



THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN

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INTRODUCTION

John's first letter deals with many subjects, but the main one is the identity of Jesus. Throughout the first century, the church had many problems with false teachers and deceivers, all of whom were teaching their own ideas, encouraging people to follow them, and as a result, they caused division within the church, but more dangerously, they drew people away from the truth.

AUTHOR

Most scholars and commentators attribute the author to John himself, the beloved disciple of Jesus. There are also many similarities between this letter and the Gospel of John, which certainly suggest that John is the author, **John 14:15 / John 14:21 / John 15:10 / John 15:14**.

There is also external evidence that John is the author. Polycarp, a close associate of John, appears to refer to this letter at the beginning of the second century, in a letter to the Philippians. Irenaeus, a student of Polycarp, quoted from it and attributed it to John.

THE RECIPIENTS

John doesn't appear to be writing to anyone specifically, but it has been suggested that he may have been in Ephesus at the time and that his letter might be a general letter to the Christians throughout Asia Minor. Others suggest that John may have been addressing a particular group of Christians possessing certain spiritual gifts, **1 John 2:20 / 1 John 2:27**.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

John himself tells us why he wrote the letter.

1. He wrote it 'to make their joy complete,' **1 John 1:4**.
2. He wrote it 'so that they will not sin,' **1 John 2:1**.
3. He wrote it 'that they continue to believe in the name of the Son of God,' **1 John 5:13**.
4. He wrote it 'so that they may know they have eternal life,' **1 John 5:13**.
5. He wrote it because certain people were 'trying to lead them astray,' **1 John 2:26**.

The main problem John was dealing with was Gnosticism, and those who follow this teaching are called Gnostics. They claimed to have superior knowledge, hence the Greek word for knowledge is 'gnosis'.

They believed that all matter was evil, and God didn't create or have anything to do with the material universe. They also believed that Christ couldn't have come in the flesh, **1 John 4:1-3**.

A splinter group from the Gnostics were called Docetism, and they believed that Jesus only 'seemed' to be physical; in other words, they believed that Jesus was a ghost, **1 John 1:1**.

Cerinthus taught that ‘Jesus’ was physical, but that the ‘Christ’ came upon him at his baptism, and left before His death, so that the ‘Christ-spirit’ never suffered, 1 John 5:6.

Their application to everyday living took two different directions because they believed that all matter was thought to be evil. Some thought everyone should abstain altogether from anything that would satisfy the flesh, and others claimed it didn’t matter what anyone did in the flesh, because it was evil anyway, and to have full knowledge, it was proper to explore everything.

DATE

Some commentaries suggest that John’s first letter was written anywhere between 60 A.D. and 100 A.D. Most commentators place the date of writing around 95 A.D., but there are also good reasons for believing it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

THEME

John appears to be dealing with one theme in particular, and that is, the eternal nature of Jesus the Christ. He asserts the incarnate Son of God so that his readers be reassured that Jesus is who He claimed to be, 1 John 1:3, and so, John encourages them to continue in fellowship with God in their belief that Jesus was the Christ, 1 John 5:13.

OUTLINE

- Our fellowship with God. 1 John 1:1-10
- A new commandment. 1 John 2:1-17
- A warning against Antichrist and evil. 1 John 2:18-29
- Christian conduct. 1 John 3:1-24
- False teachers. 1 John 4:7-21
- The love of God. 1 John 4:7-21
- Faith is the victory. 1 John 5:1-21

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.’ 1 John 1:1-4

THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD OF LIFE

John begins by proving evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Notice he says that the ‘Word of life’ existed at the beginning, that is, the beginning of the world, [1 John 1:1](#) / [John 1:1-2](#).

John is emphasising the fact that Jesus was in eternity with the Father when the world was created, [Genesis 1:1](#). He was the beginning of the created world in the sense that through Him all things were created, [1 John 2:13-14](#) / [John 17:5](#) / [Colossians 1:16](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘No writer in the New Testament holds with greater intensity the full reality of the incarnation.’

Notice John uses the word ‘we’, [1 John 1:1](#), which tells us it was not only him but all the Christ sent apostles who met and spent time with Jesus, along with John, who were eyewitnesses, [John 1:14](#).

John and the apostles heard Jesus, saw Jesus, looked at Jesus, and touched Jesus, [1 John 1:1](#) / [John 1:14](#) / [2 Peter 1:16](#). In other words, Jesus was flesh and blood; He wasn’t some ghost as the Gnostics believed, [John 20:11-29](#) / [Luke 24:39](#).

John and the apostles proclaimed the ‘Word of life’, [1 John 1:1](#). The word he uses here is the word, ‘Logos’, which again relates to the Christ who was in the beginning with God and was God and became flesh, [John 1:1-2](#) / [John 1:14](#). Jesus was the final revelation of God to man, [Acts 1:1-2](#) / [Hebrews 1:1-3](#).

John tells us that the life appeared, that is, the Word was made visible when He became flesh and blood, [1 John 1:2](#) / [John 1:14](#) / [Philippians 2:6-8](#) / [1 Timothy 3:16](#) / [1 Peter 1:20](#) / [1 John 3:5](#) / [1 John 3:8](#).

John once again testifies that he and the apostles personally saw the life, that is Christ, who appeared to all mankind, [1 John 1:2](#) / [Luke 24:48](#) / [John 8:12](#) / [John 21:24](#). They had experienced the Light, but also the life that He brought into the world, [1 John 3:14-15](#) / [John 5:24](#).

Earlier John said that they proclaimed the Word of life, and he now says that they proclaimed eternal life, [1 John 1:2](#). Jesus is the life, [John 11:25](#) / [John 14:6](#), Jesus is the light of life, [John 8:12](#), and He is the bread of life, [John 6:35](#) / [John 6:48](#). Jesus is God’s revelation of eternity that is available to all men through Him, [John 14:6](#) / [Romans 16:25-27](#) / [1 Timothy 3:16](#).

Notice the relationship between the Father and the Word, Jesus was in heaven as one with God, [1 John 1:2](#) / [John 1:1](#) / [John 6:41](#) / [John 6:62](#) / [John 17:21](#). The Son was the incarnate manifestation of the one God, [John 1:1-2](#) / [John 1:14](#).

What is incredible here is the fellowship we all have with each other and the Father and the Son, [1 John 1:3](#). The word fellowship in Greek is the word, ‘koinonia’, which basically means a joint partnership and sharing in the common bond which comes from obeying the Gospel, [John 17:1](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:9](#) / [2 Thessalonians 2:14](#) / [2 John 9](#).

John now tells us the first reason for writing this letter: he wants to make our joy complete, [1 John 1:4](#) / [3 John 4](#).

This joy comes as we remind ourselves of the Word of life and the relationship we have with each other and the Father and Son, [John 16:24](#) / [2 John 4](#) / [3 John 3-4](#).

LIGHT AND DARKNESS, SIN AND FORGIVENESS

‘This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.’ [1 John 1:5-7](#)

John now tells us the message that he and the apostles heard from the Word of life, God is light, [1 John 1:5](#) / [Psalm 27:1](#). In other words, He is the source of all light, [James 1:17](#) / [1 Timothy 6:16](#). Because God is light, this means that He is holy, pure, good, loving, desirable and righteous, [Ephesians 5:8-14](#).

Dodd, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The figure of light that John used to describe God emphasizes His ability to reveal and His ability to deal with what the light of His holiness reveals, [John 1:4-5](#) / [John 1:7-9](#) / [John 3:19-21](#) / [John 8:12](#) / [John 9:5](#) / [John 12:35-36](#) / [John 12:46](#) / [Revelation 21:23](#). John elsewhere described God as spirit, [John 4:24](#), and as love, [1 John 4:8](#). All three comparisons of God stress his immateriality and essence. God exposes and condemns sin (called ‘darkness’ in [John 1:5](#) / [John 3:19](#) / [John 12:35](#), twice, and in [1 John 1:5-6](#) / [1 John 2:8-9](#) / [1 John 2:11](#), twice. The light figure emphasises these qualities in God: His splendour and glory, His truthfulness, His purity, His self-communicative nature, [Psalms 27:1](#) / [Psalms 36:9](#) / [Isaiah 49:6](#) / [John 1:9](#), His empowering activity, [John 8:12](#) / [John 12:35](#) / [Ephesians 5:8-14](#), and His right to demand, [John 3:19-21](#). The light-darkness motif was common in both the Hellenistic and Jewish thought life of John’s day and culture.’

Because God is light, Jesus came to bring light into the world, [John 1:5-9](#) / [John 3:19-21](#) / [John 5:35](#) / [John 8:12](#) / [John 9:5](#) / [John 11:9-10](#) / [John 12:35-36](#) / [Colossians 1:12](#).

Because God is light, there is no darkness in Him, [1 John 1:5](#). The darkness refers to wickedness, fear, sin, or evil, [James 1:13-14](#) / [James 1:17](#), God has none of these things in Him.

We must remember that John is writing to people who are already Christians, people who have already been united with Christ in baptism, and had their sins forgiven, [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Acts 2:38](#) / [Romans 6:3-4](#).

Notice how John uses the word, ‘if’ eight times throughout this chapter, [1 John 1:6-10](#), which implies these are the terms and conditions. In [1 John 1:6](#), he uses the word if to speak about the terms and conditions for having fellowship with God and His Son. If we claim to have fellowship with Him, we can’t at the same time walk in the darkness, we can’t lie, and we must live out the truth.

John uses the progressive tense of continuous action, that is, continually walking, continually lying, continually not living out the truth, in other words, he’s not speaking about a one-off sin in our lives, but a continually, deliberately continuing to sin, [John 8:12](#) / [Romans 6:4](#) / [Galatians 6:7-8](#) / [Ephesians 2:1-3](#) / [Ephesians 5:8](#) / [Hebrews 10:26](#) / [1 John 2:9-11](#).

Continually walking in the light means living according to God’s ways, [Acts 17:11](#) / [1 John 5:3](#) / [John 14:15](#) / [John 15:14](#). It means living our lives in a way that pleases God, as we’re being guided by the light of God, and the truth, [John 17:17](#) / [1 John 2:9-11](#) / [1 John 2:21](#) / [1 John 3:19](#) / [2 John 2-4](#).

If we don’t live as God has directed us, then we are simply not walking by the truth; we’re walking in darkness, [1 John 1:6](#) / [1 John 2:29](#) / [Matthew 7:21-23](#). If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with each other, [1 John 1:7](#) / [John 8:12](#) / [Ephesians 5:8](#), and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin, [1 John 1:7](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Walking in the light means walking in the sphere that the light prescribes. The idea is more about where we walk than how we walk. Had John said ‘according to’ the light rather than ‘in’ the light, he would have been requiring sinless perfection for fellowship with God. We must be open and responsive to the light that we have, which increases as we grow in our knowledge of God’s will.’

The atoning blood of Jesus, which was shed on the cross, is the only means by which we can receive forgiveness of sin, [Acts 4:12](#) / [Romans 8:1](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:11](#) / [Ephesians 1:7](#) / [Hebrews 9:14](#) / [1 Peter 1:19](#) / [Revelation 1:5](#). The idea here is also a continuous action; the blood continually keeps on cleansing us.

‘If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word is not in us.’ 1 John 1:8-10

John uses the word ‘if’ again, [1 John 1:8](#), to describe the terms and conditions for the forgiveness of sins. We must acknowledge our sinfulness, [Matthew 5:3-12](#). Otherwise, we deceive ourselves, [Romans 3:9-10](#) / [Romans 3:23](#) / [Ephesians 2:1-3](#), and the truth isn’t in us, [1 John 2:24](#) / [Luke 18:10-14](#).

The terms and conditions for forgiveness continue with the words, ‘if we confess our sins’, [1 John 1:9](#) / [Psalm 32:5](#). As Christians, we should never be ashamed to confess our sins to God, [Psalm 32:5](#) / [Psalm 51:2](#) / [Proverbs 26:13](#). Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The fact that God has removed the penalty for our sins at conversion, [1 Corinthians 6:11](#) / [Ephesians 1:7](#) / [Ephesians 4:32](#) / [Colossians 2:13](#), does not remove the necessity of confessing our sins frequently.’

The idea of confessing our sins to a priest isn’t being taught here. And although we are encouraged to confess our sins to each other, [James 5:16](#), we must confess our sins to God, [1 John 2:1](#) / [Hebrews 7:25](#) / [Hebrews 10:19-20](#) / [1 Timothy 2:5](#).

Remember, confessing our sins to God isn’t for His benefit but ours. He wants us to acknowledge that we sin, and He wants us to trust in Him because He is just, [Psalm 143:1](#) / [Romans 3:21-26](#).

Notice that John uses the word ‘will’ forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness, [1 John 1:9](#). This is the promise, if the terms and conditions are met.

This has been described as the second law of forgiveness; the first law for having our sins forgiven is when we were baptised, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 22:16](#). In other words, we can’t be forgiven unless we’ve already come into contact with the blood of Jesus at our baptism.

When God forgives, [Hebrews 10:17](#), and cleanses us, we’re then able to approach Him, [1 John 2:12](#) / [Psalm 51:2](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:11](#). When we’re right before God, He continues to bless us with every spiritual blessing we need, [Ephesians 1:3](#).

In contrast, if we claim we have never sinned, and we don’t confess our sins, then we make God out to be a liar, [1 John 1:10](#) / [Romans 3:9-10](#) / [Romans 3:23](#). If we claim we have never sinned, and we don’t confess our sins, then God’s Word, isn’t in us, [1 John 1:10](#) / [John 8:37](#) / [1 John 2:14](#) / [2 John 4](#) / [2 John 6](#) / [3 John 4](#).

John is telling us, as it is, that those who don’t confess their sins are lying, they are deceiving themselves, and they make God a liar. In other words, they are still walking in the darkness, no matter how much they want to claim otherwise, [Mark 7:1-9](#) / [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](#).

CHAPTER 2

‘My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.’ 1 John 2:1-2

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter, where John now speaks of Jesus as being the Christian’s solution for sin, [Romans 7:24-25](#) / [Titus 2:11](#). John begins by addressing his audience as ‘my dear children’, [1 John 2:1](#), which suggests that he was older and speaking as one who is an elder of the flock, [1 John 2:12](#) / [1 John 2:28](#) / [1 John 3:7](#) / [1 John 3:18](#) / [1 John 4:4](#) / [1 John 5:21](#). It could also suggest that his audience were recent converts to the faith, [1 Corinthians 4:15](#) / [3 John 4](#).

He now reveals the second purpose for writing his letter, that is, ‘so that they will not sin’, [1 John 2:1](#). The emphasis here is that they don’t get into the habit of sinning so that it becomes a way of life, [Hebrews 10:26](#) / [1 John 1:3](#) / [Isaiah 59:1-2](#).

The good news is that if anyone does sin, that is, not deliberately, [Hebrews 10:26](#), then Jesus, who is our advocate, intervenes on our behalf, [1 John 2:1](#) / [Hebrews 7:25](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The emphasis is on Jesus Christ’s help after we have sinned. Since Jesus Christ is righteous, He is the perfect Advocate with God, [Acts 3:14](#) / [Acts 7:52](#).’

The Greek word for advocate is ‘parakletos’, [John 14:16](#) / [John 14:26](#) / [John 15:26](#) / [John 16:7](#). It means one who gets called to the side of another to help. Jesus can plead our case because He is close to the Father and the Holy Spirit, [Hebrews 2:17-18](#) / [Hebrews 8:1-6](#). Jesus can plead our case before the Father because He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, [1 John 2:2](#) / [Romans 3:25](#) / [1 John 4:10](#).

Because of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, He not only died for our sins but He died for the sins of the whole world, [1 John 2:2](#). In His dying for mankind, He removed the guilt of our sin, [Romans 3:25](#) / [Romans 8:1](#) / [Hebrews 2:17](#), and we can now be at peace with God, [Romans 5:1-2](#) / [Romans 1:11](#) / [2 Corinthians 5:18-19](#).

Our sins being forgiven had nothing to do with the things that we did or do or are going to do. It’s all down to Jesus, it’s all down to His blood. All the gold and silver of the world cannot redeem us from our sins. All the material riches we can store up on some remote island cannot redeem us from our sins.

All the good deeds we can ever do for other people cannot redeem us from our sins, [1 Peter 1:18-19](#). The only thing that can redeem us from our sins is the precious blood of Jesus Christ, [Ephesians 1:7](#) / [Hebrews 2:9](#) / [Hebrews 9:28](#).

LOVE AND HATRED FOR FELLOW BELIEVERS

‘We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.’ [1 John 2:3-6](#)

John now proclaims that if anyone claims to know God, then they must keep His commands, [1 John 2:3](#) / [James 1:22](#). Knowing Him is a phrase that John uses throughout his letter in an effort to reassure them of their salvation, [1 John 2:5](#) / [1 John 3:16](#) / [1 John 3:19](#) / [1 John 3:24](#) / [1 John 4:2](#) / [1 John 4:6](#) / [1 John 4:13](#) / [1 John 5:2](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘To know God was not merely to know Him as the philosopher knows Him; it was to know Him as a friend knows Him. In Hebrew, the word to know is used of the relationship between husband and wife, and especially of the sexual act, the most intimate of all relationships, [Genesis 4:1](#).’

Keeping God’s commands requires responding in obedience to His offer of grace and love for us, [1 John 4:19](#). It’s by knowing and being obedient to His will, that we come to know God better, [1 John 4:7-11](#) / [John 17:3](#). The idea of keeping in His commands is a continuous action, we must continually obey His commands, otherwise we are liars and the truth is not in us, [1 John 2:4](#).

In other words, knowing God is one thing, but obeying his commands is another, and so, it’s only through our love of God’s Word and our obedient response to His word that we can claim to be following God, [1 John 2:4](#) / [Mark 7:1-9](#) / [John 15:10](#) / [John 17:3](#) / [Titus 1:16](#).

If we love God, then this should be demonstrated in our lives, [John 14:15](#) / [John 14:21](#) / [John 14:23](#) / [John 15:10](#) / [1 John 2:4](#). Our love for God must have legs attached, that is, it should be accompanied by action, [Matthew 22:37-40](#) / [Galatians 5:13-14](#) / [Galatians 5:22-23](#) / [1 John 5:3](#).

When we practice this love, then God is made complete in us, [1 John 2:5](#). That is, because of Christ's atoning sacrifice, His blood will continue to cleanse us from our sin, [1 John 1:7](#). Through Christ's blood, we can be presented complete to God, [Colossians 1:28](#).

Because we are 'in Him', [1 John 2:6](#), that is, in Christ, [Ephesians 1:4](#) / [Ephesians 1:7](#), and because He is in us, [Romans 8:10](#) / [Galatians 2:20](#), then we should allow Him to control our lives in order for us to be able to live as Jesus did, [1 John 2:6](#) / [1 John 4:13](#). This is one reason God blessed us with the gift of the Holy Spirit at our baptism, [Acts 2:38](#), in order to help us live as Jesus did.

The point John is making is that nobody can claim they know God and His Son if they refuse to do His will, [John 14:15](#) / [John 15:14](#) / [2 John 9-10](#). It is only those who live according to God's will who will remain in fellowship with both the Father and Son, [John 15:1-10](#) / [John 15:14](#) / [1 John 1:3](#).

Stott, in his commentary, says the following.

'We cannot claim to abide in Him unless we behave like Him.'

'Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.' [1 John 2:7-8](#)

John reminds his readers that he isn't writing a new command but an old one, [1 John 2:7](#), which is a reference to Jesus' words concerning loving God and our neighbour, [Matthew 22:37-40](#). In the Old Testament, God expected His people to love Him and their neighbours, [Deuteronomy 10:19](#) / [Leviticus 19:18](#) / [Micah 6:8](#).

His readers had heard this old command since the beginning, [1 John 2:7](#), which probably refers to the time they first became Christians. When Jesus came along, He said that He gave His followers a new command, but what was new about it was the fact that they were to love God and their neighbours, as He had loved them, [John 13:34-35](#) / [1 John 3:11](#) / [1 John 3:23](#) / [1 John 4:21](#) / [2 John 5](#).

Despite the commandment being old, it is still new, in the sense that Jesus demonstrated the sacrificial fullness of His love to mankind, that is, we must love as He loved us, [John 13:34-35](#) / [John 15:12-13](#) / [1 John 3:11](#) / [1 John 3:16](#).

The word 'love' used in the above passages is the Greek word 'agape', which implies seeking the very best for others, and it's the kind of love that Jesus commands us to show even our enemies, [Matthew 5:44](#).

Ryrie, in his commentary, says the following.

'The life of Christ was one of self-sacrificing love; therefore, the proof of imitating him is exhibited in love. Love is that which seeks the highest good in the one loved; and since the highest good is the will of God, love is doing the will of God.'

John says that the 'darkness is passing', [1 John 2:8](#), which infers that ignorance passes when we become more knowledgeable of God and His will, [Romans 13:12](#) / [Galatians 1:4](#) / [Ephesians 4:11-16](#) / [Ephesians 5:8](#) / [Colossians 1:13](#).

As the darkness passes, we come to understand that Jesus is the true light who has brought to light the Gospel, [1 John 2:8](#) / [John 3:19-21](#) / [John 8:12](#) / [John 1:5](#) / [Romans 13:12](#). The more people hear the Gospel, the more the darkness, that is, their ignorance, is cleared away, [Acts 17:19-31](#).

'Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.' [1 John 2:9-11](#)

Here again, John emphasises that we can't claim to be in the light, and yet at the same time hate your brother and sister in Christ, [1 John 2:9](#) / [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#) / [2 Peter 1:9](#).

The word 'hate' simply means to love less, [Matthew 6:24](#) / [Matthew 24:10](#) / [Luke 14:26](#) / [Luke 16:13](#). If we do, then we are still in the darkness, [1 John 2:9](#) / [1 John 1:6-7](#), we're living and acting as the world does, [Matthew 6:23](#) / [Romans 13:12-14](#) / [2 Corinthians 6:14](#) / [1 Thessalonians 5:5](#) / [Ephesians 2:1-3](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning [1 John 2:9](#).

'This verse contains a concrete example of what John had been talking about. It is another claim to intimate fellowship with God that behaviour shows is spurious, [1 John 1:6](#) / [1 John 1:8](#) / [1 John 1:10](#) / [1 John 2:4](#) / [1 John 2:6](#). Hatred of other Christians is a sure sign that one is not walking with God in close fellowship.'

Remember that the love which John is describing has legs attached; it's an active love, not an emotional feeling, [1 John 3:18](#) / [1 John 5:3](#) / [Galatians 5:6](#). This is the kind of love that looks out for our brothers and sisters, [James 2:14-17](#), the kind of love which wants nothing but the best for them, [Matthew 18:7](#) / [Romans 13:8-10](#) / [Romans 13:14](#) / [2 Peter 1:10](#). It's the person who truly lives in the light and doesn't want to cause anyone to stumble, [1 John 2:10](#).

Anyone who claims to love their brother and sister in Christ but doesn't demonstrate this love towards them is still walking in the darkness and doesn't know where they are going, [1 John 2:11](#) / [1 John 1:6](#) / [John 12:35](#).

As a result of walking in the darkness, they have become blind because they sin in not loving their brothers and sisters as they should, [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) / [Hebrews 3:13](#) / [2 Peter 1:5-9](#) / [John 12:35](#) / [Luke 11:35](#) / [John 3:19](#) / [Romans 1:21](#) / [2 Corinthians 6:14](#) / [Ephesians 5:8](#) / [Ephesians 6:12](#) / [Colossians 1:13](#).

REASONS FOR WRITING

'I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.' [1 John 2:12-14](#)

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'Who did John have in mind when he addressed his readers as little children, fathers, and young men? Perhaps he meant those who physically fell into these categories. If he did, what about his female readers and others who were not in these categories? Perhaps he was thinking of those in his audience who were in their spiritual development, children, men, and youths.'

Some commentators suggest that [1 John 2:12-14](#) describes the spiritual development of a Christian. The children are new Christians, spiritual babies, the young men have grown in their faith, and the fathers are those who are spiritually mature.

John now addresses those who are children, those who are fathers and those who are young men. The children, [1 John 2:12](#), which is the word 'teknia' in Greek, [1 John 2:12](#), were probably those who were new converts, [Acts 22:16](#) / [1 Peter 2:1-2](#).

These children would grow and become young men, that is, the word 'paidia' in Greek, which implies older children. These were the Christians who had great spiritual strength, as did the physical strength of young men. The fathers were those who had been Christians the longest, and so, had spiritually grown the most.

John reminds the children that their sins have been forgiven, [1 John 2:12](#) / [1 John 1:7](#) / [2 John 2:2](#) / [Acts 22:16](#), and they can know they have been forgiven because they know the Father, [1 John 2:12](#) / [1 John 2:14](#).

Our sins have been forgiven on the account of Jesus' Name, [Luke 24:47](#) / [Acts 4:12](#). Our sins were forgiven at our baptism, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 22:12-16](#), and we are continually cleansed of our sins through the blood of Jesus, [1 John 1:7](#).

The fathers, those who are more mature in the faith, knew the Father from the beginning, [1 John 2:13](#) / [1 John 2:14](#), that is, from the start of their Christian journey, and so they too will know that their sins have been forgiven.

The young men had overcome the evil one, [1 John 2:13](#), that is, the devil, [2 Timothy 2:22](#) / [James 4:7](#). They did this because of the strength they received from God when they allowed God's Word to live and direct their lives, [1 John 2:14](#) / [Jeremiah 10:23](#) / [Acts 20:32](#) / [Colossians 3:16](#) / [1 Thessalonians 2:13](#) / [1 John 1:10](#).

We can let God's Word direct our steps or let human philosophy direct our steps, [Colossians 2:8](#). We can let God's Word direct our steps or let false doctrine direct our steps, [1 John 4:1](#). God has given us His Word for a reason, and that reason is to guide our steps, [Psalm 119:105](#).

When we get to know God and His Word, we won't want to sin against Him, and it's through reading His Word that He gives us the strength to overcome any desire, [Psalm 119:11](#).

It's through His Word we find the strength to dismiss any human philosophy. It's through His Word that we can find the strength to dismiss any false doctrine we come across in life.

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD

'Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.' [1 John 2:15-17](#)

John commands his readers not to love the world, [1 John 2:15](#). This is the Greek word 'kosmos', which refers to an organised society in general. Christians shouldn't allow themselves to think as the world does, or behave as the world does, [Colossians 3:1-2](#) / [Romans 12:2](#).

Christians aren't to love anything in the world, [1 John 2:15](#), that is, they're not to allow themselves to be influenced by any evil values or morals that the world demonstrates, [Matthew 6:24](#) / [Romans 8:5](#) / [Romans 12:2](#) / [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](#) / [Colossians 3:1-2](#) / [James 1:14-15](#) / [James 4:4](#) / [1 John 4:4](#).

John again reminds us of obedience and where our true loyalty really is, if we love the world, then the Father isn't in us, [1 John 2:15](#). Many Christians feel they need to compromise their relationship with what God says in relation to what the world says, but this shouldn't happen, because there is no compromising God and His Word, [Revelation 3:15-16](#).

Many Christians leave the faith because their love for the world was greater than their love for God, [1 Timothy 1:19-20](#) / [2 Timothy 2:16-18](#) / [2 Timothy 4:10](#). Many Christians leave the faith because the temptation to sin was too great, [Luke 8:13](#) / [James 1:12-16](#). Many Christians leave the faith because of false teachers, [1 John 4:1](#) / [Matthew 7:15](#) / [Ephesians 4:14](#).

John says the things that don't come from the Father but come from the world are 'the lust of the flesh', [1 Timothy 6:11](#), the lust of the eyes, [2 Timothy 2:22](#), and the pride of life', [1 John 2:16](#) / [Matthew 4:1-10](#). These are all temptations that lure us away from our love for God, [Romans 1:24](#) / [Romans 6:12](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#) / [Galatians 5:16-23](#) / [Ephesians 2:3](#) / [2 Peter 2:18](#).

Notice what the Bible says in [Genesis 3:6](#). Lust of the flesh, she saw it was good for food. Lust of the eyes, she saw it was pleasing to the eyes. Pride of life, she said it was desirable for gaining wisdom, [Genesis 3:1-6](#).

There was an appeal there because if there is no appeal, there's no temptation, and so sin had an appeal. Temptations are often produced by looking at things in an evil manner, [Ecclesiastes 5:11](#) / [Matthew 5:28](#) / [1 Corinthians 13:5-6](#).

Hebrews talks about ‘the fleeting pleasures of sin’, [Hebrews 11:24-26](#), and here John reminds us that the world and its desires are passing away, [1 John 2:17](#) / [1 Corinthians 7:31](#) / [2 Corinthians 4:18](#) / [1 Peter 1:24](#) / [2 Peter 3:10-11](#). Those who love the world and get involved with the sins of the world won’t inherit eternal life, [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#) / [Galatians 5:19-21](#), but those who love the Father and do His will, will be blessed with eternal life, [1 John 2:16](#) / [1 John 5:13](#).

WARNINGS AGAINST DENYING THE SON

‘Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.’ [1 John 2:18-19](#)

John again uses his favourite phrase, he says ‘dear children’, [1 John 2:18](#). He uses the term ‘children’ eighteen times throughout his three letters and in 1 John, he uses the term ten times.

This tells us that John is writing this letter to the Christians at that time as a loving father would write to his own children. In doing so, he is warning them about a problem that was very real in his day, that is, the antichrist, [1 John 2:18](#).

Now it is very interesting that John is the only writer of the New Testament who uses the term ‘antichrist’. He uses the term five times: [1 John 2:18](#) / [1 John 2:22](#) / [1 John 4:2-3](#) / [2 John 7](#).

We’re living in a society where many people believe that the term ‘antichrist’ is used to refer to an individual. In other words, they believe ‘the antichrist’, singular, will appear in the end times.

For example, some believe that an actual person will arise in the religious-political arena and lead many people astray just before Christ comes again. This view is held by premillennialists and many amillennialists.

But to understand what John means, we need to ask ourselves the question. Who are the antichrists? [1 John 2:18](#). Unlike popular public belief, the answer is not a mystery but quite simple. It’s simple because John tells us the answer is quite simple.

In John’s day, not sometime in the future, but in John’s day, the antichrists, not ‘one antichrist’ but ‘many antichrists’, [1 John 2:18](#), were individuals who had associated themselves with the apostles and other Christians. But what these people did was that they had gone out on their own and were no longer in fellowship with the apostles, hence, why they went out and didn’t really belong to them, [1 John 2:19](#). In other words, these people weren’t approved by the apostles. Why? Quite simply because they didn’t respect the apostle’s authority, [1 John 4:3-6](#).

Many ‘antichrists’ behave the same way today; they start out acting like they respect apostolic authority and seek to be with Christians, but eventually their true nature comes out, and they will not want to be with those who respect apostolic authority very long. Those who reject the apostles, reject Christ Himself, and so in effect, they have the spirit of the antichrist, [John 13:20](#).

Again, in John’s day, he says that these people denied that Jesus is the Christ, [1 John 2:22](#). Remember, in John’s day, there was a big problem with Gnosticism. A Gnostic is a person who says, ‘a divine God couldn’t possibly come in the flesh because the flesh is too sinful.’

Many people in John’s day and even today allege that Jesus and Christ are two different persons. They believe that Christ merely appeared to have flesh, but in reality, didn’t.

Some believe that Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism and departed at the time of His suffering. It is that denial that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, John 1:1-2 / John 1:14, that John identifies as the spirit of the antichrist, 1 John 4:3.

John says another way to spot the spirit of the antichrist is that they deny the Father and the Son, 1 John 2:22. In other words, by denying that Jesus is the Christ, they were denying the Son, John 1:1-2 / John 1:14.

In other words, because of their denial, they are refusing to believe that Jesus came from the Father. And by denying the Son, they were also denying the Father, 1 John 2:23 / John 13:20.

Is the antichrist a character soon to be revealed on the stage of world events? Let's look at some of the views of Dispensationalists, which is currently the most popular form of premillennialism, because they have much to say about 'the antichrist.' According to these guys, they would have us believe that the antichrist is a man, now living, who will soon rise to the position of a worldwide dictator.

Over the years, in reference to the 'spirit of the antichrist,' countless people and groups have attempted to identify the antichrist. Simply type in the word "antichrist" on the internet, and you will be immersed in suggested personalities such as the Roman Emperor Nero, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, and the Pope, which are but a few of the candidates put forth.

In most cases, 'the antichrist' is supposed to be connected with the end of the world, the number 666, and various other 'signs of the times.' John specifically says that many antichrists had already come into the world, 1 John 2:18. If his readers were looking for a single, solitary figure distinguished as the sole antichrist, John took that notion away by saying to them that 'many antichrists had come', 1 John 2:18.

Remember that John is referring to those of the Gnostic persuasion. If John was talking about a mysterious antichrist who is some sinister personage who is to appear in the late twenty-first century, why would he say that many antichrists are already in the world, 1 John 2:18 / 1 John 4:3?

John says the spirit of the antichrist is already here, in John's day. In John's day, these 'antichrists' claimed to belong with the apostles, but they left, which demonstrated they never belonged with them in the first place, 1 John 1:19.

'But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.' 1 John 2:20-23

The way we guard ourselves against the spirit of the antichrists is by going to the people who have already experienced it. We guard ourselves in the same way John told his readers to guard themselves. And the way John tells them is by reminding them of their 'anointing,' 1 John 2:20 / 1 John 2:27.

John says that this 'anointing is from the Holy One' in 1 John 2:20, and it was this anointing that enabled them to know 'about all things', 1 John 2:20. It also enabled them so that they 'didn't need anyone to teach them,' 1 John 2:27.

As far as my studies have led me to believe, John is talking about the 'gifts of the Spirit', which, as you know, in New Testament times served to provide both Revelation and confirmation of the truth for the early church.

These gifts of the Spirit were given by the 'laying on of the apostle's hands,' Acts 6:5-6 / Acts 8:14-19, so that the early church in this case could identify the 'antichrists' without John's help, 1 Corinthians 12:10. And so, despite having this 'anointing', they still needed to be encouraged to continue in what they had learned from the Spirit, 1 John 2:24-25.

Remember just because they had 'gifts of the Spirit', this didn't keep them from sinning, or being misled, 1 John 2:26. It was only by paying attention to that which 'they had heard from the beginning', 1 John 2:24, that they would be able to continue to abide in the Son and in the Father and receive the promise of eternal life!

As Christians today don't have the 'anointing' like John's readers did, although many religious groups do claim this. But if that were the case, then we wouldn't need the Scriptures, according to what we read in 1 John 2:21 and 1 John 2:27, only the self-deceived would make such a claim today!

We do, however, have something just as good: we have the Word of God, which is the 'sword of the Spirit', Ephesians 6:17. We have 'the faith once delivered unto the saints,' Jude 3.

In other words, we have something which we use as the standard by which we can know the truth, 1 John 2:21. And because of that truth we find in the Bible, we can avoid lies and being misled by subjective feelings that can be mistaken for some sort of prompting of the Spirit, Proverbs 14:12.

With the Scriptures, we have all we need to know God's will, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 / 2 Peter 1:3. Just like John's readers, we need to be encouraged to continue in what we have learned from the Spirit-given Word.

But remember, just because we have the Word of God does not ensure that we won't be misled by others. That's why, unless we study and apply the Word, we are open to deceptions by modern-day 'antichrists', who are liars and deny Jesus is the Christ and His relationship with the Father, 1 John 2:22-23. As John urged his readers almost two thousand years ago, so we must today test the spirits, 1 John 4:1.

'As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life.' 1 John 2:24-25

There may not be many professing Christians who deny Jesus is the Christ, or that He came in the flesh; there are many who reject the authority of the apostles by the manner in which they disregard the Scriptures!

The solution then remains the same for us; we must allow what we heard, that is, the Gospel concerning Jesus, to remain in us, 1 John 2:24 / Romans 6:3-6 / 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

When we obey the Gospel, we come into fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19-20 / Romans 6:3 / Galatians 3:26-27. As a result of our obeying the Gospel, we enter into fellowship with the Father and the Son, and they direct our lives, John 14:23 / Acts 20:32 / 1 Thessalonians 2:13 / 1 John 1:6-9 / 2 John 6.

As the Father and Son direct our lives, we remember the promise of eternal life, 1 John 2:25, which has been given to everyone who obeys the Gospel, John 17:3 / Philippians 3:9 / Hebrews 6:18-19 / Titus 1:2 / Revelation 14:13. As Christians, we can be confident that we will be saved if we remain faithful to Him, 1 John 1:6-10 / 1 John 5:11.

'I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.' 1 John 2:26-27

John now gives another reason for why he wrote to these Christians: there were some who were trying to lead them astray, 1 John 2:26 / Acts 20:29 / 1 Timothy 4:1-3 / 1 John 2:18 / 2 John 7. It appears that those who went out from the community of the Christians were still affecting the faithful, 1 John 2:19 / 1 John 4:1-6.

Earlier, John told them to guard themselves against the spirit of the antichrist by reminding them of their 'anointing,' 1 John 2:27. He said that their anointing enabled them to know 'about all things', and here he says that their anointing would also enable them so that they 'didn't need anyone to teach them', 1 John 2:27.

In other words, what the Holy Spirit taught the disciples was true, and so, they didn't need the false teachers to teach them anything concerning the fundamental truths of Christianity, Acts 2:38-39 / Acts 8:18 / Ephesians 4:4-6 / 1 John 2:20.

The words remain in you, 1 John 2:27, refer to that which remains in them, that is, God, 1 Corinthians 3:16 / 1 Corinthians 6:16 / Philippians 2:13 / 1 Thessalonians 1:1 / 1 John 4:11-16.

The Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:17 / Romans 8:10 / Galatians 2:20 / Ephesians 3:17, the Holy Spirit, Romans 8:11 / 1 Corinthians 3:16 / Galatians 5:16, and the will of the Godhead, Philippians 2:5 / 1 Corinthians 2:16 / Colossians 3:16 / 1 John 2:14.

GOD'S CHILDREN AND SIN

‘And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.’ 1 John 2:28-29

John now gives us three conditions in which Jesus will find people when He returns.

1. When Christ returns, ‘He is going to find some people who are ashamed’, 1 John 2:28.

Some people will be ashamed because they denied the Lord Himself, 1 John 4:3-5, but John says that many people deny the Lord in many different ways. Some will deny Jesus by word, just like Peter did, Matthew 26:69-75.

Some people deny Jesus by the way they live their lives, Titus 1:16, and some people deny Jesus by denying His words, Mark 8:38. Some other people will be ashamed when Christ returns because they rebelled at the commands of the Gospel, Thessalonians 1:8-9.

And then Jesus will find those who will feel shame more than anyone else, and that is, those who trample underfoot the Son of God, Hebrews 10:26-31 / 1 Timothy 4:1-6 / 2 Peter 2:20-22.

All these people will feel shame more than any other person because they had the truth, they once lived by the truth, but ultimately they turned their backs on the truth.

2. John tells us about the second condition, and that is, ‘people who are confident’, 1 John 2:28.

If we have the confidence of knowing that God means what He says, 2 Peter 3:9. A Christian can have confidence in the fact that God will reward the faithful with everlasting life, 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Because when Jesus returns, there will be no middle ground; it’s either eternal punishment or eternal life, Matthew 25:46.

Confident people will do what the Lord commands, 1 John 2:3-5. Confident people are always going to be busy working for the Lord, 1 Corinthians 15:58. Confident people are born again of genuine love for the Lord, 1 John 4:17. This love causes people to want to obey God and to delight in that obedience, 1 John 5:3.

Confidence means obeying God fully, and confidence means that God really does love us because we understand that God is love. For the Christian, fear shouldn’t even be in your vocabulary concerning the judgment, Romans 8:1 / 1 John 4:18. It’s all about confidence, confidence in God, confidence in His promises and confidence in His Son’s blood.

3. Christ will find faithful people when He returns, 1 John 2:29.

However, before anyone can continue in Him, they must first get in Him. Because it’s only the in Christ people that are truly the children of God, according to Galatians 3:26.

It’s only the in Christ people that are truly a new creation, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. It’s only the in Christ people that are truly redeemed and forgiven of sins, according to Ephesians 1:7.

A person gets in Christ or into Christ by being baptised into Christ, Galatians 3:26-27 / Romans 6:3-4. Jesus will find faithful Christians who don’t trust in their own merit but trust in the blood of the One who is returning, 1 John 1:7-2:1-2.

Because when He does return, He’s not coming to give the world another chance, Hebrews 9:28. When Jesus comes, those same Christians shall be made just like Him, Philippians 3:20-21 / 1 John 3:1-3.

John says that Jesus is the righteous One, 1 John 2:29 / Acts 22:14, and if we know this, then we too should do what is right in His eyes, John 14:15. When we do this, then we can certainly claim that we have been born of Him, 1 John 2:29 / John 3:1-12 / Matthew 7:15-23 / 1 Peter 1:23.

Those born again are obedient to God’s commands, 1 John 3:9 / 1 John 3:18 / 1 John 4:7 / 1 John 5:1 / 1 John 5:4 / 1 John 5:18. Those born again are truly God’s children, 1 John 3:1-2 / 1 John 3:10 / 1 John 5:2 / John 3:3-5 / Galatians 3:26-27.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

‘See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.’ 1 John 3:1-3

John begins this chapter by thinking about the significance of being called the ‘children of God’, [1 John 3:1](#). Think about the implications of what it should mean in our lives.

John appears to be overwhelmed when he thinks about the great love the Father has lavished on Christians, [1 John 3:1](#) / [John 1:12](#) / [Acts 17:28](#) / [Romans 8:15](#) / [Galatians 3:26-27](#) / [Galatians 4:5-7](#) / [1 John 3:10](#) / [1 John 5:3](#), and that’s because it’s through God’s love that we can become His children, [John 3:16](#) / [Romans 5:8](#) / [1 John 4:9-10](#). His love for us is immeasurable, [Titus 3:3-7](#).

David, in [Psalm 8:3-4](#), was also struggling to come to terms with God’s love for mankind when he more or less asks the very same question. God’s love for us is far beyond what we can comprehend. However, John says that ‘the world does not know us’, [1 John 3:1](#).

I’m sure if we went outside to our non-Christian friends, they would know who we are, but John isn’t talking about that kind of knowing. He’s talking about those who aren’t Christians, those who don’t truly recognise or appreciate what we have become in Christ.

They may accept that we’re Christians, but they don’t really understand what the term Christian means. Paul says he understands why the world wants to ridicule us for our beliefs in Christ. Paul says to some people, we’re the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world, [1 Corinthians 4:9-13](#). The reason the world did not and still does not really know us is that they did not and still don’t know Jesus, [1 John 3:1](#) / [John 1:11](#) / [John 15:18-19](#) / [John 16:3](#).

Roberts, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Although they saw the human Jesus, they did not recognise him as the Son of God.’

If the world doesn’t recognise Jesus for who He was, how on earth are they going to recognise us for who we believe in? That’s why Paul talks about our lives being hidden with Christ in God, [Colossians 3:3-4](#).

As God’s children, we are loved and honoured with a love and honour that cannot be measured. As children of God, we’re unknown and sometimes despised by the world, but for the Christian, the best is yet to come; we will appear with Him in glory, [1 John 3:2](#) / [Colossians 3:4](#).

What are God’s children going to be like in the future? Who knows, because what we shall be like hasn’t been revealed yet, and I think the reason for that is that we just couldn’t comprehend it all in our earthly minds.

We do know a couple of things about what we will be like. For example, Paul tells us that we will have a new spiritual body [1 Corinthians 15:42-44](#), and Paul also says we will be immortal, [1 Corinthians 15:50-53](#). In the future, we’re going to get a new spiritual body, and we’re going live forever.

John says that we’re going to be just like Jesus, [1 John 3:2](#), as Paul did, [1 Corinthians 15:49](#). Can we imagine that in our minds? I can’t. It’s beyond comprehension, and these lowly bodies that we possess just now are going to undergo an amazing transformation, [1 Corinthians 15:51-54](#) / [2 Corinthians 5:1-8](#) / [Romans 8:29](#) / [2 Peter 1:4](#). They are going to have bodies like Jesus’ [Philippians 3:20-21](#).

John says that the hope of these new bodies, being like Christ, should influence how we live for Christ, Philippians 4:1. He says that this hope should motivate us to live pure lives for Christ, 1 John 3:3.

The word ‘purify’, 1 John 3:3, is the Greek word ‘hagnizo’, which means ‘to make clean or sanctify.’ But it’s also closely related to the Greek word ‘hagiasmos’, which means ‘holiness or sanctification’.

And so what John is saying here is that as children of God, we are ‘set apart’ for a holy purpose, and it’s those things that God’s children are taught to pursue, Hebrews 12:14.

When we are motivated by the hope that Jesus will ‘transform our lowly bodies into His glorious body’, Philippians 3:21, the true children of God will always be working towards the purity or holiness which is seen in Jesus Christ Himself.

Notice that John says everyone who has this hope in him ‘purifies himself’, 1 John 3:3. How can Christians purify themselves? Well, first and foremost, by recognising the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, 1 John 1:7 / 1 John 1:9.

When we recognise what the blood of Christ does for a Christian, we need to remain in His love, Jude 21, and we need to continue to obey His commands, 1 John 5:3 / 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 / 1 Peter 1:22, it’s then and only then can we hope to be truly holy and without blemish, Ephesians 5:25-27 / Colossians 1:22 / Colossians 1:28.

However, it’s one thing to accept the cleansing power of Christ’s blood to purify us and make us holy, but it’s another thing to take the responsibility for how you live your lives. Because of the very fact that we are holy, we need to be aware of the things around us which can and will defile us.

And the way to stay holy is to recognise the areas in your own world which can make you unholy. We should be striving for holiness in our lives because our God is holy, 1 Peter 1:16. We need to recognise those areas in our lives and separate ourselves from them, 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1.

‘Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.’ 1 John 3:4-6

When we keep in mind that John is dealing with Gnosticism in this letter, and that’s important because the Gnostics believed that sinning didn’t affect one’s relationship with God.

What’s your attitude towards sin? How should the true child of God regard sin? Is sin something to be taken lightly? Not if the apostle John has anything to say about it, and so, John starts by giving us a definition of sin, 1 John 3:4. Some people think that sin is nothing more than a violation of human relationships, which can be easily resolved by correcting relationship problems. Other people think that some sins may be a violation of human relationships, but the true meaning of sin goes much further than that.

Literally speaking, the word sin means ‘to miss the mark’, just like when an archer fails to hit the centre of the target, Romans 3:23. And so, when we look at sin literally, it means that it’s some kind of action or lack of it in which a person fails to meet the goal intended by God.

John says that sin is ‘lawlessness’, 1 John 3:4, or ‘transgression of the law’ as some translations have it, in other words, everyone has violated God’s Law, Romans 4:15. If a person steals for example from someone else, they have broken or violated God’s Law which says, ‘You shall not steal’, Exodus 20:15.

In this context, John speaks of one’s free moral reaction against the law of God, Romans 4:15 / Matthew 23:28 / Romans 6:19 / 2 Corinthians 6:14 / 1 John 4:4. When we do something in the world which is illegal, we have broken the law, haven’t we? Well, that’s what sin is: when we do something which God has forbidden us to do, we have sinned against God’s Law.

James describes another kind of sin. He says that if we know what is right to do but we don't do what's right, then we're sinning, James 4:17. Failing to love our brother or sister in Christ is a sin. In other words, sin isn't just found in the doing of something, but sin is also found in the not doing of something.

As Christians, the standard is the 'law of God,' which, when carefully looked at, is designed to help us in our relationships with not only God Himself but with other people and even ourselves. Every command of God, whether it is a negative or positive command, affects these relationships in one way or another.

And so when we 'miss the mark', by either doing what we shouldn't be doing or failing to do what we should be doing. What we're doing is revealing the influences of the devil in our lives. If sin can make a person be 'a child of the devil', John 8:44 / Acts 13:10, that ought to tell us something about the terribleness of sin, shouldn't it?

I think that sin has been seriously watered down over the years, and in the world we live in today, it has almost lost its true meaning. People fail to see and understand that sin is so serious in God's eyes that God had to send His One and only Son to the earth as a human to defeat it, 1 John 3:8.

John the Baptist declared those very words when he saw Jesus coming toward him in John 1:29. Why do we think Jesus came to the earth? Because how we portray Jesus' reasons for coming will reflect on how we view sin, 1 John 3:5. If we continue to walk in sin, 1 John 3:6, all we're doing is undermining the purpose of our Lord's coming, 1 Corinthians 15:3 / 1 Peter 1:18-19.

When we properly understand what sin is, and we begin to understand how terrible it must be in God's sight, it's then that we understand that for the 'child of God', there can only be one goal! If we are living the Christian life, we won't live in sin, because there is no sin in Him, 1 John 3:5 / 1 John 1:7-9 / 1 John 2:24, but will keep His commandments, 1 John 5:2-3.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning 1 John 3:5.

'Although in the present tense and bearing the meaning noted above, this is also true in the past tense of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus 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, etc.'

The phrase 'does not sin', 1 John 2:6 / 1 John 3:9, is present tense in Greek, and it suggests a practice of not sinning. Remember that John has already affirmed that Christians sin, 1 John 1:8 / 1 John 1:10, and so, to say we have no sin is to lie, and to make God a liar.

So what sin is John talking about? 1 John 3:6. I believe that John is talking about people who do not 'continuously practice sin'. Because it's people who do not continuously sin that 'live in Him', 1 John 3:6. Those who 'live in Jesus' don't continuously engage in sin. Why? Because they let that which they have heard from the beginning remain in them, 1 John 2:24.

And what did they hear from the beginning? Nothing less than the very words of Jesus Christ Himself, 1 John 2:24. It's people who do not continuously sin but are striving to walk as Jesus walked, 1 John 2:6.

Now we can claim that we know Jesus all we want, but if we continuously practise sin, we've neither seen Jesus nor known Him. It is only through obedience to God's Word that we can see and know God, and so, those who live in sin don't know God or His ways, and they will never be able to see Him or know Him, 1 John 3:6 / 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 / 1 John 3:3-5 / 1 John 4:8.

'Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.' 1 John 3:7-10

John now goes on to warn his readers not to let anyone lead them astray, 1 John 3:7 / Matthew 24:23-24 / 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 / 1 John 3:18 / 1 John 1:8 / 1 John 4:1-3. And one way to make sure that doesn't happen is to continue to practice doing what is right, 1 John 3:7.

Because we fail to understand the true nature of 'sin', we sometimes have a great lack of concern toward it today. Every time we sin, we seriously damage our relationship with either God, others, or ourselves.

And if we still think that sin is something not to be too worried about, then John is going to tell us just how terrible sin is. It's terrible because of its origins. John says that sin is of the devil, 1 John 3:8.

John and Jesus say that the devil is a liar and the father of lies; what He means is that the devil is the origin of sin, Matthew 13:38. John is saying that people who sin are of the devil. In other words, since he is the 'father' of sin, those who practice sin are his children, John 8:44.

Gore, in his commentary, says the following.

'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.'

Jesus was sinless in reference to God's law because He, as God, he was the author of divine law, 2 Corinthians 5:21 / Hebrews 4:15 / Hebrews 9:14 / 1 Peter 1:19 / 1 John 2:29. Because He was sinless, He could be the offering for those who were in sin, Isaiah 53:5-6 / Matthew 1:21 / John 1:29 / Titus 2:14.

That was the main purpose of Christ coming to the earth in the first place. One translation says that 'He was manifested to take away our sins,' the same translation says that 'for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil,' 1 John 3:8 / Luke 10:18 / John 12:31 / John 16:11 / 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 / 2 Timothy 1:10 / Hebrews 2:14-15 / Revelation 21:4.

John says anyone who has been born of God won't continue to sin, 1 John 3:9, but please don't misunderstand what he's saying here. He's not suggesting that a person 'born of God' never sins, he's not saying that. He's saying that a person who is truly 'born of God' won't continuously practise sin.

And why is that? Because 'God's seed remains in him', 1 John 3:9. The 'seed' is that life-giving Word of God which Jesus talked about it in the parable of the sower, Matthew 13:1-23. James talks about it in James 1:18, and Peter talks about it in 1 Peter 1:22-23.

In other words, as long as a Christian allows the 'seed', the Word of God, to remain in them, they are 'born of God', 1 John 3:9. And a person who is born of God doesn't want to continuously practice sin, nor can they continuously practice sin, if the 'seed' is remaining in them.

And so instead of continuously practising sin, they continuously practise righteousness, 1 John 2:29 / 1 John 3:6. That's why John warned his readers and us today not to let anyone lead us astray, we must practice righteousness, and He is righteous, 1 John 3:7.

The idea that a person can claim to be 'born of God' and not be concerned about sin in their life is a teaching of Gnosticism. However, when we keep in mind the definition of sin that we have looked at. When we keep in mind the origin of sin, which we have looked at.

When we keep in mind Jesus' defeat of sin and how we as Christians are to 'stop sinning'. Then our attitude toward sin should certainly be different from those Gnostics that John was having to fight off during the first century.

John again reminds us that God's children are classed as those who do what is right and those who love their brothers and sisters, 1 John 3:10 / 1 John 4:20. Loving one another shows that we belong to God. I think the KJV reads better, 'in this the children of God manifest and the children of the devil.'

The word ‘manifest,’ 1 John 3:10, is the Greek word ‘phaneros’ which literally means ‘shining or apparent’. In other words, we need to show or demonstrate in our lives that we are indeed children of God. It’s not enough just to say it; we need to prove it or provide evidence that we truly belong to God.

MORE ON LOVE AND HATRED

‘For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.’ 1 John 3:11-15

The children of the devil don’t practise righteousness, and they don’t practise brotherly love, 1 John 3:10, but John says, we should love one another, 1 John 3:11. But when did they first hear about loving one another? 1 John 3:11. I believe they heard it first when they first heard the Gospel, Matthew 22:37-40 / John 13:34-35.

Jesus stresses the point about how His disciples would show or prove to anyone they ever met that they belonged to God, John 15:12 / John 15:14 / 1 John 2:7-8 / 2 John 5. He says if we show the world that we love one another, not just say it but practice it, then everyone will know that we are His disciples, John 13:35.

Now, some decisions in life are out of our hands, but how we choose to live isn’t; we either live as a child of God or live as a child of the devil. However, we can’t have our feet in both camps. And do you know why?

Because the people of the world need to know who we belong to, and we need to make up our minds about whose child we want to be. Because the children of God and the children of the devil are constantly in conflict with each other.

As we know from the story of Cain and Abel, righteousness and evil are always going to be at war with each other. Cain killed his brother Abel, Genesis 4:8, why? 1 John 3:12.

Because Abel was standing up for righteousness and Cain didn’t want to be reminded about what righteousness was all about, Genesis 4:1-16 / Hebrews 11:4. Cain’s actions were the opposite of the love God wishes that Christians demonstrate toward one another, 1 John 3:12.

Stott, in his commentary, says the following.

‘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 wilfully disobedient.’

We can be sure that if we’re walking as a child of God, we’re going to get opposition from the children of the devil, hence why John tells us not to be surprised if the world hates us as well, 1 John 3:13.

When we follow the teachings of Jesus, especially His command to love one another, it soon becomes evident to the world that we are different from those of the world, John 15:18-20.

It’s important for us to stand out from the rest of the world, not because of the persecution we receive but because when we love one another, the world will also see that we have also passed from death to life, 1 John 3:14 / Ephesians 1:1-5 / Colossians 2:13 / John 5:24 / 1 John 5:11-12.

Smith, in his commentary, says the following concerning passing from death to life, John 3:14.

‘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.’

John says, loving one another is the mark of true conversion. Remember that brotherly love is not the only indicator of a true conversion because we also need to practice righteousness, which again should be evident in our lives, [Galatians 5:22-23](#).

How is our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Any love lost? Those who love one another are alive but those who don't remain in death, [1 John 3:14](#), they are still in darkness, [1 John 2:9](#) / [1 John 2:11](#).

John here warns us that if we hate one another, we're no better than a murderer, [1 John 3:15](#), just like Cain and common sense tells us that a murderer doesn't possess eternal life, [Matthew 5:21-22](#).

A baby Christian doesn't know how to deal with conflicts within the family, [1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#). A baby Christian needs to learn from those who are mature about how to help those who don't love each other. The world says, get right in there and get it fixed, no matter what the cost.

Those who are mature in the faith should know how to deal with conflict within the church family; they should be humble and gentle, [Ephesians 4:1-2](#) / [Galatians 6:1-2](#). Maybe a reason why some people don't love their brothers or sisters in Christ is because of unbelief and sin, [Hebrews 3:12-14](#).

Whatever the reason is or whatever the circumstances are for not loving one another, it's not what God desires for us, [1 John 3:15](#) / [Matthew 5:22-30](#) / [John 8:44](#) / [Galatians 5:21](#).

The kind of love which John is writing about is 'agape' love, it's the kind of love that builds, not demolishes. The kind of love that seeks nothing but the best for one another, [1 Corinthians 13:4-8](#). That's the kind of love John is talking about.

John has given us two real reasons as to why we should love one another. He says this kind of love for each other shows us to be children of God, and he says this kind of love for each other signifies a passing from death to life. It's important that we continually practice this love towards one another, [Hebrews 13:1](#) / [1 Thessalonians 1:3](#)

'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.' [1 John 3:16-18](#)

After speaking about the importance of loving one another, John gives us the ultimate example to follow, His Name is Jesus Christ, [1 John 3:16](#). Jesus demonstrated 'agape' love, that active goodwill towards all. In other words, His love for mankind had legs attached to it; it's not enough to say we love someone, we need to act because of that love. It amazes me when people wonder if God loves them, and it amazes me even more when Christians wonder if God loves them, especially in light of the fact that He died for each of us, [1 John 3:16](#) / [John 3:16](#).

Because in giving His life for our sins, Jesus Christ certainly actively demonstrated goodwill, [John 5:12-13](#) / [John 10:11](#) / [John 10:17-18](#) / [Romans 5:8](#) / [Mark 10:45](#) / [Galatians 4:1](#) / [Titus 2:14](#) / [Hebrews 10:8-10](#) / [1 John 4:8-11](#).

By voluntarily going to the cross at Calvary, He showed more than love for mankind; He showed "agape" love, He showed love with legs on it. And if we as Christians consider Jesus' example, the Bible says that we are being 'taught by God to love one another', [1 Thessalonians 4:9](#).

And when we look at Jesus' example, we come to understand what brotherly love is all about. We can clearly see that it's all about one thing, sacrificially serving others.

The question is, are we willing to lay down our lives for one another? [1 John 3:16](#). That's a tough question, isn't it? But you see, if we confess to follow Christ and follow His example, then we should be willing to lay down our lives for one another. Remember that sometimes we can lay down our lives for each other in different ways. We can also be 'living' for each other through serving one another.

John uses the example of not helping a brother when it is within our power to do so, [1 John 3:17](#). In other words, in view of Christ's love, with Christ's example of love to follow, John is asking us, how we can claim to have love if we are not willing to sacrifice for a brother or sister in need? [1 John 3:17](#).

John is saying that if we love God and want to show it, he says that brotherly love is not only about a willingness to ‘die’ for someone, but it also means we need to have a willingness to ‘live’ for them as well, through active service on their behalf. In other words, don’t just say that we love someone, show them, Acts 2:44-45 / Acts 4:32-37 / Acts 20:35.

John loves using the term ‘dear children,’ 1 John 3:18. Nine times throughout this small letter, he uses that term, and it gives us the idea that he is addressing them as a loving, caring father. The Good News Translation says, ‘My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action’.

John is saying that ‘brotherly love’ not only distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil, but it not only signifies one as having passed from death to life, but he says that, that brotherly love must go beyond the spoken word or occasional hymn, 1 John 3:18.

There are many Christians who are going through a crisis in their lives, and we’re very good at listening to their problems, and that’s good and right, and sometimes we give them a hug of sympathy, which certainly helps and again is good and right.

But there are times when people need more than just someone to listen to; they need more than just a sympathetic hug. They need people to go back to their homes with them and look after their loved ones or children so that they can catch up on some much-needed sleep. They need an invitation to your home because they haven’t eaten for two days.

Sometimes it’s not enough to give people some money for food; sometimes it’s not enough to give someone some food from the kitchen, because maybe all they want is to have some company.

Maybe their home is freezing cold because they have no heating, and they are too humble to ask for help with their heating bill, and all they really want is to go to someone’s house for a warm meal in a warm house with some warm fellowship.

If we are to follow the pattern of Jesus Christ, then we need to learn how to love each other properly. Real love is visibly clear to the world, not simply because of what we say but because of what we do, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Our love for each other needs to be more than just words; our love needs to have legs attached to it.

It should be second nature when it comes to showing that love; it should be second nature to help each other when we see there is a need to be met. And John reminds us that the blessings of this love are twofold; not only are the people that we help blessed, but when we share that love with those in need, we too are blessed.

‘This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.’ 1 John 3:19-24

John says that love with legs attached assures us before God. Our love for each other shows the world that we are ‘belong to the truth’, 1 John 3:19. And practising this love does help to provide us with the assurance of our salvation, 1 John 3:10. If our hearts condemn us, maybe it’s because we don’t love each other as we should, 1 John 3:20.

Henry, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If our conscience condemns us in known sin, or our conscience condemns us because of our neglect of known duty, God does so too.’

What's he saying is that sinning isn't just about the things you do wrong, it's about the things that you don't do which you know you should do, that is just as bad, James 2:14-26 / James 4:17. If our hearts don't condemn us, it's simply because we're loving each other as we know we should, 1 John 3:20 / 1 John 4:7 / 1 John 4:12.

And when we love each other as we should, then this will make our approach to God easier; we can approach God with joyful confidence, 1 John 3:21 / 1 John 2:28. And it's because of that confidence that we can expect positive answers to our prayers, 1 John 3:22.

In other words, our prayers are more likely to be answered according to our requests. Why? Because we are keeping the commandments of God, of which loving each other is one, and thereby pleasing Him. And commandment-keeping is a condition upon which God hears prayer, just as it is a condition upon which Christ promises His abiding love, John 15:10.

Wesley, in his commentary, says the following concerning 1 John 3:23.

'To believe and love, this is the greatest and most important command that ever issued from the throne of glory.'

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning 1 John 3:23.

'When we put these two commandments together, we find the great truth that the Christian life depends on right belief and right conduct combined.'

If we claim to live in Christ, then we need to keep His commands, and if we keep those commands, then we are living in Him; the two go hand in hand, 1 John 3:24 / John 14:23. And how do we know that Christ truly lives in those who keep His commandments? 1 John 3:24. We know by the Spirit whom Christ has given us at our baptism, Romans 8:9-11 / 2 Timothy 1:13-14.

I don't want to be disrespectful to some religious groups; they are good people who do a lot of good things in the Name of Jesus. But if they haven't been fully immersed in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, they haven't got God's Spirit, because you cannot receive God's Spirit any other way, Acts 2:38 / Ephesians 1:13. John mentions three blessings for the Christian.

1. We're blessed to live in Him as He lives in us.
2. We're blessed that God hears and answers our prayers.
3. Were blessed to have confidence concerning our standing before God.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.' 1 John 4:1-3

DENYING THE INCARNATION

In 1 John 1:5-6, John describes what our relationship with God should be like. In 1 John 2:3-4, he describes what our relationship with Jesus should be like. He also described what our relationship with the world should be like in 1 John 2:15. In 1 John 3:4-5, he describes the relationship we shouldn't have with sin, and he spoke about what our relationship with our brethren should be like.

All this is worth bearing in mind as we begin to look at this chapter, where we will see that John is going to tell us about a very real danger that was around back in their day and is still very present in today's society. He's going to talk about false prophets.

John teaches us three things concerning false prophets: **Jeremiah 29:8 / Matthew 24:4-5 / Matthew 24:11**. He is going to warn us not to believe every spirit but test them first. Then he is going to tell us why we should test them, and then finally he is going to share with us how we test the spirits.

Now, what does John mean when he says, 'don't believe every spirit'? **1 John 4:1**. Well, it's obvious that he's saying that there are spirits around which don't come from God. I believe he is warning his readers and us to be careful, in other words, don't believe everything we hear, or everyone who claims that they are from God.

The problem with listening to every spirit is that it leads to confusion, **1 Corinthians 14:33**, and so, because of that confusion, we would be easily misled by those who are teaching errors. That's why we shouldn't just believe everything which is being taught, and that goes for every teacher who teaches from God's Word.

The word test, **1 John 4:1**, is the Greek word 'dokimazo', which means to try or prove; it's the idea of examining closely what is being said. The early Christians may have well used the gift of discerning spirits to find out if these people were false or not, **1 Corinthians 12:4-11 / 1 Corinthians 14:29 / 1 Thessalonians 5:21 / Revelation 2:2**.

However, because the miraculous gifts have ceased, **1 Corinthians 13:8-13**, we need to use God's Word. In other words, test the words to see if they are genuine or not, don't just accept what some teacher or preacher is saying, examine what is being taught, **Acts 17:11**.

We need to have that same testing spirit that they possessed when anyone preaches or teaches or even talks to us about God, **Revelation 2:2**. And why is this so important? Because 'many false prophets have gone into the world', **1 John 4:1**. John isn't the only one in the Bible who has warned us about this; Jesus warns us, **Matthew 7:15**, Peter warns us, **2 Peter 2:1-3**, and Paul warns us, **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**.

Let me say it again, we must examine, prove, and scrutinise anyone who would teach us. Even though some teachers might consider it rebellious, some might not like the possible controversy it can cause.

Whether someone teaches in our classes, on pulpits, radio, in newspapers, or even on the street corners, we must 'test the spirits!' **1 John 4:1**. How do we test the spirits? Do we try to work it out for ourselves and rely on our own understanding? Absolutely not! John says that if anyone denies the claim that Jesus Christ actually came in the flesh has a false spirit, **1 John 4:2**.

We need to remember that John is dealing with the problem of Gnosticism. The Gnostics denied the very fact that Jesus Christ actually came in the flesh. The Gnostics were going around, confusing Christians and leading many of them away from the truth because they claimed inspiration, **2 John 7**. John says that anyone who would teach falsehood is not led by the Spirit of God but is being led by the spirit of the antichrist, **1 John 4:3**.

MacKnight, in his commentary, says the following concerning the antichrist.

'From this, as well as from **1 John 2:18**, it appears that Antichrist is not any particular person, nor any particular succession of persons in the church.'

Another test John asks us to apply when testing the spirits is this: do they listen to the apostles of Christ? This is how we know the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

We have in our possession today the complete revelation from God in the form of the book we call the Bible, and all Christians need to do is read their Bibles to find out what that truth is, which God has revealed to all of mankind, 2 Timothy 3:16 / Jude 3.

We can always find out what kind of person we are listening to by the way they view Scripture. If anyone doesn't agree with that, then they are not worth listening to. Because those people who truly know God listen to what He has to say in His word and live their lives by His word.

Those people who truly know God listen to the apostle's teachings. And those who are not of God will reject their teachings. In other words, when someone is preaching or teaching from God's word, does their teaching agree with what the apostles teach?

Because we cannot disagree with the apostle's teachings and agree with Jesus' teachings. If a person rejects the teachings of the apostles, they reject the teachings of Christ Himself, John 13:20. If the apostle's teachings were important to the early church, then their teachings should be important to us, Acts 2:42 / 1 Corinthians 14:37. So if we claim to be true Christians, we need to listen and agree with what the apostles have to say through God's Word. And when we have high regard for the Bible, this test can easily be applied today to virtually every issue which comes up.

Mark Twain once said the following.

'The difference between truth and fiction is that fiction has to make sense.'

If someone's or something's doctrine contradicts what God has already revealed, they are to be rejected, Galatians 1:6-9. Not all things are always what they seem to be sometimes, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. We need to be aware of what is being said and who is saying it.

'You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.' 1 John 4:4-6

After speaking about testing the spirits, John goes on to give us some comforting words. He says Christians are of God, 1 John 4:4. These are the people who believed and obeyed the fundamental teaching that Christ had come in the flesh as the Messiah, 1 John 5:4.

These are the people who were born of God through their obedience to the Gospel of Jesus' death for our sins and resurrection for our hope, John 3:3-5 / 1 Peter 1:23 / 1 John 2:29 / 1 John 3:1 / 1 John 3:9 / 1 John 5:4 / 1 John 5:19. And it's because they have listened to and obeyed the words of God that they can overcome the false prophets, 1 John 4:4. And how did they do that? They did it because the One who is in them is greater than the one who is in the world, 1 John 4:4 / Ephesians 3:16-17 / 2 Timothy 1:7 / 2 Timothy 3:24.

And who is He that is in the world? People who have been baptised into Christ, and possess the Holy Spirit living within them, John 12:31 / Acts 2:38 / Ephesians 2:1-2 / 1 John 2:13-14 / 1 John 5:4-5.

We shouldn't be surprised to see the world following after the false prophets because false prophets are a lot like politicians; they speak to the people in the words the people want to hear just to get their vote, 1 John 4:5.

Wesley, in his commentary, says the following.

'These false teachers speak from the same principle, wisdom, and spirit of the world; and, of consequence, the world approvingly hears them.'

And so, false prophets are of the world and speak in a way as to appeal to the world, 1 John 4:5 / Matthew 7:21-23 / John 8:44 / John 15:19 / 2 Timothy 4:1-4. When we seek truth, we will find it, Acts 18:9-10, but those who don't seek truth will never find it; all they find is a spirit of falsehood, 1 John 4:6 / Isaiah 8:20 / 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

GOD'S LOVE AND OURS

‘Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.’ 1 John 4:7-12

We have already seen where John declared that love is evidence of ‘remaining in the light’ and ‘having fellowship with God,’ in 1 John 2:10. He makes a similar declaration concerning love in 1 John 1:5-7.

He says that love is the evidence that we belong to God in 1 John 3:10 and 1 John 3:14. John gives us the definition of love in 1 John 3:16, and he tells us about the value of love in 1 John 3:18-19.

John, in these verses, tells us that brotherly love is evidence of sonship, Matthew 22:37-40 / Mark 12:29-30 / John 13:34-35 / John 15:9-23 / Galatians 5:6 / 1 Thessalonians 4:9 / 1 John 3:9-18 / 1 John 4:20.

The word love used in these verses is the Greek word ‘agape’, which means ‘active goodwill.’ That’s the love with legs attached. He says we should love one another. Why? For love comes from God, 1 John 4:7. Every action that God takes is motivated by love.

We must bear in mind that God hates sin and He cannot simply overlook people’s sin because God is also light, 1 John 1:5-6. Those who love show that they are ‘born of God’ and ‘know God’; however, if we don’t show that love as God does, then we haven’t yet come to truly know God, 1 John 4:8.

In other words, our love for each other is defined by God’s love towards us all. God clearly showed His love for mankind by sending His one and only Son. He sent His Son not because we loved him but because He loved us, 1 John 4:9 / John 3:16 / Romans 5:8 / Titus 3:4-5 / 1 John 4:19.

He sent His Son for two reasons, first, He sent His Son so that we may live through Him, John 10:10 / John 14:6 / 1 John 5:10-11, and secondly, as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, Romans 3:25 / Hebrews 2:17 / Hebrews 10:5-10 / 1 John 2:2. In short, the Hebrew writer tells us that Jesus Christ was born so that He could die, Hebrews 10:5-10.

Jesus came so that He could be an atoning sacrifice for our sins, 1 John 4:10. Jesus died not just to provide forgiveness, but also to provide new life. And so, if this is the kind of love God has toward us, that ‘active goodwill’ love which was shown unconditionally, then this is the kind of love we should have toward one another!

Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The love which proves us 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.’

Because ‘God is love’, 1 John 4:8 / 1 John 4:16, we are to love each other as He loves us as His children. Not only that, but our love also goes beyond each other; our love is to be active towards those who don’t like us, Luke 6:35.

The way we show our love for each other and the way we show love towards those who don’t like us is evidence of our love for God and His love for us.

John goes on to tell us that this love is also evidence of fellowship with God. He says that no one has ever seen God at any time, 1 John 4:12 / John 1:18. Now, if we have never seen God, how do we know that we have fellowship with God?

If we obey and live by His commandments, we have the assurance that God will not only be with us but indeed live in us, 1 John 4:12 / John 14:21-23. John's point is that no one has ever seen the divine nature of God, John 1:18 / 1 Timothy 6:16.

We can only see the attributes of God as they are manifested through Jesus, John 14:9, and His loving actions toward man. Therefore, through obedient love, we see God, John 13:34-35 / 1 John 3:6.

If Christians love one another, then God lives in them, 1 John 2:28. Our loving of one another, and loving God through the keeping of His commandments, completes God's love that was revealed through Jesus in order to redeem us, 1 John 2:5 / 1 John 4:16-17.

‘This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world, we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.’ 1 John 4:13-18

Notice John uses the word ‘we’ again, 1 John 4:13. He's referring to the apostles. The giving of the Holy Spirit here to the apostles was the evidence that they were from God, Mark 16:17-20 / Galatians 3:5 / Hebrews 2:3-4 / 1 John 3:24. He's saying that the apostles have testified that the Father sent the Son to be our Saviour, 1 John 4:14 / John 14:20 / 1 John 1:1-2.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning 1 John 4:14.

‘The entire story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is here reduced to one line.’

It was the apostles who were the special witnesses to the Son of God and His resurrection, John 1:14 / John 15:26-27 / Luke 24:48 / Acts 1:8 / 1 John 1:1-2. Notice that John mentions acknowledging Jesus is the Son of God, 1 John 4:15 / Matthew 10:32-33 / John 12:42 / Acts 2:36-37 / Romans 10:9.

That's why we always take this confession from people before they are baptised, and so, we must be willing to confess Jesus as the Son of God because it's through that action of confession that we come to know and believe the love God has for us.

Before we are baptised, we should understand two basic principles of the Gospel: God is love, 1 John 4:8 / 1 John 4:16, and after our baptism, God will live in us if we continue to keep His commandments, 1 John 4:15-16 / John 17:25-26 / Acts 2:38 / 1 John 3:24 / 1 John 4:8.

Our love for one another not only shows the world that we belong to God, but it also shows the world that we have God living in us, 1 John 4:15-16. Our love for one another also provides assurance.

John says that when love is perfected, we can have confidence, 1 John 4:16. In other words, as we grow and become more complete and mature in brotherly love, we will be able to have confidence in the Day of Judgment, 1 John 4:17. And where does that confidence come from? Does it come from our self-righteousness? Does it come because of all the good deeds we've ever done? Our confidence isn't a self-arrogance kind of confidence, John says, the confidence will come from knowing that as His children we were like him in this world, because if we love each other as we should, fear is driven away, 1 John 4:18 / 1 John 2:5.

The prospects of torment would naturally produce fear in anyone, but the more we grow in God's love, the more we lose the fear, Romans 2:6-7 / 2 Corinthians 5:10 / Hebrews 9:27-28.

We all know that obedience is an essential element in the life of a person who is right with God, but please don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that we can earn eternal life with God.

When you think about life itself, it is a gift from start to finish. We need to remember that our relationship with God is not based on our legal status but based on a relationship. It's based on a faith relationship; in other words, if we have no faith, we have no relationship.

So, what does that mean for those who claim to be His? It means that our lives need to reflect our commitment to Jesus Christ. It means we need to reflect on all that He means and all that He stands for, and so when we come to the Judgment claiming to be His, our response to righteousness will be an identifying marker.

But if we deny Christ here, He will deny us there. It won't help anybody to deny Him here and then go to the Judgment and say, 'Lord, Lord', **Matthew 7:21-23**. If we fear the Day of Judgment coming, that could be a sign that we need to grow in love, **1 John 2:28 / 1 John 3:21**.

Those who lovingly obey God don't fear Him as an angry God who seeks to punish, **1 John 4:12 / 1 John 3:19-21**.

Those who lovingly obey God, respect Him but don't fear Him because He is a gracious God, and love casts out all, **Romans 8:37-39**.

'We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.' **1 John 4:19-21**

In a sense, God made growing in love easy for us because He loved us first, **1 John 4:19 / Romans 5:8**. We didn't love Him first, oh no, He loved us first and showed it through the sending of His Son, who gave up His own life at Calvary, **John 3:16 / John 13:34 / John 15:12-13 / 2 Corinthians 4:15 / Ephesians 2:4-9 / Ephesians 5:2**.

John once again reminds us that brotherly love is essential to loving God. Because He had mercy on us, we have mercy toward others, **1 John 4:20 / James 2:13**. The nature of the hearts that are fit for the eternal dwelling is merciful because of love.

We can't have it both ways. If people claim to love God but hate their brothers or sisters in Christ, then John says they are liars, **1 John 4:20**. They are liars, like those who claim to have fellowship with God while they walk in darkness, **1 John 1:6**.

They are liars, like those who claim not to have sinned, **1 John 1:10**. They are liars, like those who claim to know Jesus while not keeping His commandments, **1 John 2:4**. John says that they are all liars.

John is simply saying for us to love the One whom we cannot see, that is, God, **1 John 4:20**. This requires that we first be able to love those whom we can see, **1 John 4:20 / John 13:34-35**. For us to love God, we first need to develop our love for each other, **Matthew 22:35-40**.

Let me try to summarise what John has taught us about loving each other, **1 John 4:21**. He says that we should never even think about neglecting this essential command from God. Why? Because loving each other is evidence of sonship.

Loving each other is defined by God's love for us. Loving each other is evidence to each other and to the world that we are in fellowship with God. Loving each other doesn't give us arrogance but assurance and confidence for the Day of Judgement.

And finally, but most importantly, loving each other is a command from Jesus Himself which needs to be obeyed, **John 15:12**. Loving each other is essential to loving God, **1 John 4:21 / Matthew 22:37-40 / Mark 12:29-31 / Luke 10:27 / John 13:34-35 / John 15:13**.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

‘Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.’ 1 John 5:1-5

FAITH IN THE INCARNATE SON OF GOD

So far in John’s letter, he has told us about certain evidence that we can look at to see if we are truly children of God. He also spoke about several tests by which we know we have eternal life, and so, in this final chapter, John is going to speak about three of those tests by which we can test our Christianity.

The first test is the test of belief, that is, belief in Jesus. He asks us if our Christianity believes that Jesus is the Christ, and he asks us if our Christianity believes that Jesus is the Son of God, 1 John 5:1.

Earlier, he asked us if our Christianity believes that Jesus was God in the flesh, 1 John 4:2. The point is, if we deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh, then John says we’re a liar, and our Christianity is not real, 1 John 2:22-23. Not only is our Christianity not real, but we are also not in fellowship with the Father or the Son, 2 John 7-9.

We must remember there is a huge difference between believing there is a God and having faith in Him. Biblical faith in Jesus is important too, Hebrews 11:6. Here, John says that loving God and obeying His commands are important in relation to being born of God, 1 John 5:1.

How we perceive Jesus is one test, but John is going to share with us another test to see if our Christianity is real and Bible-based; this is the test of love. Jesus said that brotherly love is a mark of real Christianity, John 13:34-35. He also said that our love for Him is a mark of real Christianity, John 15:12-14.

Love for God and love for each other is not an option; it’s a command, 1 John 5:2-3. It shows the world, our friends and family that our Christianity is real. And remember, John, in his letter has already stressed the importance of brotherly love.

He says this love is evidence of our remaining in the light, 1 John 2:10. He says this love is evidence of our being a child of God, 1 John 3:10. He says this love is evidence of our having passed from death to life, 1 John 3:14. And finally, he says this love is evidence of our knowing God and being born of God, 1 John 4:7-8.

Real Christianity promotes a real love for God, real Christianity promotes real obedient faith in God, and real Christianity promotes a real love for each other. In other words, if we love God who brings forth children, then we must love those children who have come from Him, 1 John 5:1-2.

If our Christianity is real, then we need to love God, His children and keep His commandments, 1 John 5:2-3. In other words, if I claim to love my brethren but I fail to love God and keep His commandments, my claim is as empty as Jesus’ tomb was when He rose from the dead.

The third is in which John describes to see if our Christianity is real or not, is the test of obedience, 1 John 5:2-3 / John 14:15 / 1 John 14:15 / Galatians 5:6 / 1 John 2:5 / 2 John 6.

Remember, John has already emphasised the importance of obedience to Jesus and His words. He says obedience is essential to having fellowship with the Father, 1 John 1:6-7. He says obedience is essential to knowing Jesus, 1 John 2:3-4.

Obedience is essential to loving God, 1 John 2:5. It is essential to remaining in Jesus, 1 John 2:6. It is essential to being a child of God, 1 John 3:10, and finally, obedience is essential to having our prayers answered, 1 John 3:22. But John doesn't leave the subject of obedience at that; he says if your Christianity is real, then we must not only love God Himself, but we must also love all of God's children, 1 John 5:1-2.

We might think to ourselves, 'wow, all these commandments He has given us are really heavy,' but John here says otherwise, 1 John 5:3. God's laws are not distressing or grievous to those who are truly motivated by His saving grace, 2 Corinthians 4:15. It's a pleasure for those who love God to do His will, Micah 6:8 / Matthew 11:30 / Matthew 23:4.

People who don't like God's command are people who don't like obedience. The world is full of people who don't like obedience; that's why our prisons are overflowing, that's why people go out and break the law, and that's why many people claim to be Christians, but the reality is that they refuse to be fully obedient to God and His words.

If we're not willing to fully obey His commands, then we can't be His followers, because His road is long, thin and narrow, Matthew 7:13-14 / Luke 14:28-33. Yes! His commands are difficult to keep sometimes. Yes! We will break His commands from time to time, but a command is a command and will always be a command, and it's not our place to find a way around them just to ease our consciences.

Are they heavy? 1 John 5:3. No! They are only heavy or troublesome if you hate discipline. When we think about the apostle John himself, the guy who wrote this letter, he had served the Lord for many years, possibly fifty or more. Did he find the Lord's command burdensome or grievous, as the KJV says? No! In fact, John had the same attitude toward God's commands as David did, Psalm 19:7-11.

Sinclair, in his commentary, says the following.

'Were we 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.'

If we to claim really love God and His children, if we claim to really believe in Jesus as the Son of God who came in the flesh and died for our sins, then we should also know that the commandments of the Lord are not burdensome, 1 John 5:3. Because like we said earlier obedience is not an option, it's a command, John 14:15.

What we need to remember is that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary too; it's necessary to experience eternal life, John 8:24. Biblical faith is never passive; it always motivates us to do something. The Ethiopian Eunuch knew that too well; his faith led him to do something with it, Acts 8:36-38.

Just having faith alone doesn't mean anything unless it is expressed with actions, James 2:14-26. Biblical faith in Jesus Christ is also important if we want to overcome the world, as John says in 1 John 5:4. In other words, faith alone doesn't get us into Christ; biblical faith will lead us to be baptised into Christ's death.

And it's during your baptism, according to Acts 2:38, that we not only receive the forgiveness of our sins, but we also receive the God Spirit living within us, 1 Corinthians 3:16.

In other words, to overcome the world, we need to have Christ living in us in the form of His Spirit, 1 John 4:4. And with God living in us in Spirit form, we have the strength to do anything God desires of us, Philippians 4:13.

In other words, without Biblical faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God who came in the flesh, we cannot be born of God and so live to overcome the world, 1 John 5:5.

Our faith is our victory insofar as we are moved to respond to the will of God, James 2:14-26. Those who have obeyed the Gospel have overcome the mentality and behaviour of the world, John 16:33 / Romans 8:37 / 1 John 2:15. Our life is guided by the will of God, and so, we overcome the temptations and false teachings of the world by our obedient response to His will and word, 1 John 5:4-5 / John 16:33 / Romans 8:37 / 1 Corinthians 15:57.

‘This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.’ 1 John 5:6-12

John said earlier in 1 John 4:2 and 1 John 5:1, that anyone who believes that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and indeed they have been born of God. In these verses, John is going to give us evidence to prove these facts concerning Jesus Christ.

If we have ever been convicted of a crime, we know that when it comes to going to court to need some witnesses. What John is going to offer is many witnesses to prove that Jesus Christ was who He claimed to be.

The word witness is used nine times in these few verses; the NIV uses the term testify or testimony. But it’s the Greek word, ‘martureo’, which means ‘to be a witness’ or ‘to give evidence for, to bear record’.

And John begins his courtroom appearance by calling upon his first two witnesses. Because when we put these two witnesses together, they should tell us even more about the facts concerning Jesus Christ’s claims. He calls upon the water and the blood to take the stand, 1 John 5:6.

Remember, John is dealing with Gnosticism in his letter, and they taught that God couldn’t come in the flesh because the flesh is so sinful, 1 John 4:1-3. Gnosticism was beginning to develop at this time, and one Gnostic named Cerinthus, who was the leader of a sect in the first century, taught some interesting ideas about Jesus. He taught that the divine side of Christ descended upon Jesus at the time of his baptism and then left him before he died on the cross. And it’s because of that teaching that the Gnostics claimed that Christ did not experience death.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following concerning the Gnostic.

‘From their point of view, Christ came by water, but not by blood. Therefore, John emphasised 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.’

So what do John’s two witnesses have to say concerning this? 1 John 5:6. Well, the water and the blood are very significant to John’s argument. The ‘water’ refers to Jesus’ baptism, Matthew 3:13-17, and the ‘blood’ refers to Jesus’ death on the cross, Luke 23:26-43.

John’s point is that Jesus Christ came by both water and blood and not by water only. He’s saying that not only was Christ present at the baptism but that He also suffered in the flesh on the cross.

Do you remember Genesis 31:43-52, when it talks about Jacob and Laban setting up stones as a witness? The stones were a witness to the fact that Laban and Jacob couldn’t go past the stones into each other’s land.

The water and the blood, which John is talking about here, have that idea behind them. The waters of Jesus’ baptism and the blood that flowed from His side, John 19:34, offer testimony concerning who Jesus Christ truly was.

People who do not or cannot believe that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh need to listen to these two witnesses of John. John is going to call forward another witness as to the fact of who Christ claimed to be, because the blood and water are not the only witnesses; they are joined by someone else.

They are joined by the witness of the Spirit, 1 John 5:6. The Spirit’s testimony is true because of His involvement in the earthly life of Jesus. So what proof can the Spirit bring into the courtroom? Well, the Spirit can testify to at least four things.

1. He can testify to the conception of Jesus Christ, Matthew 1:20.

He was involved in the bringing forth of Jesus into the world through Mary.

2. He can also testify to the baptism of Jesus, **Matthew 3:16**.

He was involved in the baptism of Jesus Christ.

3. He was involved at the time of Jesus' temptation in the desert, **Luke 4:1**.

He was led by the Spirit.

4. He was involved in Jesus' ministry here on earth, **Luke 4:18-19**.

And when you think about this witness, the Spirit Himself, according to Jesus, was there to testify about Jesus in the first place, **John 15:26**. And how did the Spirit achieve this goal of testifying about Jesus? The Holy Spirit did this by inspiring the apostles and confirming their word with spiritual gifts, **John 16:13-14 / Hebrews 2:3-4**.

When we are involved in any incident which requires the police, we need to get a lawyer to defend our case in court. We can have a great case, but if our witnesses aren't all saying the same thing, we could end up in trouble. If one witness says one thing and then another witness says another, the jury needs to decide which witness to believe.

But that's the beauty of John's first three witnesses, they are all in agreement with one another because John says that all three are in agreement concerning who Jesus was, **1 John 5:7-8**.

The Spirit, the water, and the blood, all three bear witness, and they all agree as one. In other words, they are saying and testifying to the fact that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh!

Have you ever wondered why John brought three witnesses? Not just because three witnesses are better than one, not just because three witnesses are better than two. I believe he gives three witnesses, possibly because of **Deuteronomy 19:15**.

But John isn't going to stop at three witnesses; he's going to call upon someone else whose testimony is just as true. He now calls upon the witness of God Himself, **1 John 5:9**. We can imagine standing in that courtroom and in comes God Himself. Who is going to argue against His testimony?

John says in your normal courtroom of law, you have witnesses who are human beings, and we usually accept their testimonies, don't we? What he's telling us here is that 'if we receive the witness of men,' **1 John 5:9**, any witness of God would naturally be greater than that of man.

So what light does God Himself have to shine on this Jesus character? Well, God has borne witness to Jesus on several occasions. Again, if we think of Jesus' baptism, **Matthew 3:17**, and on the Mount of Transfiguration, **Matthew 17:5**.

And so, I guess what John is saying here concerning these witnesses is that the blood, the water, and the Spirit, together, form the witness of God Himself. In other words, we have three witnesses who are in agreement, speak for the fourth witness, who is God Himself.

When we're baptised into Christ, **Acts 2:38**, we become a witness for Christ, not in the sense that we physically witnessed Christ as the apostles did, but in the sense that we witness His transforming power in our lives.

However, witnessing is not something we do; witnessing is something we are. We are witnesses to the fact that God did indeed, in the form of Jesus Christ, come to earth in the flesh.

When a person believes the testimony given about Jesus as the Son of God, they become a witness, and that's people who John calls people who are born of God. John says anyone who believes in the Son of God is a witness themselves, **1 John 5:10**.

Those words sound familiar, don't they? Jesus says anyone who does the will of God as taught by Jesus will know the teachings of Christ are truly from God, **John 7:16-17**. And so anyone who believes in the Son receives confirmation 'in himself'.

Those of us who are Christians know who Jesus truly was; we may not fully understand it, but we know, and it's because of that belief and knowing that John said earlier in his letter that we have truly been born of God, **Proverbs 14:12**.

If we as Christians believe and act upon the witness of God concerning His Son. If we believe and act upon what God has revealed in His Spirit-inspired Word, which agrees with the witness of the water and the blood. Then we, as Christians, will have confirmation in ourselves that Jesus is truly the Son of God!

John has presented us with four witnesses who all point to the fact that Jesus Christ was indeed God in the flesh. The first four, the water, blood, Spirit and God Himself all provide their evidence before you.

And those who have believed who Jesus was and repented of their sins, confessed Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives and been baptised for the forgiveness of their sins are all the fifth witness.

But what about those who do not believe the four witnesses? If they don't believe these testimonies, then they are liars. John says they are making God out to be a liar, **1 John 5:10**.

Notice how John now moves on and begins to focus on the content of the witnesses. So what is the 'content' of God's testimony concerning His Son? In other words, what has God declared? And what does John say about these things?

John tells us that God has given us more than life; He has given us eternal life, **1 John 5:11**. Many of us need to remind ourselves of this promise because too many Christians live as though eternal life is something we are only going to possess in the future.

Now, in terms of hope, this is correct. We all hope for eternal life, but John says this eternal life is more than hope; it is something that all Christians already possess here and now, **1 John 5:11**.

When John uses the term eternal life here, he is using it in the present tense. He doesn't say He will give us eternal life, but He has already given us eternal life. He doesn't say you will have eternal life; he says if you've got Jesus, you already have eternal life. In other words, eternal life is not just something to hope for in the future; it is also something that all Christians possess now.

Now, please don't misunderstand me here, the Bible authors do talk about eternal life in the future, **Romans 2:6-7 / Titus 1:2**. The point is that sometimes the words 'eternal life' are used in both tenses, present and future tenses. Remember, John begins his letter by referring to Jesus as that 'eternal life', **1 John 1:2**. And he's going to end his letter by describing eternal life as 'knowing Him who is true and being in Him who is true', **1 John 5:20**.

John is saying that the testimony of God is this: He has given us 'eternal life', a quality of life based upon fellowship with Deity, **James 2:14-20**. So where does a person find this 'eternal life'? Well, that's John's second point as he continues with God's own testimony.

John says eternal life is only found in one Name, Jesus Christ, **1 John 5:11 / John 17:3**. Jesus says if you know Him and know God, then you have eternal life. He also said He came to give us life to the full, **John 10:10**.

Peter himself confessed that Jesus was the only one who had the words of eternal life, **John 6:68**. The apostle Paul wrote that all spiritual blessings, of which eternal life is one, are found only in Jesus Christ, **Ephesians 1:3**.

It is only in Jesus that eternal life can be found, and if anyone wishes to have eternal life, they must be in Jesus! But as always, there are two sides to every coin. If eternal life can only be found in Jesus Christ, then it is also obvious that anyone who doesn't possess Jesus doesn't have this eternal life, **1 John 5:12 / John 14:6 / Acts 4:12**.

God doesn't want anyone to miss out on this eternal life, **2 Peter 3:9 / 1 Timothy 2:3-4**. God wants every single human being to have eternal life in His Son. We don't have to wonder or worry about whether we possess eternal life because Jesus Christ took care of it all at Calvary. And that's John's final point concerning eternal life.

CONCLUDING AFFIRMATIONS

‘I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.’ 1 John 5:13-15

If we have ever wondered why John wrote this letter, this is it; he wrote it because they needed to know back then, just as much as we do today, that we are saved. He doesn’t want us just to hope that we are saved; he wants us to know for certain that we are saved, 1 John 5:13.

John’s whole letter is all about knowing. He says in 1 John 2:3, ‘Now by this we know that we know Him’. He says in 1 John 2:5, ‘By this we know that we are in Him.’ He also says in 1 John 3:14, that ‘We know we have passed from death to life.’

Again, he says in 1 John 3:19, ‘And by this we know that we are of the truth.’ He says in 1 John 3:24, ‘And by this we know that He lives in us.’ In 1 John 4:13, he says, ‘By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us.’

All the way through this great little letter, John assures us not to worry about eternal life. He says if we have done this and are doing that and continuing in Him, we can know for certain that we have eternal life, not only in the future but also here and now, 1 John 5:13.

Do we know for certain that we have eternal life? We know we have eternal life because of the testimony of God Himself. John says, we can all know we have eternal life if we keep the commandments of Jesus, 1 John 2:3-4. We can all know we have eternal life if we keep His words, 1 John 2:5. We can all know we have eternal life if we love our brethren, 1 John 3:14.

We can all know we have eternal life if we believe what the Spirit has revealed about such things, 1 John 3:24 / 1 John 4:13. We can all know we have eternal life if we have confessed Jesus to be the Son of God, 1 John 4:15. We can all know we have eternal life if we believe that Jesus is the Christ, 1 John 5:1.

And so, when we take all these knowings and beliefs together, we can truly know with certainty that we have eternal life. John was writing to these early Christians, and his words still have a lot of meaning for us today. He wanted his readers and us to continue to believe in the Name of Jesus, John 20:30-31.

In 1 John 5:14-15, John speaks about prayer, but this is not the first time he has spoken about prayer in this letter. In 1 John 1:9, he talked about the value of confessing our sins to God in prayer.

In 1 John 2:1, he talked about how Jesus Christ, who is the righteous One, is our advocate in prayer and in 1 John 3:22, he talked about how God answers prayer if we do what He asks of us.

Here, John teaches us how to pray with confidence and how to pray for our prayers to be answered. The first requirement for our prayers to be answered is that they need to be in line with God’s will, 1 John 5:14.

However, for people to pray according to God’s will, they first need to know what God’s will is. Prayer is not about assuming that God will automatically answer that prayer because we also need to understand that God will say ‘no’ sometimes to our requests, especially if it’s not according to His will.

Our prayers are dependent upon the will of God. Even Jesus’ own example of prayer illustrates that answers to prayer depend upon whether or not it is in harmony with God’s will, Matthew 26:39-42.

Three times Paul asked God to take his torment away, and three times God said, ‘no’, 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. Why? Because it stopped Paul from becoming big-headed, his request to God wasn’t in line with God’s will.

The more we learn God’s revealed will through His word, the more likely we will pray according to His will, and the more we pray according to His will, the greater confidence we can have that our prayers will be answered accordingly, 1 John 5:14.

And that brings us to John's second requirement for our prayers to be answered. We not only need to pray according to God's will, but we also need to keep God's commandments. John has already stressed the importance of keeping the Lord's commands in reference to prayer, **1 John 3:21-22**.

This is an important point John is making here; he's saying even if we are asking for something that would normally be within God's will for us, if we are not keeping His commandments, can we really expect God to answer our prayers?

I don't believe we can expect God to answer our prayers if we just live our lives in any way we want, **1 Peter 3:12 / 1 John 3:22**. God understands that we struggle sometimes to live according to His will but pleasing Him is His will and He wants to help us live by His will, but He can only do that if we ask Him for help, **1 John 5:15**.

We struggle to pray with confidence because we don't really know what His will is, or we struggle to keep His commandments. It is then that we should be praying for God to help us to understand His will and to keep His commandments, **Psalm 119:18**.

The Lord's commands are not burdensome; His commandments are there for us to delight in and His commandments are there to sustain us in every way, **Psalm 119:173-176**.

Not only are our prayers to be according to His will, but they are to be on the condition that we keep His commands. Prayer requires Christians to remain in Jesus and His words remaining in us, **John 15:7**. Confidence in prayer depends upon keeping His commandments, but keeping the commandments is the key to remaining in Jesus, **1 John 3:24**. If getting confident in our prayer lives depends upon asking according to God's Will and it depends upon Jesus' words remaining in us, won't that help us know what God's will is? Won't that help us to know what and what not to ask for in our prayer lives?

‘If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray, and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.’ **1 John 5:16-17**

John's final point concerning prayer is this: we should pray as we mean it. One of the great themes running through John's first letter is the theme of love, and so it shouldn't be surprising for us to find him talking about prayer and love together, **1 John 5:16**.

We might ask, why bother to pray for a repentant Christian if their sins will be forgiven anyway? The only answer I could find in Scripture is back in the Book of James, **James 5:16**.

When a Christian confesses their sin to God and has shown that they have repented, that should be the end of the matter, **1 Corinthians 13:5**. Prayer is a privilege and a wonderful blessing, especially when we pray with confidence and pray like we mean it.

Time and time again, John has stressed the importance of brotherly love, **1 John 3:16-17**. It's not surprising then that he says that we should be willing to pray for each other.

There is no escaping the fact that this is a difficult text to understand. What is the “sin that doesn't lead to death”? What is the sin that “does lead to death”? What does John mean when he says, ‘God will give him life’? **1 John 5:16-17**.

As far as my studies have led me to believe, John is saying, ‘listen, if anyone sees his brother sin’, **1 John 5:16**, he is speaking about after the fact, after the sin has taken place. And the reason I believe that is because in the future, after the sin has been committed, what does John say the sinner will do? They will pray, **1 John 5:16**, or they will ask, as some translations have it.

The Message translation makes it a little easier to understand because the sin that doesn't lead to death and the sin that does isn't a specific sin.

“For instance, if we see a Christian believer sinning (clearly I’m not talking about those who make a practice of sin in a way that is “fatal”, leading to death), we ask for God’s help, and he gladly gives it, gives life to the sinner whose sin is not fatal. There is such a thing as a fatal sin, and I’m not urging you to pray about that. Everything we do wrong is sin, but not all sin is fatal.”

In other words, if anyone continues in their sin, eventually, that will lead to their spiritual death. What kind of sin could a Christian commit that would lead to death? According to James, any temptation can lead to sin and death, **James 1:14-15**, but what we need to remember is that sin does not produce ‘death’ until it is ‘fully grown’. How do we avoid sinning toward death? What is the sin that doesn’t lead to death? John gave us the answer in the opening chapter. Any sin which has been repented of and confessed to God, **1 John 1:9-10**. And so when we put these Scriptures together, we can clearly see that the sin that leads to death is the unrepentant and unconfessed sin of the sinner.

If we follow this understanding of the text, it’s obvious that the sin that doesn’t lead to death is the sin that has been confessed and repented of. And it’s this sin which John says we can pray for our brethren and God will forgive. Common sense tells us that we cannot expect God to forgive a person who refuses to repent or confess, hence why we should pray about that, **1 John 5:16**.

Remember, when John is talking about death here, he’s talking about spiritual death, **Genesis 2:17**. We know that both Adam and Eve ate from the tree, and they were cast out of the Garden, but they didn’t die physically straight away, did they? They died spiritually; their sin separated them from God, **Isaiah 59:2**.

Notice that John says if someone commits a sin that doesn’t lead to death, after praying, God will give them life, **1 John 5:16**. If the ‘death’ in this passage is ‘spiritual death’, it is natural to believe the life in this passage is ‘spiritual life’. The ‘life’ that God will give the repentant sinner in answer to our prayers could also be described as ‘forgiveness’.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning **1 John 5:16**.

‘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. Perhaps that limitation is understood in John’s promise here of such great efficacy in the prayers of Christians for one another.’

And we know that forgiveness is essential for eternal life in Christ, **1 John 1:9**. What he’s saying is that this same offer of forgiveness is offered to the repentant sinner who has his brothers and sisters in Christ praying on his behalf.

‘We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.’ **1 John 5:18-20**

John now summarises three facts that we should know by now after studying his letter. He says we should be certain of our faith in relation to sin. We should be certain of our faith in relation to the evil one and we should be certain of our faith in relation to the truth concerning fellowship with God and Jesus Christ. These certainties, which John talks about, are introduced to us with the words, ‘we know’, **1 John 5:18**.

He says our first certainty is that we should know what our relationship with God and sin is to be like. John says whoever has been born of God does not sin, **1 John 5:18**.

We’ve already dealt with this subject when John says a similar statement back in **1 John 3:9**, and if you remember, John told us in **1 John 1:8** and **1 John 1:10** that all Christians do sin and if we say we don’t sin, we are liars, and we make God out to be a liar. John is saying the same thing here; he’s talking about Christians who don’t ‘continuously practice sin’, **1 John 5:18**.

Plummer, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A child of God may sin, but his normal condition is one of resistance to sin.’

John goes on to tell us why a Christian won’t continuously practice sin, because anyone born of God won’t continue to sin, **1 John 5:18**. Whenever John uses the phrase ‘born of God’ in his letter, he always refers to Christians. And so, what he’s saying is that all Christians are responsible for their own actions.

In **Genesis 3**, when God was walking around in the garden looking for Adam and Eve, who tried to hide from Him after eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They started to play the blame game with God. Adam blamed God, and then blamed the woman whom God created and then Eve blamed the serpent, **Genesis 3:12-13**.

John says earlier in his letter that God will help us not to sin, **1 John 3:9**, but again, this stresses the importance of God’s word living in our lives. In other words, our faith needs to work with God’s power, as Peter tells us, **1 Peter 1:1-5**. We have available to us the power to stop continually sinning, that’s Peter’s point, and that’s John’s point in **1 John 5:21**. That’s Jude’s point in **Jude 21**.

In other words, we can’t win on our own. We are winners in Christ because He is superior to us. And the point is, it is only when we cooperate with God that we give Satan no chance to win in our lives. We are safe in Christ only if we remain in Christ, we are safe in Christ only when we humble ourselves to His will, **1 John 5:18**.

We have all pictured ourselves running away from Satan, but have we ever pictured Satan running away from you? Because the Bible says that we have that power available to us today, **James 4:7**. When we submit to God and resist the temptation to continuously sin, then Satan is going to flee from us because he knows he can’t win.

We all know that Satan is a strong character who can influence the lives of many people, but as Christians, we need to remember who is living in us, **1 John 4:4**. John says that God, who is in us, is much greater than the devil, but for us to remain strong enough to resist the devil, we need to allow God’s word to remain in us, as John told us in **1 John 2:14**.

When Jesus Himself was being tempted by the devil in the desert, how did Jesus win His battle against temptation from the devil? He won His battle the same way in which we can win our battles with the devil. Three times in **Matthew 4:1-11**, when Jesus is dealing with temptation, He says, ‘It is written’.

And so, John’s point is that we can be certain in our faith that as Christians, we mustn’t treat sin lightly and with God’s help, we can win our own personal battles with the wicked one, **1 John 5:18**.

Then John goes on to talk about our next certainty, which we should know as Christians, the difference between us and the world. John says all Christians are of God, he says all Christians have been born of God, **1 John 5:1**, and he says that all Christians are privileged to be called children of God, **1 John 5:19 / 1 John 3:1-2**.

In other words, all Christians are truly blessed to be ‘of God’, but he also says the whole world is under the control of the evil one, **1 John 5:19**. It’s sad but true that not all people are Christians, even though some may claim to be and some claim the name, Christian.

Anyone who rejects Jesus Christ and His teachings is not of God, and by their own actions and rejection, they are demonstrating who their father really is, **John 8:42-47**. As long as people remain in their sins, they will remain under the control of the evil one, **1 John 5:19 / 2 Corinthians 4:3-4**.

John now shares with us the final certainty which we should know about our faith. He says we should know the basis of fellowship with God and eternal life, **1 John 5:20**. Jesus Christ came to give us true insight concerning God, which is exactly what John also told us in his Gospel, **John 1:18**.

When John says, ‘He is the true God’, **1 John 5:20**, or ‘Him who is true’. He doesn’t mean that He tells the truth, he means the One we should know is really God. In other words, by coming in the flesh, Jesus has manifested the true God to us, **John 1:1-2 / John 1:14 / John 14:7-9**.

We are in Him who is the One true God, Jesus Christ. Jesus has also given us understanding about how we can be in God, **1 John 5:20**. He says that it’s through His Son, as we keep His words and His commandments, that we can live in God, **John 14:21-23**. And it’s this same true God and eternal life that John talks about, **1 John 5:20**.

What John is doing here is defining what eternal life is. He says eternal life is to know Him who is true, he says eternal life is to be in Him who is true, and in His Son Jesus Christ.

In other words, to have eternal life is to have life to the full, **John 10:10**, and the only way for you to have that life in full is by knowing the Father and the Son intimately.

Our God doesn't live with us one minute and leave us the next, **Hebrews 13:5**. We have an ongoing intimate relationship with God. We get that relationship through having fellowship with the Father and the Son, **John 17-1-3** / **1 John 1:1-3**.

‘Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.’ **1 John 5:21**

It is truly a blessing to know all these things, but as always, we just need to keep reminding ourselves of the many dangers that lie ahead of us. That's why John finishes his letter in a caring, fatherly, loving way and reminds us not to let anything or anyone replace the relationship we have with the One True God, Jesus Christ.

Anything which replaces God in our life is an idol, **Ephesians 5:5-6**, and the only way to stay away from idolatry is by putting them to death, **Colossians 3:5-6**. If there wasn't a real danger of being led astray, there would be no need for John to warn us against such things.