

The First Letter of John the Apostle

INTRODUCTION—

Very little needs to be said about the background of the Apostle John. His place in Bible literature is important, but it can be a challenging study to confirm important facts. It is generally known that he was one of the original 12 Disciples, who were later raised to the position of Apostles. He and his brother James, sons of Zebedee, were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus summoned them, they left all and followed. These brothers, along with Peter, were selected and distinguished from the other Disciples to be witnesses of some of the miracles of Jesus, and to be present at His “Transfiguration.” These same three were permitted to go beyond the resting place of the others in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before Jesus was crucified.

But it was only John who dared to be an observer of the crucifixion of Jesus, along with some women who were disciples. When the Lord Jesus saw him standing near His mother, it was convenient for him to commit her to his care. John took her into his own home for that purpose.

John is an extensive writer of New Testament literature, being surpassed only by the Apostle Paul and Luke. Only three other Apostles were authors of New Testament books (Peter, Paul and Matthew). The Gospel of John is a powerful polemic in favor of the divinity of Jesus, the “Son of God.” John’s book of Revelation, written near the end of the 1st Century, is prophecy that hides its comforting message to Christians from casual readers, by the use of coded symbols and random quotations from the Old Testament.

The three short letters of John are considered to be helpful as insights into the state of the early church of Christ. They contain reaffirmations of doctrine, warnings against those who would pervert the Gospel, exhortations about Christian behavior, and predictions of things to come. Like the letters of Peter, they are full of important information about Jesus, His Word, and His cause.

NOTE: The quotations of the text in this study of the letters of John are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted. The comments following each portion of the text contain other scripture references that should be read in conjunction with the points that is made in comments.

TEXT: 1 John 1:1-4

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— [2] and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— [3] what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. [4] These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

COMMENTS:

Verse 1 indicates the close proximity of the author to the “Word of Life,” meaning Jesus (compare **John 1:1-4**). He had heard, seen, and touched, in daily contacts with the Son of God. His commission would be to carry the message of the Gospel to the whole

world, in company with the other Apostles (**Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16**).

Verse 2 confirms this mission. As “eye-witnesses” to all the events in the brief life of Jesus on earth (**Acts 10:38-42**), he and his contemporaries could proclaim “the eternal life” (this is a recurring theme in this first letter, and he seems to use these terms to describe both Christ, the messenger, and His message. Compare **1 John 5:11, 20**).

Verse 3 reveals that what John and the Apostles have proclaimed brings us into fellowship (Greek, KOINONIA, meaning “sharing”) with them, and, as a result, into fellowship with God through them. This is a concept similar to what Peter wrote in his second letter (**2 Peter 1:1-3**).

Verse 4 contains an expression that is used by Christ (**John 15:11, 17:13**), and the Apostle Paul (**Philippians 2:1-2**). This “joy” can be understood as a sense of gratification. It is always a source of joy for teachers to know that students have been able to understand the teaching.

TEXT: 1 John 1:5-10

[5] This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. [6] If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; [7] but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. [8] If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

COMMENTS:

Verse 5 repeats a truth that is found in other parts of the Bible. “Light” and “darkness” are figures that suggest either truth and error, or knowledge and ignorance (Compare **Ephesians 5:8** and **1 Peter 2:9**). If God is “light”, and has no darkness, it means that He is exclusively truth and knowledge (**1 Timothy 6:13-16**). This verse could also suggest that God is totally moral, with no immoral trait (Compare **Psalms 145:17** and **Romans 9:14**). Jesus knew no sin (**Hebrews 4:14-15**), and since He is the “image of God,” he is also the epitome of “light” (**John 1:4-5, 3:19, 8:12**).

Verse 6 asserts that walking in darkness separates us from God, so that there can be no fellowship with Him. Therefore, it is a lie to claim to have that fellowship (see **1 John 2:9-11**).

Verse 7 has been involved in a controversy among our brethren. Some have promoted the idea that we have a “continual cleansing” of our sins, granted without any conditions, so long as we “walk in the light.” Arguments in favor of this position are based on the Greek tenses of the verbs in this verse (“walk” and “cleanses”), which are both in the “present indicative active tense,” indicating continual action. The fault of this argument is that it does not acknowledge, first, that walking in the light is itself a condition of our “cleansing” of sin. Also, a statement in the context (verse 9), reveals the condition of “confessing our sins,” in order to have them forgiven. Confession of sins, in addition to repentance, is required for their forgiveness (see **Acts 8:22**, an example of a baptized believer falling into sin, again).

Verse 8 denies that we can say we have no sin. We are deceiving ourselves,

because the truth is that “all sin and come short of the grace of God” (**Romans 3:23**).

Verses 9-10 state a condition on which forgiveness must be based, as was noted in the comment on Verse 7 above. These verses also continue the thought of the previous verse, but state that if we say that we have not sinned, we not only deceive ourselves, but we also say that God is a liar (since He says that all have sinned). Paul cautions us about charging God with a lie in **Romans 3:4**, and compare **Titus 1:1-2**. These faults can be avoided, if the truth, or the Word, is in us “richly” (compare **Colossians 3:16-17**).

TEXT: 1 John 2:1-6

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; [2] and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

[3] By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. [4] The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; [5] but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: [6] the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

COMMENTS:

Verses 1-2 show the purpose of John’s letter. It was an attempt to keep his readers from sinning. However, if one of them (or, one of us) does sin, we are to take comfort in the fact that Jesus Christ is both our Advocate and the ordained peace-making offering (“Propitiation”) for our sins. This is like having a defense lawyer who will who will plead our case, but also pay the fine for our sins. This is just, since the Devil is both our tempter (**1 Thessalonians 3:5**), and our accuser (**Revelation 12:10**). The last phrase of verse 2 shows that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, not just for those of the “elect” (**1 John 4:14**, **1 Timothy 2:4**). This fact refutes the “limited atonement” argument of Calvinism, which says that Jesus made the atonement sacrifice only for those who were predestined personally for salvation.

Verses 3-4 give us a key regarding having true knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is the keeping of His commandments. Those who claim to know him, without meeting this condition, are liars, bereft of the truth. Compare **2 Peter 1:2-8**, and **Titus 1:16**.

Verses 5-6 reveal a second benefit of keeping the word of Christ. In doing so, we have “the love of God truly perfected.” Compare this to **1 John 3:24**, **5:2-3**. The keeping of commandments is a basic theme of this letter of John. Verse 6 states a truism, that the person who says he abides in Jesus Christ has the obligation to walk as Jesus walked, proving by action what he claims with his mouth. Compare **John 13:15**, **15:10**, and also **1 Peter 2:21-22**.

TEXT: 1 John 2:7-11

[7] Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. [8] On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. [9] The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the

darkness until now. [10] The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. [11] But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

COMMENTS:

Verse 7 speaks of a “new commandment” which John says is also an “old commandment.” Most interpreters of this verse are convinced that John is referring to Jesus’ command to “love one another” (See **John 13:34, 15:12, 17**, and **2 John 1:5**).

Verse 8 has John reversing himself, again, by pressing a “new commandment” on his readers, in the sense that he is really *renewing* and *re-applying* Jesus’ command in a period distinguished by the “passing away” of “darkness,” and the spreading of the “true Light” that is “already shining.” (Compare **Ephesians 5:6-12**.)

Verses 9-11 make specific application of the precept to love the brethren. John shows the inconsistency of a person saying that he has escaped “darkness,” while still hating his brother in Christ. Hate of the brother indicates that there has been no real escape. John will return to this theme in Chapter 3.

TEXT: 1 John 2:12-14

[12] I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. [13] I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. [14] I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

COMMENTS:

These verses are designed to congratulate those who have come to “know” the Lord, and have “overcome the evil one.” John seems to be poetical in his repetition of phrases, as he addresses “little children” whose sins have been forgiven. This includes “fathers” and “young men.” Of course, women who have the same traits are also to be commended. The victory of “overcoming the evil one” is possible only through the blood of the sacrifice of Christ (**Revelation 12:10-11**).

TEXT: 1 John 2:15-17

[15] Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. [17] The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

COMMENTS:

Verse 15 presents two objects that can receive the love of mankind, the “world” and the “Father,” Who is, of course, God. The “world” in this verse needs definition. The Greek word here is KOSMOS, which can have various meanings. The best definition for this verse is probably, “The present condition of human affairs, in alienation from and

opposition to God" (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 12th edition, 1962, Vol. IV, p. 233). We are not forbidden to love the amazing order of the divinely created earth, or the universe, which is also a definition derived from this word. The prohibition of this verse is based on what human beings have done to our world to corrupt it in a spiritual way. Compare **1 Corinthians 2:12**.

Verse 16 helps to define the spiritually distorted world. In that "world" there are evil desires of flesh, eyes, and pride. Appetites of the flesh do not need to be satisfied, if they are in violation of the will of God for man. Neither are the evil desires that come from seeing with the eyes, nor the corruption of the human spirit by pride. It is interesting to note that this verse says that these three lusts are "*all that is in the world.*" It is impossible to imagine any transgression of God's will that is not covered by these three things. It is also interesting to note that both Eve, the first woman, and Jesus, were tempted through these same three avenues (see **Genesis 3:6**, and **Luke 4:1-13**).

Verse 17 shows that it is foolish to choose the "world" over the "Father," because "*the world is passing away,*" but obedient Christians will live beyond the existence of the world. Compare **Matthew 7:21**, **1 Corinthians 7:31**, and **2 Peter 3:11-13**.

TEXT: 1 John 2:18-25

[18] Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. [19] They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. [20] But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. [21] I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. [22] Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. [23] Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. [24] As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. [25] This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

COMMENTS:

Verse 18 is our introduction to the spirit of "anti-Christ." The appearance of "many antichrists," John says, is the indication of the arrival of the "last hour." Other writers of the New Testament speak of the "last days" (**1 Timothy 4:1**, **1 Peter 4:7**), but Paul joins John in speaking of the arrival of the "hour" (**Romans 13:11**). John also says that his readers had heard that the antichrist was coming. This could be a reference to the warnings of Jesus regarding false "christs" (**Matthew 24:5, 24**). The spirit of anti-Christ, or the rejection of God's "anointed" (the Greek word "CHRISTOS" means "anointed"), was prophesied in **Psalms 2:1-3**. Early Christians applied this Psalm to the rejection of Jesus (**Acts 4:23-28**).

Verse 19 indicates that those who opposed Christ "went out" from among the brethren. Their departure is also an indication that they were not fully committed to the cause of Christ. Paul predicted such a departure from the church in Ephesus (**Acts 20:28-31**).

Verses 20-21 tell of an “anointing from the Holy One,” which most likely means that some among his readers had received the gift of prophecy (compare **Acts 10:38**). When this gift was properly used, each congregation of Christians could receive God’s answer to any spiritual question. However, even though they had a source of spiritual knowledge, there could still exist a spirit of opposition to the truth.

Verses 22-23 give us the first definition of the “antichrist.” He is the “one who denies that Jesus is the Christ” (or, the “anointed.” Compare **2 Peter 2:1**). The divine role of Jesus must be “confessed,” according to **1 John 4:2-3**. (NOTE: another definition of the antichrist is in John’s second letter. **2 John 7**). These definitions were written before the emergence of sects, such as the Docetists and Gnostics. J. W. Roberts, in his commentary on the letters of John, writes, “*The Docetists and later Gnostics generally taught that Jesus was born as any man and died as any ordinary man. They believed that at Jesus’ baptism the divine Spirit, ‘Christ,’ came upon Him, but left Him before the cross. Thus, while the ‘Christ’ was divine, Jesus was not.*” But, to deny Jesus as the Christ separates a person from the Father at the same time. Jesus said something similar in **John 8:16-19**, and compare **2 John 9**.

Verse 24 calls for the readers to renew their allegiance to what they heard at the beginning of their Christian life. The Apostle Paul urges the same course in **Galatians 1:6-9**. A return to the earliest doctrines of Christianity is a necessity, according to this.

Verse 25 adds one more incentive for faithfulness to this section, “*the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.*” This reminds us that when Jesus tested the loyalty of His disciples with “hard sayings,” some who could not endure what he claimed left Him. When Jesus asked the twelve if they would go away, they answered, “*To whom shall we go, You have words of eternal life*” (**John 5:67-68**).

TEXT: 1 John 2:26-29

[26] These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. [27] As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

[28] Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. [29] If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

COMMENTS:

Verse 26 connects with other references in New Testament “letters,” which show that congregations of the Lord’s people were often invaded and corrupted by false teachers. Both Peter and Jude use large sections of their letters to warn their readers against such invasions. The Apostle Paul also had to deal with the false teachers who raised doubts in the minds of brethren regarding his credentials as an apostle. Almost the entire content of his 2nd letter to Corinth covers this. Compare again **Acts 20:28-32**.

Verse 27 calls for attention to their “anointing,” which we have seen could refer to the gift of prophecy held by some in the church (compare **1 Timothy 4:14**), so that they can know all things given through revelation of the Holy Spirit (see **1 Corinthians 12:4-11**). When false teaching contradicts truth in the words of the prophets, it must be rejected in favor of “abiding” in the truth found in Christ Jesus.

Verse 28 repeats the precept of “abiding” in the truth, so that confidence will

sustain us at the 2nd coming of the Lord. Compare **Mark 8:38**.

Verse 29 reveals the key to being reborn in the righteous Jesus Christ. It is the principle of practicing righteousness. This is a basic goal for every Christian. The source for learning what is righteous is the “gospel” (see **Romans 1:16-17**).

TEXT: 1 John 3:1-3

[1] See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. [2] Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [3] And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

COMMENTS:

Verse 1 elevates every Christian’s estimate of his privilege in Christ, by receiving the “honor” of being called a “child of God.” John says that this is evidence of the great love which God has for us. This high privilege has the secondary effect of distinguishing us from others in the “world” (*for definition of this word, see the comments on 2:15, above*). Jesus also showed this distinction in **John 14:17-19, 15:18**.

Verse 2 extends the benefit of being a “child of God.” This benefit is the privilege of having an “appearance” that is compatible with that of God (*or, Christ, who is the “image” of God, Colossians 1:15*). At the time of His appearance, “we will see Him just as He is.” John records that Jesus said, “God is Spirit” (**John 4:24**). It would follow that, if we are to be like Him, we will also be “spirit” (see **1 Corinthians 15:49**).

Verse 3 states the obvious fact that those who have such “hope” will “purify” themselves, in order to be joined with the pure divinity (**Psalm 18:26, Matthew 5:8**)

TEXT: 1 John 3:4-12

[4] Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. [5] You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. [6] No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. [7] Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

[11] For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; [12] not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

COMMENTS:

Verse 4 defines sin. It is “lawlessness.” This English word carries the meaning of

the Greek word, ANOMIA, better than the word found in older translations, which is "iniquity." The Greek word combines the word NOMIA, meaning "law", with the negative *alpha*, or "A" prefix, and carries the meaning, "no-law." Since New Testament Christians can sin, and yet are not subject to the Law of Moses (**Ephesians 2:12-16, Colossians 2:13-14**), they violate the "Law of Christ" (**1 Corinthians 9:21, Galatians 6:2**).

Verses 5-8 present parallel points: Jesus came to take away sins, and Christians are to avoid sinning. Jesus had the task of destroying the works of the Devil (compare **Hebrews 2:14-15**). He could be victorious in this, because he was never a sinner (compare **2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, and 1 Peter 2:22**).

Verse 9 has been misunderstood by many interpreters. Calvinists use it to claim that the saved person cannot sin a damning sin, and be lost. However, one phrase in the verse sets a condition for sinlessness ("*His seed abides in him*"). In parables of Jesus, the "seed" is the word of God (**Matthew 13:19, Luke 8:11**). The "seed" will only "abide" in us, if we retain it. It is possible to turn from the truth (**2 Timothy 2:17-18, 4:1-4**). We must conclude, then, that those who turn from the truth can sin, and will.

Verses 10-12 give us two identifying marks of the children of God. (1) They practice righteousness, and (2) they love their brethren. John shows that love among Christians is a prime lesson, with its origin "from the beginning," or the beginning of the kingdom of God. John uses Cain as a negative example of the relationship of brethren. (See **Genesis 4**.)

TEXT: 1 John 3:13-24 (ESV)

[13] Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. [14] We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. [15] Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. [16] By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

[17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

[19] By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; [20] for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. [21] Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; [22] and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. [23] And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. [24] Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

COMMENTS:

Verse 13 says that the hatred of the world against Christians should not surprise them. The following verses will show why the Christian manner of life stirs up the hatred of the world. Jesus was hated by the world (**John 7:7**), and for the same reason. Jesus warned the early disciples about this hatred (**John 15:18**), and now one of them,

John, passes the warning along to later disciples.

Verses 14-16 suggest that the world reacts negatively to Christianity, because its core doctrine is love, a virtue in short supply among non-Christians. Yet, to Christians who have achieved true love of their brethren, it becomes evidence that they have also achieved the passage from “death” (*that is, the absence of love*) to “life” (compare **John 5:24**). Verse 15 teaches the principle that the intent to sin, or the unrestrained inclination toward sin, is sin itself. This is the principle found in Christ’s teaching on murder in **Matthew 5:21-22**, and on adultery in **Matthew 5:27-28**. The extent to which love for brethren can go is seen in Verse 16. The example for this is the sacrifice of Jesus (**John 15:12-13**).

Verses 17-18 suggest another way in which love of brethren can be shown. We should be willing to share our “world’s goods” with brethren in need (compare **Acts 4:32-35**). John’s statement in Verse is similar to the axiom, “Actions speak louder than words.”

Verses 19-22 speak of “heart health” (*of the spiritual kind*). By obedience to the commands of the Lord regarding our relationship with our brethren, we are assured of a closer relationship with God. Failure to obey the commands causes our conscience to condemn us. When we clear the conscience of guilt, and return to obedience, we have the confidence that God hears our prayers. Compare **1 Peter 3:12**.

Verses 23-24 establish the “benchmark” for having confidence in our relations with God. It is the keeping of His commandments concerning love of the brethren, along with faith in the “name” of Jesus Christ (compare **Acts 3:16**). This is the key to “abiding” in Christ.

TEXT: 1 John 4:1-6

[1] Beloved, 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. [2] By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. [4] You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. [5] They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. [6] We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

COMMENTS:

Verse 1 commands that we “test the spirits” to see if they should be believed. We have to remember that this was written in a time before evil spirits had been completely subdued. The Apostles claimed to be guided by the Spirit of God, and it would be easy for false prophets to claim the same thing (compare **Deuteronomy 13:1-5**.) Therefore, John gives us a measure by which to test the spirits in verses 2-3.

Verses 2-3 tell us that spirits which confess that Jesus has come in the flesh can be identified as “from God.” This seems a little too simple, since a false prophet might be willing to make such a confession, in order to gain a following for his false doctrine. Some scholars think that John is anticipating the false doctrine of the Gnostic sect of the

2nd Century, which denied that Jesus was flesh on that ground that all flesh tended to be evil. If this was John's purpose, it is an example of the Holy Spirit predicting "things to come" to the Apostles (see **John 16:13**). Those who do not confess Jesus in this way have the "spirit of the antichrist." John reveals that this spirit was already at work in that time.

Verse 4 assures us that we have overcome the threats posed by false prophets, because we are "from God." In his "Gospel," John reports Jesus speaking to some of His hearers, and saying, "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God," **John 8:47**. The superiority of God over "he that is in the world" raises the question, "who is the one in the world?" Some might identify him as the "evil one," the Devil, who is in one place called "the god of this world" (**2 Corinthians 4:4**). However, he might also be identified as the false prophet of verse 1, who has "gone out into the world." Verse 5 seems to suggest this.

Verses 5-6 says that those with the spirit of antichrist are from the world, have a worldly message, and are heard by those who are worldly. In contrast, John claims to be "from God," and that those who know God recognize this, and listen to him, and also to others of the inspired prophets. (Compare **John 7:17**). This, John says, is the obvious distinction between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. If we could discern more of the mind of John, we could understand this simple truth better.

TEXT: 1 John 4:7-14

[7] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8] The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. [9] By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. [10] In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. [13] By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. [14] We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

COMMENTS:

Verses 7-8 continue the simplistic definitions of those who "know God." They are those who love their fellow Christians. Again, false teachers could pretend to love other people (*or, even have a true affection for them*), but at some point of observation, the true "lover" who has learned his manner of love from the example of a loving God will be revealed. Compare **John 13:35**.

Verses 9-10 indicate the kind and extent of the love of God. It is the willingness to sacrifice his Son for our sins. The agonies of death are not emphasized here, but the benefits of that death. We have the privilege to "live through Him" who died for us. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" **John 15:13** (and compare **John 3:16** and **Matthew 20:28**).

Verses 11-12 show that God's love is our motivation to love one another. The invisible God whom we serve can be "seen" in our reaction to His love. If we love in the manner of God's love, "His love is perfected in us."

Verse 13 tells us that we can be assured that God dwells in us, because we have adopted his "Spirit." He "abides in us" when we "abide in Him." Those who believe in a

personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit do not undertake to explain whether our dwelling in God is "personal." To them it is only a one-way operation. The word "spirit" here could mean God's "spiritual nature" having influence over our imperfect spirit.

Verse 14 is another of John's assertions that his message is the "gospel" of the loving God sending His Son to be the savior of the world (Compare **John 3:17**).

TEXT: 1 John 4:15-21

[15] Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. [16] We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. [17] By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. [18] There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. [19] We love, because He first loved us. [20] If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

COMMENTS...

Verse 15 is another of John's simplistic assertions that confessing Jesus as the Son of God assures us of a dwelling with God, and He with us. In this case, confession seems to imply more than a verbal admission of belief. This is also the case with Paul's statement in **Romans 10:9-10**, where he seems to say that confession of the Lord, and belief in His resurrection assures the confessing believer that he shall obtain salvation. But only a few chapters before this reference, Paul states that "the body of sin" is put away in baptism, and that the same action places us "in Christ" (**Romans 6:3-6**). The fact is that the whole way of life for the Christian is called "our confession" (**Hebrews 4:14**).

Verses 16-17 continue to use the same sort of all-inclusive term, by saying that our dwelling with God, and He with us, is obtained through emulation of the "love which God has for us." This "perfected" love, in a copy of God's, gives us confidence, when we stand before the judgment seat of God.

Verse 18 shows that our love changes fear into that confidence which is mentioned in the previous verse. Those who fear the outcome of judgment have not perfected the kind of love that is displayed by God. Compare **2 Timothy 1:7**.

Verse 19 suggests no comment to the author of these lessons.

Verses 20-21 again completely tie the love we need to have for God with the companion love we must have for our brethren in Christ. Someone may reply that it is easier to love God, whom we have not seen, than it is to love brethren whose occasional faults and offenses we often see. John turns this around, and asserts that it should be just the opposite. Though Paul was often persecuted by his Jewish "brethren," he said that he would gladly accept the loss of his soul, if by that he could save them (**Romans 9:3**). We could do no worse for our brethren in Christ.

TEXT: 1 John 5:1-4

[1] Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. [2] By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. [3] For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. [4] For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith.

COMMENTS...

Verse 1 continues John's list of simplistic axioms by indicating that being "born of God" is achieved by belief that Jesus is the Christ, and by loving both God and His children. Again, neither simple faith, nor broadened love, accomplishes this birth. Peter shows this in **1 Peter 1:22-25**, which brings in the matter of obeying the "truth." John will add to this theme in the next verses.

Verse 2-3 combine to bring us again to the keeping of commandments. We can know that we love God and His children by doing this. John assures us that God's commandments are not "burdensome," that is, they are not heavier than we would like to bear. Jesus said, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* **Matthew 11:29-30** (ESV)

Verse 4 opens another layer to our understanding of this message by assuring us that being "born of God" is the Christian's way to "overcome the world." (We should remember W. E. Vine's definition of the "world," in the comment on 2:15, page 5.) Our means to overcome the world is in our faith (compare **Jude 3**).

TEXT: 1 John 5:5-12

[5] Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? [6] This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. [7] For there are three that testify: [8] the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. [9] If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. [10] The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. [11] And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. [12] He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

COMMENTS...

Verse 5 begins a new paragraph, but is a summation of the previous verses.

Verses 6-8 have puzzled interpreters from early times. Some have said that **verse 6** refers to the water and blood that came out of the side of Jesus from the wound made by the Roman soldier's spear (**John 19:34**). Others think it refers to the combination of

baptismal “washing” in water (**Acts 22:16, Titus 3:5**), and the simultaneous cleansing of the blood of Christ (**Revelation 1:5, 7:14**). The truth is probably found in a combination of these two views; the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus as a figure of the cleansing to be received by those who are cleansed by the water and the blood. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, in the word which He inspired. **Verses 7-8** have created a controversy between the text of the King James Version, and that of versions based on earlier and less corrupted manuscripts discovered after the King James translation was completed and published. The King James Version reads:

“(7) For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (8) And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

Our English Standard Version reads:

“(7) For there are three that testify: (8) the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.”

The King James reading has been shown to be wrong, since it is not supported by any Greek manuscript of the passage, until it was included in a 14th Century manuscript, and was evidently drawn from the faulty Latin Vulgate of Jerome. The 16th Century translators of the King James Version had only this corrupted manuscript (called the *Textus Receptus*), and therefore included the error. In effect, **verses 7-8**, in the short form of modern translations, are simply comments on the previous **verse 6**.

Verse 9 introduces another source of testimony, that of God. John recalls the statement of Jesus about the testimony of John the baptizer, and God, in **John 5:33-38**. The Apostle here says what Jesus said, that God’s testimony is stronger than man’s, even if that man be a prophet like John the baptizer.

Verses 10-12 state the case that when anyone believes in Christ as the Son of God, he has accepted in his heart the testimony of God. The opposite is true for the unbeliever. The gist of God’s testimony is that in Christ there is eternal life (compare **John 1:4**). He who “has the Son has the life,” and, again, the opposite is true. One way to fail having the son is shown in **2 John 9-11**.

TEXT: 1 John 5:13-15

[13] These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. [14] This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. [15] And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

COMMENTS...

Verse 13 is the statement of John’s purpose in writing (compare **John 20:30-31**). He wants us to “know” that we have eternal life (**John 17:3**).

Verses 14-15 make an application from “knowing” that we have eternal life. We can be confident that our prayers are heard, and that what we ask from God in prayer will be granted (if it is “according to His will”). This general promise is an expansion of the one which Jesus gave to His apostles during His last supper with them (**John 14:13-14**).

TEXT: 1 John 5:16-17

[16] If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. [17] All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

COMMENTS...

These two verses tell us that when we see a fellow Christian sinning in a way that is not persistent, God will answer us by granting life to the sinner, suggesting a grant of time to repent of the sin (compare **Revelation 2:20-21**). If the sin is of the type that is persistent (or, "leading to death"), we are told not to pray for such a one. An example of this is in **Jeremiah 7:16-20**.

TEXT: 1 John 5:18-20

[18] We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. [19] We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. [20] And we know 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, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

COMMENTS...

Verses 18 holds the key to maintaining our status as one "born of God." He does not sin, because he "keeps him." This needs to be explained. The American Standard Version has "begotten of God," instead of "born of God, and says that he "keeps himself," not "keeps him." This is even more confusing. One scholar suggests that the first "begotten" should begin in the lower case, and the second should be in the upper case, "Begotten," indicating the Son of God. If this is a proper conclusion, it would suggest that the Son of God keeps the first "begotten," man, from sinning. This may be the concept of a Calvinist, who believes in the idea, "once saved, always saved." The simple explanation is that the Christian should "keep" his relationship with the Son of God, as an incentive to keep from sinning.

Verses 19-20 express certainties every Christian should know. It finishes by saying, after mentioning Jesus Christ, "this is the true God and eternal life." All Christians should recognize Jesus as the "True God." See **Isaiah 9:6, John 20:24-28, and Hebrews 1:8**.

John's last admonition is verse 21, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols."