with this conception.

The following New Testament references regarding Satan are examples of the extensive biblical teaching regarding the devil:

- (1) the prince of the power of the air, the spirit which now inwardly works in the children of disobedience. (Ephesians 2:2)
- (2) The god of this world (who) blinds the eyes of unbelievers. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

- (3) Our adversary going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)
- (4) (Wicked men) are held in the snare of the devil. (2 Timothy 2:26)
- (5) We are not ignorant of (the devils) wicked devices. (Ephesians 6:11)
- (6) Through his subtlety (Satan) seduced the mother of all living (Eve). (2 Corinthians 11:3)
- (7) Christians are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. (Colossians 1:13)

### Verse 20

This is the third of the three great certainties with which John concluded his epistle, and it is rather an extensive certainty.

#### Note:

- (1) We know that the Son of God is come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
- (2) He has given us an understanding (of all things that pertain to life and godliness).
- (3) We know Christ who is the true one.
- (4) We are "in Christ," having believed in Him and having been baptized into the "one body," Christ's spiritual body.
- (5) This is the true God (an unqualified designation of Jesus Christ as God).
- (6) As a result of Christ's redemptive work, we enjoy eternal life (presently, in the joys of Christian service, and ultimately, throughout all eternity).

J. W. Roberts, op. cit., p. 147, pointed out the use of "eternal life" in this whole paragraph. Indeed, throughout the epistle, the fact of Jesus Himself being "eternal life" is reiterated. "Jesus is eternal life." With that in mind, we may view the affirmation of Christ's deity here as "the climax of John's claim for the person and work of Jesus Christ in this epistle, just as Thomas' exclamation, *My Lord and my God* (John 20:28) is the climax of the Gospel.

## Verse 21

The simple and obvious meaning of this is, “Keep yourselves from the pollutions of heathen worship. (William Barclay, op. cit., p. 123)

Ephesus was dominated by the temple of Diana of the Ephesians, that temple being the center of immorality and licentiousness. The temple institution as a force of incredible power in pagan civilization. The right of sanctuary for criminals of all classes had crowded it with the vilest men on earth. It was the financial center of the pagan culture, occupying about the same status in that ancient culture that the Bank of England enjoyed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

William Barclay, op. cit., p.125, wrote, “To have anything to do with the Temple of Diana was to be associated with the very dregs of society . . . and to be brought into contact with commercialized superstition and the black arts.” No Christian must ever set up in His heart any idol which usurps the place rightfully belonging to the Lord. The gods of ancients lie buried under the debris of millenniums; but men still worship sex, gold, wealth, power, fame, “success,” youth, humanity, self, pleasure, wine or even their families, instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. The citadel of their heart belongs to the Son of God who died for us and loosed us from our sins in His blood. The final word of this epistle is directed to the guardianship of that citadel. May the child of God never forget that he or she belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.