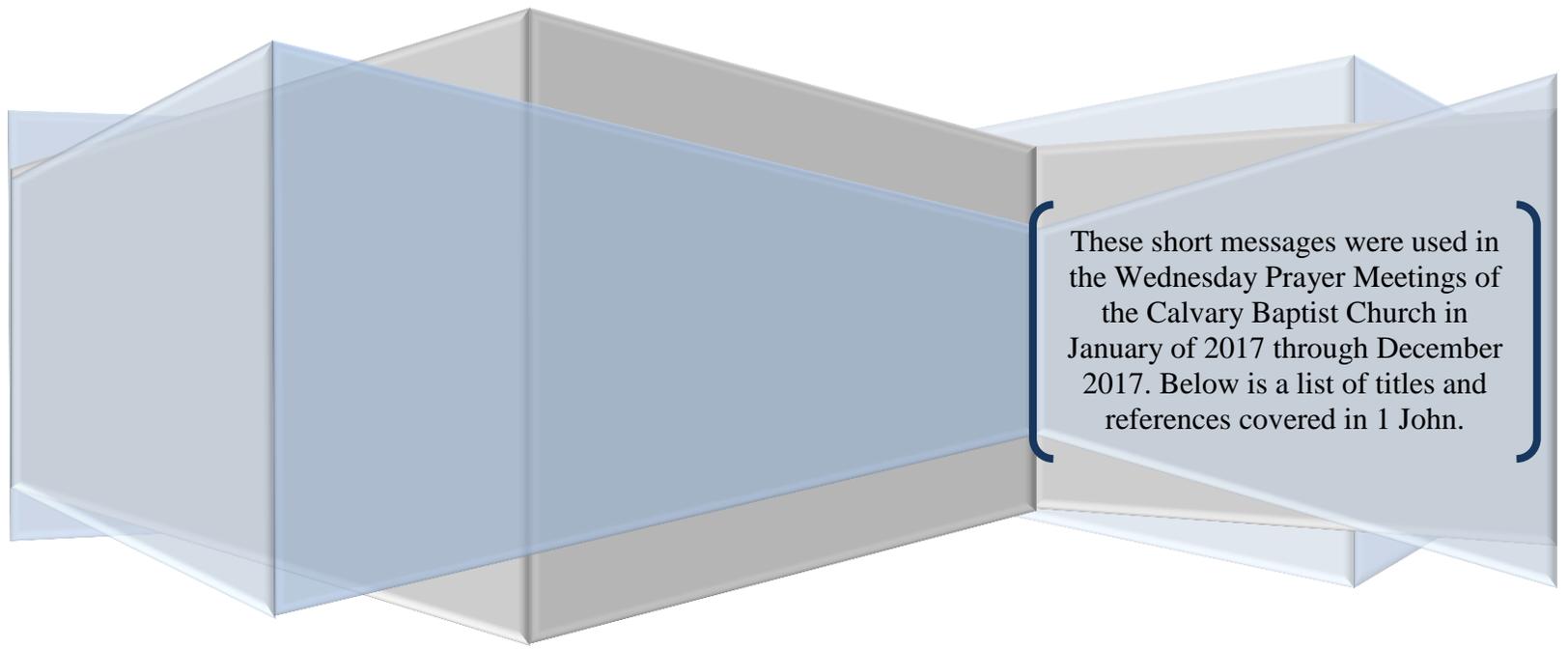


Calvary Baptist Church of Lamar

Discussions on First John

Jeffrey Alexander



These short messages were used in the Wednesday Prayer Meetings of the Calvary Baptist Church in January of 2017 through December 2017. Below is a list of titles and references covered in 1 John.

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By Pastor Jeff Alexander

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1. The *Arche* (1 John 1:1)
2. God Is Light (1 John 1:1–10)
3. Fellowship with God (1 John 1:1–4)
4. Joy and Gladness (1 John 1:1–4)
5. Walking (1 John 1:5–10)
6. An Advocate (1 John 2:1–6)
7. Don't Sin (1 John 2:1–6)
8. Propitiation (1 John 2:1–8)
9. Keeping His Word (1 John 2:1–6)
10. The New Commandment (1 John 2:7–11)
11. Love for God Perfected (1 John 2:3–11)
12. "I Write" (1 John 2:5–14)
13. Maintaining Relationship (1 John 2:7–11)
14. The Bigger Picture (1 John 2:12–16)
15. The World (1 John 2:15–17)
16. Love Not (1 John 2:15–17)
17. In Whom Do You Lie? (1 John 2:15–17)
18. The Spirit of Antichrist (1 John 18–27)
19. The Spirit of Antichrist, Part Two (1 John 2:18–27)
20. Abide in Him (1 John 2:28, 29)
21. Discernment and Deception (1 John 2:18–29)
22. Duty in Light of Destiny (1 John 2:26–3:3)
23. What Kind of Love (1 John 3:1–3)
24. Sin and Lawlessness (1 John 3:4–10)
25. Sons of God (1 John 3:4–10)
26. What Loving the Brethren is not (1 John 3:11–15)
27. Not a New Thing (1 John 3:11–15)
28. By This We Know (1 John 3:16–18)
29. To Lay Down One's Life for Another (1 John 3:16)
30. Our Confidence before God (1 John 3:19–24)
31. The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error (1 John 4:1–6)
32. Test the Spirits (1 John 4:1–6)
33. Antichrist Spirit (1 John 4:1–8)
34. God Is Love (1 John 4:7–12)
35. We Have Come to Know (1 John 4:13–21)
36. Perfect Love (1 John 4:16–21)
37. Overcomers (1 John 4:20–5:5)
38. The Victorious Life of Obedience (1 John 5:3–8)
39. Water and Blood (1 John 5:5–12)
40. That You May Know (1 John 5:13–15)
41. Keep Yourselves from Idols (1 John 5:13–21)

1.

The Arche (1 John 1:1)

I have a theory that the first epistle of John was written to offset the trauma created by the *Revelation* given to John by the Lord Jesus while he was exiled on Patmos. Of several reasons, I give two for holding this notion. First, we know that the beast of Revelation 13 is antichrist; the only place where that terminology is found is 3 times in 1 John and once in 2 John. Antichrist is a liar and a deceiver as Jesus revealed to John in the Revelation.

Second is in John's description of the true Messiah/Christ, taking the reader back to the beginning. His gospel started that way also: "*In the beginning was the Word.*" The potency of this declaration is huge. *Beginning* (*arche* in the Greek) is more than a point of origin. Dan Phillips (in a blog article at pjmedia.com, Jan. 9, 2017) listed 26 reasons why Genesis 1:1 is "*the Most Offensive Verse in the Bible.*" Dan's seventh reason is that "the opening word (Hebrew *bereshit*, *in-beginning*, rather than, say, on the first day) points both to a purpose and an end." That is whole crux of the matter. The Bible begins with God. He is in charge right away, and "We don't get to stack the deck by massaging a preselected set of facts to adorn our predetermined conclusion" (Phillips' first point).

It is interesting that, in observing how the Torah opened, the rabbis, according to their understanding of patterns in Scripture, believed that the verse should have begun with an *aleph* (the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet picturing an *ox* and meaning primary or strength). Rather, it starts with *beth*, a symbol for *house*. Is God telling us up front that His purpose and end in creation is the building of His house (Num. 12:7; Matt. 21:13; 1 Pet. 2:5)?

This first verse of Genesis also contains an untranslated word of two letters following the word *Elohim* (God). These two letters are an *aleph* and a *tav*, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Scholars believe that this is the "Word" John refers to in both his gospel and epistle. It is equivalent to Christ's declaration of Himself in Revelation 22:13. The concept of *word* is communication. Jesus is the means whereby God communicated with His created beings—"God said. . . ."

Thus, we know that in the very beginning of the creation God purposed to create beings with whom He would dwell and fellowship in His house (John 1:14; 2:18–22). Sin entered the picture and destroyed that communion (Gen. 3:23, 24). However, even then, God planned to send His Word into the creation to become flesh in order to restore fellowship and build His house. This is the main theme that John uses to open his letter (1:3, 4). Instead of fearing what lies before, John would have us rejoicing in what God has already accomplished for His own in this sin-corrupted world with all its darkness and evil. The for-whom and how that God is preparing for His eternal house are the subject of 1 John.

2.

God Is Light (1 John 1:1–10)

The history of the first-century church is a practical microcosm of the whole period of church history from the first coming to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus declared that His followers would suffer the same treatment that He, their Lord, had suffered (John 15:20). The first persecutions were carried out by the Jewish leaders in Judea almost immediately after Jesus returned to the Father. James was martyred in A.D. 62. That was followed by the Roman persecutions under Nero (A.D. 64–67) during which both Peter and Paul were martyred. Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 with little comfort to the church. During the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96) emperor worship was established and Christians refused to acknowledge Caesar but only Jesus as Lord. That refusal led to intense persecution (A.D. 94–96), closing the first century.

The Revelation was penned by the Apostle John around A.D. 90. Its horrific scenes of heaven's awful judgments was written to give hope and comfort the suffering saints by John, who was, himself, suffering banishment on the Isle of Patmos. The last New Testament books to be written were the epistles of John, which I believe were written to comfort the saints alarmed by the Revelation. First John was written from Ephesus between after A.D. 90 but before A.D. 95.

The theme of 1 John is fellowship with God. John introduced the epistle by affirming his own deep and intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ (1:1–4). Then John declares the message (*aggelia–angelia*, from which the term *angel* derives) that he heard from Jesus (1:5). The book develops that message under two heads: God is light and God is love. On these themes, John builds the doctrine of fellowship with God (v. 6). Walking in the light is the basis of that fellowship with God. That walking is what we term godliness. We were created for this very thing and we will experience that godly walk if we are truly His (Psa. 4:6; 27:1; 36:9). Three things define light and godliness: holiness, truth, and love. Holiness relates to the Father, truth relates to the Son, and love relates to the Spirit. Just as light is composed of three elements (actinic, luminiferous, and calorific), our walk with God requires fellowship with all three persons of the Godhead.

Defined, holiness is self-affirming purity. Shedd defines the holiness of God as the perfect rectitude (rightness of principle or moral virtue) of His will. It is what makes God the standard of all morality. Truth is whatever conforms to God's being and knowledge. Love is God's being eternally moved in self-communication.

Holiness is God being, truth is God knowing, and love is God doing. These concepts are inseparable and form the basis of the Christian life. Towards God, these elements enable one's duty to God (Matt. 22:37–40). The unregenerate cannot walk in light because he is self-justifying and rebellious. The believer becomes holy only through truth and expresses that holiness through love (Rom. 13:10; John 14:15; 1 Cor. 13:6). Holiness functioning through truth manifests love. Are you walking in love?

3.

Fellowship with God (1 John 1:1–4)

John opens his letter with a declaration that is, frankly, beyond the pale. He claims to have had personal and intimate knowledge of the Creator of all, “*the Word of life*” or, better, “*the life-giving Word*.” John calls upon every available means of investigation to support his assertion — everything necessary to establish credible a witness. First, he assures the reader that he is not alone in his claim: “*we have,*” etc., (v. 1). “*Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses*” (Deut. 17:6; 2 Cor. 13:1). Second, he reports that he and his fellow witnesses have both *heard* and *seen* this One claiming to have existed “*from beginning*” (v. 2). Rumor alone (what one hears) is questionable, but personal observation is very strong testimony. The verb *seeing* is in the perfect tense, emphasizing that this past “seeing” has continuing and lasting results.

Third, this eye witness is described as intense scrutiny—“*we have looked upon*” (from *theaomai*, to view attentively or to contemplate; from which we get the word *theater*). He goes one step further to announce that they also *touched* Him. The word used here is of a blind person who gropes and feels after something with determination to find it. When they handled Him, they personally discovered Him to be real.

This powerful declaration was based on the fact that the Word initiated this contact through *manifestation*. What was previously unseen and unknowable chose to reveal Himself. Jesus was made flesh and appeared in order to announce the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:15). In doing so, John and the others experienced Him personally, testifying to His reality, then proclaiming to others what was revealed to them.

As if this information could not reach yet another level beyond the pale, John states that his reason for sharing this information is that the reader might also have fellowship with the Word revealed, which is “eternal life.” The one who receives and believes this proclamation joins the fellowship circle of the Father and His Son and the saints so joined. Fellowship is a community in communion. Here is the house of God, the true family of heaven joined and bound in common blood and purpose. The fellowship is the center and focus of why the life-giving Word came into His creation to reveal Himself. One cannot enjoy eternal life without the full engagement of the fellowship announced.

Participation in God’s family is the highest privilege one could possibly enjoy. Indeed, it is in this fellowship that one’s joy is complete (*pleroo*, “to make complete in every particular, to render perfect, to accomplish, to fulfill”; v. 4). The idea is that God’s will promised in the prophets has been fully and finally realized in the best possible manner to those for whom the promise was made (1 Thess. 2:19).

Oh, that God’s people would see and experience the wonder of true fellowship with God. Why are many so satisfied with so little, the tawdry and shallow things of this world? The great purpose of Christ’s appearance is that His own would enter this fellowship and fullness, experiencing all that He is—this eternal life-giving Word of God!

4.

Joy and Gladness (1 John 1:1–4)

Last week we noted that “participation in God’s family is the highest privilege one could possibly enjoy.” Just so, John concludes this first paragraph of his epistle by stating that the things he wrote were for this purpose, “that our joy may be complete (*pleroo*, “to make complete in every particular, to render perfect, to accomplish, to fulfill”; v. 4).

The foundation of our understanding of joy is the OT usage. The Hebrew terms denotes a condition of response that affects the whole disposition, as seen in the many references to joy with the heart, for example Psalm 19:8. In the Hebrew world, joy in the Lord was to be one’s highest earthly ambition (Psa. 5:11; 9:2; 16:11; 21:6; 32:11; 43:4; 92:4). All other objects of rejoicing were to be seen as gifts of God’s goodness (Neh. 12:43; Psa. 63:5; 65:8, 12, 13; 67:4).

One very significant OT aspect of rejoicing was in sharing joy in the fellowship assembly. In our culture of independence, we miss a great blessing by failing to find the congregation of the Lord’s people a great source of strength and joy. This was also John’s point, that our joy is complete as we fellowship together with the Father and with His Son. One may rejoice in some aspect of God’s goodness, but sharing with others in order that they, too, might rejoice with you is better. That is a core feature of the NT church (Eph. 3:7–19).

Isaiah reveals the plan of God with respect to the restoration of all things (Isa. 46:9–11; 44:21–28). God’s Israel is “*saved by the Lord*” (Isa. 45:17) and even in Isaiah we see God’s purpose in uniting Jews and Gentiles in one body (Isa. 45:22; 56:7). Isaiah is pointing to the post-resurrection church.

What is particularly revealing is to read Isaiah in light of Revelation and the end of the age. Babylon was God’s instrument of judgment and discipline on His wayward children (Isa. 46 and 47) and will be again (Rev. 18, compare Rev. 8:4 with Isa. 48:20). The great issue that His people, both OT and NT, face is their love for Babylon (Isaiah 48:1–5). The Lord Himself will rescue them from Babylon by sending His savior, typified in Cyrus (Isa. 48:17–22). The true Servant/Savior is described in Isaiah 49 and His restoration in Isaiah 50. In 51, salvation is declared (Isa. 51:9–11). Now, in light of this, mark the evidence for that salvation—*joy*, finding full satisfaction in the Lord, not Babylon (51:11; 55:12; 65:18).

I would challenge you to read and re-read Isaiah 40–65. Note how many references are quoted in the NT and rejoice in your salvation. See how you naturally gravitate to Babylon for fulfillment. Then, see the true satisfaction that Lord will give you in Christ. “*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*” (Isa. 41:10). “*Rejoice evermore*” (1 Thess. 5:16).

5.

Walking (1 John 1:5–10)

Fellowship with the Father and with His Son is a great privilege. God has condescended to restore image-bearers to favor in spite of the rebellion and sinful desertion of God's original purpose for them. Simply put, that purpose is described as walking with God.

Genesis describes the Lord as “*walking in the garden in the cool of the day*” (Gen. 3:8—the first mention of walking in Scripture). The assumption is that this was a regular occurrence and that it involved Adam because he “*hid from the presence of the LORD.*” Sin severed the fellowship. What a tragedy. The serpent fooled the first humans into thinking equality with the LORD was better than fellowship with the LORD.

The whole story of the Bible is God's plan to restore that fellowship, and this accomplishment is the glorious message that John shares in his epistle. Nevertheless, there is a condition prerequisite to that fellowship and presence of the LORD. God is light, and to have that fellowship, we must walk in the light. How is that possible? God must provide the way. Sinful humanity has neither the will nor the way to accomplish it.

Light is a metaphor for God's perfection or His holiness. In Isaiah 10:17 we read, “*The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame, and it will burn and devour.*” Here, light and holiness describe the same thing. Light stands for everything that sets God apart from His sin-damaged creation. In order to walk in the light, we must be cleansed and free from sin (John 3:19–21). The only thing that makes that possible is the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7).

It was upon this plan that God was able to fellowship with certain individuals in the OT. Enoch walked with God before the flood (Gen. 5:22–24). Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Abraham walked with God (Gen. 17:1; 24:40). God gave Israel laws and rules to see if they would walk aright (Ex. 16:4; 18:20). In this latter case, the test revealed that laws and rules are not sufficient to enable one to walk in the light. It merely revealed that a better means must be established—the gospel of Christ which alone is able to transfer us from the domain of darkness into His marvelous light (John 12:46; Eph. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:9).

However, John describes the scenario that characterizes the end of the age and the time of antichrist. Antichrist is a liar (John 8:44; 1 John 2:22). The issue is sin. John reveals three errors that prevent fellowship. First, there are those say that they are in fellowship, but they prove otherwise by what they do (v. 6). Second, there are those who deny that they have sinned. These are self-deceived; everyone around them knows better. Their problems, though sin-related, are blamed on circumstances, heredity, or environment. Sin becomes fate, not fault. However, confession is God's means of acknowledging guilt, which Christ both forgives and cleanses (v. 9). Third, there are those think that sin does not exist at all (v. 10). These make God a liar.

6.

An Advocate (1 John 2:1–6)

We have postulated that John’s epistles were written to encourage the church in the aftermath of his “bombshell” Revelation of Christ. There are several themes in the first letter that support this view. First, John emphasizes the need for believers to keep His commandments (1 Jn. 2:3, 4; Rev. 14:3). The keeping of commandments focuses on one’s loving of his brother as evidence that he has been truly born of God (1 Jn. 2:10, 11; Rev. 2:4). Second, John warns about the world (2:15–17; Rev. 17, 18), antichrists (2:18, 19; Rev. 13), the appearance of Christ (2:28, 29; Rev. 19:11ff), persecution (chapter 3; Rev. 6:9–11; 19:1, 2), false prophets and teachers (chapter 4; Rev. 16:12–16), and ultimate victory for overcomers (chapter 5; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 9–12, 21; 17:14).

As we are faced with overwhelming evidence that we are in the last hours of this age, we have come to this letter written to prepare us for these days. The greatest security that one can have facing these dark and dangerous times is to be in close, personal, and joy-filled fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. This fellowship is possible and it is John’s main point—his “good-news” message proclaimed (1:3, 5). Jesus came into the world in order that we might have a secure relationship with the Most High God, creator of heaven and earth.

However, there is a condition for that fellowship. “*God is light*” (1:5) and in order for us to have fellowship with Him, we must walk in the light. The greatest obstacle to that fellowship is that we are sinners and we naturally walk in darkness. The good news is that Jesus shed His blood in order that His own might be cleansed from all sin; but that cleansing requires us to own our sinful state (“*confess*,” *homologeo*, a compound of “same” and “word”; to admit and declare one’s self to be guilty as charged). When we own our sinful condition through the work of the Spirit (John 16:8–11) and obey His commandments, we walk in the light and Christ maintains that fellowship through forgiveness and cleansing.

The second chapter opens with a somewhat obtuse warning that using the gracious and generous work of Christ to continue a sinful lifestyle is very wrong. Christ enables people to overcome sin and pursue holiness (Heb. 12:14–16). On the other hand, so as not to discourage the saints (“*my little children*”), John reveals a great resource—“*we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (v. 2). An advocate (a *parakletos*) is someone qualified to come to one’s legal aid and render assistance. We know that Christ is at the Father’s right hand (Heb. 4:14–5:4). Thus, we actually have *two* advocates; one with the Father and one in us from the Father (John 14:26). Jesus is also identified as qualified—*righteous*, which means that Jesus has full and right standing with the Father. What more could we ask? Christ’s Spirit “coaches” us in our walk on earth while the Son advocates for us with the Father before the heavenly throne.

7.

Do Not Sin (1 John 2:1–6)

Sin is our greatest enemy because it destroys our relationship with God and confines us in a world of spiritual darkness and death. Only Jesus can fix our sin problem so that life and fellowship can be restored. However, Jesus restores no one who has not come to Him fully confronted with his guilt, humbled and repentant (1:8–10). The unusual sentence construction of 1:8 is used by John in his gospel (9:41; 15:22, 24; 19:11). It is not a denial of sin *per se* but rather a denial that one is guilty of what God reveals to them. Only when one agrees with God through confession and repentance will he secure cleansing and forgiveness (1:9). Truth is dynamic and active—a principle of life operation that God uses to overcome our self-deception. If the truth is in us, we understand and acknowledge our sinful state. Many realize a problem, but they refuse to see it as anything more than human weakness or worse, a disease that can be easily cured.

Worse still is denying sin at all (1:10). Such denials make God a liar and demonstrates that His Word, which is dynamic truth (Isa. 55:11), is not present in its life-giving power (1 Peter 1:23). Thus, in the opening statement of the second chapter, John states the purpose of his writing—“*that you may not sin*” (2:1). The sentence structure points to the reality of believers being sinners until the resurrection (3:2, 3). Since we are sinners, we must stop committing sins if we wish to remain in fellowship and walk in the light.

At this point, it is important for us to understand how John defines sin. Sin is *lawlessness* (*anomia*, also translated *iniquity*; 3:4; Isa. 53:5, 6), acts committed in a disposition of disobedience to the Father. We wrongly tend to view sin in a purely legal context, that is, as merely law-breaking, which makes one liable for punishment. Because we are sinners who fear punishment, we, like Adam, avoid God. We childishly hide from His displeasure and wrath.

The conception of sin as mere law-breaking also leads us to think that being right with God simply requires keeping the rules. One can keep rules and not be right with God. The Bible defines spiritual life in terms of *walking*—living out the principles of relationship to God—*fellowship* (1 Jn. 1:7). One either walks after the flesh or after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25). Lawlessness is much more than law-breaking. It is an attitude in which one decides for himself what is good and what is evil.

John calls his readers “*my little children*” (2:1). This is more than a term of endearment, as we will see (2:12–14). The term *children* points to *relationship* as the foundation of one’s experience with God. He is our Father, wise and knowledgeable with respect to our best interests. When we view sin in a legal context, we care only about what is permissible and what isn’t. What we ought to care about is what the Father wants for us—what the will of God is (2:17).

The latter part of verse one introduces a parenthetical note that Jesus advocates for us with the Father because He has propitiated our sins. This means that Jesus secured full forgiveness for sin by sprinkling His blood on the mercy-seat. The amazing truth revealed in this is that Jesus has secured full and unreserved access to the Father by this act for those who are believers but still sinners.

8.

Propitiation (1 John 2:1–8)

God relates to His creatures, and in that relationship He alone determines what constitutes the basis for the continued *harmony* in the relationship and what violates the harmony. *Iniquity* describes the attempt of the creature to hijack authority for determining harmony in the relationship.

As we have previously stated, sin should be understood as *lawlessness*, not law-breaking (3:4). Lawlessness is iniquity (Isa. 53:6), the hijacking of authority from God to determine for oneself what does or does not violate harmony in one's relationship to another. Of course, we should also understand that incidents of law-breaking cause disruption. However, sin is not the act of law-breaking but is the disposition by which the violation occurred. Let me explain.

In Psalm 51 David appealed to God for expiation of (1) his *transgressions* (*pasha'*, to revolt or to rebel), (2) his *iniquity* (*avon*, to be perverse, the disposition of depravity), and his *sin* (*chatta'ah*, the breaking of the relationship). Each of these descriptives is associated with his *condition* and not his sinful act (v. 5). David owned the violation but also understood that the breach in his relationship to God was much more serious than the act committed, as horrendous and devastating as that was. That is why David confessed, “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*” (v. 4).

David literally *commanded* God to be merciful to him (v. 1), understanding that God purposed to expiate his guilt and restore the broken relationship in His greater plan (see vv. 9–12). His condition could be remedied only in the redemption promised by God through genuine repentance (vv. 10, 11, 17). Finally, David's appeal for the restoration was not selfish but in the national interest (v. 18).

David illustrates John's appeal in 1 John 2:1 that if we are to walk in fellowship or relationship with God, we must walk in the light. We must not give in to our natural tendency to hijack authority to determine for ourselves what constitutes that relationship. Like David, we were birthed in iniquity, therefore, we must seek out the sole remedy for our dilemma—a “lawyer” at God's judgment bar, Jesus Christ the righteous (*straight* in contrast to our iniquity).

The power that Jesus has with the Father is His being the *propitiation* (to win favor by appeasing or conciliation) for our acts that break our relationship. Propitiation is the means whereby God is enabled to be merciful and restore sinners through redemption. Note, however, that it is not what Jesus *does* but what He *is*. Jesus *is* our propitiation—our mercy seat with God. This is so important because of how this verse is often misused to argue for universal atonement. If Jesus died for every sinner, then He must also be their propitiation. We know that not every sinner is saved. Did their propitiation somehow fail? If that is true, then how can I be sure that my propitiation will not also fail? No, quite the contrary, for when I sin, my advocate successfully presses my case with the Father because *Jesus* is my mercy seat (v. 3).

9.

Keeping His Word (1 John 2:1–6)

John has presented the glorious truth that Christ's shed blood is the basis for His acceptance of us—our entering into the fellowship which He has with His Son, Jesus Christ. The sole condition for this fellowship is that we walk in the light as He does (1:7). Walking in the light is recognizing that God is holy and agree with God about our unholiness (1:9). We are forgiven, not because we confess, but because the blood of Christ cleanses us from every sin.

Now, with that in mind, one might be prone to think that sinning is no big deal, but God provides neither license nor comfort for sinning. God's children do not practice sinning (2:1; 3:4–6). Nevertheless, we are not yet perfect. We do sin. For that, God has made gracious provision—an advocate, lawyer or intercessor to plead our case (2:2). This advocate has a vested interest to keep us from sinning because He has *expiated* (compensated) for our sins in order to appease God on our behalf. “*By this*”—by this knowledge of Christ's advocacy—“*we know that we have come to know Him*” (v. 3). Note that it is *we* who *know* that we know. Divine fellowship requires a mindset that God has enabled our submission to his goal in saving us (v. 5).

With this background, John begins the series of tests by which we can assure ourselves that we have a right standing with God. These tests are quite simple: Do I love the Lord? How do I show that I love him? John provides three proofs (vv. 3–6): (1) I know that I know Him *if* I keep His commandments—obey Him (*salvation*, vv. 3, 4). (2) I know that I know Him *as* I obey Him (*maturity*, v. 5). (3) I know that I know Him *when* I obey Him (*spirituality*, v. 6).

We do not obey Christ to prove, gain, or keep our relationship to Him. Obedience is the response of submission and gratitude of one who understands that Christ has saved him from his sins. *Keeping* involves guarding and watching over something, the *commandments* or covenantal elements that define the relationship (Ex. 19:3–6). Keeping commandments is not so much *doing* as *relating*. To claim relationship while ignoring the elements that define the relationship only proves one's hypocrisy (v. 5).

Second, keeping the word, as difficult or inconsistent as it may seem, is God's means to build *maturity* into His children. Through obedience, a believer's love for God is perfected—brought to maturity. It speaks of one's *holiness* in drawing near to God (v. 5; Heb. 7:19; 11:6; James 4:8). Should this not be the motivating desire of God's children—that we walk as close to Him we can?

Lastly, keeping involves *abiding*, remaining or continuing in one's relationship to Christ (v. 6). This sentence argues that obedience is the proof of spirituality. *Abiding in Him* means that one recognizes the *positional* truth that one's acceptance with God is not based on *performance* but *position* (Eph. 1:3–6; Col. 1:28, 29). This understanding motivates us to walk like Him.

10.

The New Commandment (1 John 2:7–11)

Chapter 2 begins with “*my little children, these things I am writing to you that you may not sin.*” “*That you may not sin*” is a purpose clause using the Greek ingressive aorist. In other words, “*these things*” refers to that which prevents sinning. They are “*things*” that flow out of the declaration that “*God is light*”—truth and righteousness. Thus, to claim a relationship (a *koinonia*, fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation) with God requires certain indisputable evidence that such a relationship truly exists. Merely claiming such a relationship without demonstrable evidence (*not sinning*) reveals one to be a *liar* (*pseustes*, from which we get *pseudo*—false).

Genuinely “*walking in the light*” involves a radical transformation of life from that previously characterized by *sin* (*hamartia*, to wander from and to violate the law of God in thought or in act). Thus, one who walks in the light must share with God similar traits that make compatibility possible. “These things” include three traits that John uses repeatedly as a gauge for the reader to evaluate his own claim of fellowship—obedience, love, and faith.

In the section before us (2:7–11), John expands on the assertion of verses 3–6 that the evidence of new life in Christ is obedience—one’s desire to “*keep his commandments.*” Keeping (*tereo*, to attend to carefully) means taking care to preserve the state that one is in. Keeping the commandments means far more than simple rule-observance. It recognizes that certain conditions are required to maintain one’s relationship to another. The value of that relationship governs one’s care in maintaining it. When one cherishes his God, he will do everything to please Him and nothing to offend Him. In this disposition one’s love for God is perfected (v. 5; *teleioo*, to carry through to completion or fulfillment). “*But if someone keeps doing what he says, then truly love for God has been brought to its goal in him*” (v. 8)*

What John develops is the truth Paul declares, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*” (2 Cor. 5:17). Like Paul, John sees that the “new” has come; yet, it is not really new but “*an old commandment*” (v. 7). The phrase, “*from the beginning*” most likely relates to opening of the gospel age. The “old” commandment is described as the *logos* (word) that “*you have heard.*” While John does not explicitly define his meaning, one need only remember his opening words (1:1–4). This word is the “*word of life,*” life made manifest and proclaimed as the means of fellowship with God. Jesus is the living Word. Jesus is the gospel.

At the same time it is a *new* commandment because “*it is true in him [Jesus] and in you*”—this “*word of life*” or “*life-giving word.*” Indeed, this new commandment is a present reality because the “*darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.*” The gospel age has dawned with new possibilities of obedience not enjoyed before.

*Complete Jewish Bible, © 1998, David H. Stern

11.

Love for God Perfected (1 John 2:3–11)

I came across the following statement: “Obedience to God’s Word (“His commands,” v. 3) results in a rich and full experience of God’s love.” This is from a good commentary, ordinarily, but on this point, not so good. Our obedience does not result in the experience of God’s love. Neither does obedience perfect God’s love; rather, spiritual regeneration enables obedience born of new-found love *for* God.

Verse 5 can be misunderstood and one thing is certain, God’s love for us is not tied to our performance. However, our obedience *assures* us that we are in Him; it is proof that God is at work in us. One professing to know Him ought to demonstrate that profession by walking as Christ walked (v. 6). The issue, then, is *assurance*: “*By this we know that we have come to know him*” (v. 3). When love for God is brought to its goal (v. 8), the self-evidence of obedience assures us that we know Him.

Walking and keeping commandments are synonymous here. Commandments are simply guides to keep us in the right path of obedience. The *Torah* is *instruction*. Keeping commandments does not earn anyone merit with God or the opportunity to experience His love, but it does assure us that we are in the right path.

This passage can get a bit confusing, and we need to tread carefully. First, notice that *commandment* is singular, not plural as in verses 3 and 4. John defines the *old* commandment as the word (*logos*, both written and living) that his readers have heard (v. 7). Yet, “*at the same time*,” it is a *new* commandment. This is something like the old covenant being replaced by the new. What makes it *new* is that it is the *reality* promised in the old. This is *gospel* (good news) because what the old commandment required but could not provide, the new realizes. This is expressed in the phrase, “*which is true in him and in you*” (v. 8). The best antecedent to “*which*” is the new commandment. Now, if the old commandment is the *logos*—the life-giving word of God—the new commandment is the *reality* promised. Its power is clearly evident in Jesus and His followers. The term *true* is not the opposite of false but expresses what is real, authentic, and genuine—what Jesus summed it up in Matthew 22:36–38.

Sin is the violation of His *law*—God’s will or desire for us (3:4). Salvation is the restoration of the sinner through faith and forgiveness to divine favor. Thus, it is in this gospel-blessed sinner that hatred for God (Rom. 8:7) is changed to love for God, which restores obedience also. It is simply illogical to think that God saves a sinner so that he can keep on sinning. Thus, “*whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked*” (v. 6).

John’s focus is on the second commandment—love for others (v. 11; Matt. 22:39), which Jesus called a “*new*” commandment (John 13:34, 35). Indeed, the proof that one loves God is seen in his love for the brethren.

12.

“I Write” (1 John 2:5–14)

The major focus of this section has to do with *assurance* of one’s relationship to God. “Whoever keeps His word [maintains His doctrine or teaching] in him truly is his love for God brought to its goal [perfection]. By this [maintaining His doctrine or teaching] we may know that we are in Him” (v. 5). If one maintains Jesus’ doctrine or teaching, he is abiding in Him and, therefore, he will walk “in the same way in which He walked” (v. 6). Let me explain this.

John used *commandment* as a reference to instruction, not as a legal rule. If one is to abide in Christ, he needs instruction and guidance. If we are to walk as He walked, we must know how to do it. Thus, John says, “I am writing you no new instruction, but old instruction that you had from the beginning [of the gospel age]” (v. 7). Specifically, this old instruction is the doctrine [word] that they already heard. In other words, this is doctrine that is applicable in every age. It flows out of God’s instruction that we are to *know Him* in order to love Him (Deut. 6:5, 6). Notice that “these words [instruction] that I command [saw, to charge or instruct] you today shall be on your heart [by way of understanding]” (Deut. 6:6). The gospel is intended to restore fallen sinners to fellowship with God through an understanding that results in love and devotion. When we limit the gospel to mere forgiveness and freedom from judgment, we short-change the gospel.

For this reason, John calls it a “new” commandment, not because it has changed but because Christ has made the “shall-be-on-your-heart” possible through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The clear evidence that one has the Spirit is his *understanding*—“because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining” (v. 8). The outward evidence that marks one’s understanding of Christ’s doctrine is the way he treats his brothers and sisters in Christ (vv. 9–11). When a professing believer fails to do right by (*hates*) his brothers and sisters, he shows that he is without understanding (v. 11).

To fortify his argument, John encourages the believers (vv. 12–14). The meaning of *children, fathers, and youth* is debated. Some argue that it describes various stages of spiritual maturity. Others hold that John is speaking to various age groups in the Christian community. What is important is to see *what* these believers enjoy because they have understanding and keep His Word. They are forgiven on account of His name, they know the Father and the Son, and they are strong and overcome the evil one because the Word of God abides in them.

It is curious, although not seemingly recognized by the commentaries, that John uses two different verb tenses for “to write” (vv. 12–14). Six times John states the action of his writing. Three times he uses the present tense (“I am writing”) and three times he uses the aorist (past tense (“I wrote”). What is the significance of that?

13.

Maintaining Relationship (1 John 2:7–11)

Commandments or precepts are rules that govern relationship. “*Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar*” (v. 4). Keeping his commandments is equated to walking as He walked (v. 7). But again, one must know how He walked and, greater still, to want to walk as He walked. This is where John takes us in dealing with new and old commandments (vv. 7–11). He is very clear to tell us that the old commandment is the word (v. 7). This takes us back to the *shema* (Hebrew word meaning “hear”—“*Hear, O Israel*”) of Deuteronomy 6:4–9.

After reiterating the ten “*words*” (*dabar*, commandments; Ex. 20:1; 24:3, 8; Deut. 4:36), Moses admonished the people, “*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart*” (6:6). This is what John meant when he said that “*The old commandment is the word that you have heard*” (1 Jno. 2:7). The “*new*” commandment has to do with its *freshness*, not its content. The difference between the old and new is what is true in Him and now also true in you “*because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining*” (v. 8). Although the Holy Spirit is not specifically mentioned here, this change from darkness to light—from ignorance to understanding is possible only through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15–17, 26). As believers live “*in Him*,” the Spirit enables them to “*walk*” or live out the commandments in the light of truth and understanding. Love and light go together as do darkness and hatred (v. 11). Hatred is not doing what is right for your brother; love does what is right. By doing right, we love God when we do it in obedience to Him.

The focus is on *relationship*: “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*” (Deut. 6:5). To *know* (1 John 2:13) someone is to love them, and a loving relationship must be maintained. How do we do this? Deuteronomy 6:6 tells us. For His words to be “*on your heart*” means that we *cherish* what He has enabled us to understand. The evidence of this cherishing is that (1) one teaches them diligently to those closest to him, (2) talks about them constantly, and (3) uses any and all legitimate means to keep them visually before him (Deut. 6:7–9).

Do you notice that loving the Lord and cherishing His words in your heart naturally leads to interacting with those closest to you? This truth is clearly illustrated in Christ’s high priestly prayer for His own (John 17:23–26; notice v. 26 in particular). To make one’s name “*known*” is to reveal the person and character of the one who owns the name. The purpose for this revelation is that “*the love with which you have loved me may be in them.*” Jesus’ love for the Father impelled Him to bring others to know that love. That is what John is telling us in the text before us. Knowing the Father must result in our longing to share that life with the people whom He has loved as He has loved us.

14.

The Bigger Picture (1 John 2:12–16)

As the believer grows in spiritual maturity, one truth that emerges with growing clarity is what it means to know the Father and His goal for the believer. We tend to limit relational truth to a fuzzy notion of personal connection in varying degrees. However, John is providing a much larger picture of God’s intention in our knowing Him—Christ likeness (3:2; Col. 3:12–17). Forgiveness and freedom from the guilt of sin is foundational to experience the Christ-like life that God intends. Forgiveness provides the freedom needed to progressively engage that life fully by overcoming the evil one and his plan that humans can be their own god (Gen. 3:5). In light of this John announces to the young men, “*You are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one*” (v. 14). The third verb (“*have overcome*”) is perfect indicative active, which indicates past action that has continuing effects. The Greek term translated *overcome* is *nikao*, meaning “to prevail,” “to conquer,” or “to be victorious.” This term appears six times in this epistle (2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4, 5).

It is not enough merely to be forgiven. We must overcome that which has contributed to our need for forgiveness. Sin is the relationship breaker (3:1–8). Sinning belongs to the work of the devil, and “*the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil*” (3:8b). Iniquity (*anomia*) is the devil’s means to energize his seed war against God, which has raged from the beginning (3:8a). The Son of God came to destroy this iniquity-force by giving His own the victory (*nikao*, 5:4, 5) over them.

Notice also how the world is connected to this purpose. The first mention (2:2) is about Jesus’ dying for the sins of the whole world. It can get confusing when we read that God loved the world (John 3:16) and that Christ died for the world (1 John 2:2) but we are warned not to love the world (2:15–17). The confusion comes because we do not understand how John is using the term. Simply understood, *world* stands for the created order—created by God and for His glory (Isa. 49:3).

The works of the devil relate to his deceiving Adam whom God intended to rule the world for Him (Psa. 8:4–6). By this deception, the devil usurped that rule for his own purposes (4:19). Jesus came to stop the theft by rendering useless the power that the evil one needs to keep and advance his control.

Again, we ask, should we not love what God loves? Yes, but in this case we love the world by joining Christ in His work to recover the world for God. It is the world under the devil’s control that we are not to love, because, in loving it, we help the devil to maintain his grip. The devil-controlled world order and all connected with it is doomed to judgment. Only those doing the will of God endure forever. Who do you love?

15.

The World (1 John 2:15–17)

In verse 2 we read that Christ is a propitiation (an appeasement and satisfaction of justice) for the sins of the whole world. This statement is taken by interpreters of Scripture to mean that Christ paid the sin debt for every single person who has ever lived and sinned on earth and throughout all history. The problem with this interpretation is that the verse does not say that. It says that He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole *world* (*cosmos*). The Greek word is used of a system with harmonious arrangement. This is seen in 1 Peter 3:3 where it is translated “adorning.” That concept is carried into our English by the term *cosmetics*.

God created a harmonious and well-arranged *temporal* realm or dimension that is called earth or world. In the OT, the Hebrew *tebel* is translated world (1 Sam. 2:8; Job 34:13). The text in Job reveals the fact that *tebel* is a synonym of the more frequently used word *earth* (*erets*—found 2504 times compared to only 35 occurrences of *tebel*).

It is only by extension that *world* refers to mankind, being earth’s proper inhabitants (Gen. 6:11, 12; Psa. 33:8; 46:10; 42:2; 69:34). The Hebrew language is concrete, whereas Greek is more philosophical. New Testament (Greek) writers seek to balance these two elements. The more philosophical Greek concept of *world* prevails in NT passages. Nevertheless, the OT concept of earth as land, the geographical location of mankind, remains the basis for understanding the concept of *world* (Psa. 2:2, 8, 10). Thus, *world* is real estate divided into countries and realms. By extension, the *world* relates the ruling power—the authorities and powers relating to the government of individual territories, countries, *etc.* (Deut. 32:8).

This understanding is the only way that one can make sense of John’s use of *world* in this epistle. In other words, Christ’s being a propitiation for the whole world is not meant to be universal with respect to individual persons, but persons of all regions, and not just Israel. Christ is the Savior of sinners from every division (language, family, ethic, and political) of humankind (Rev. 5:9, 10).

This also explains why John commands us not to love the world (1 John 2:15). In this sense, *world* defines the present philosophical power that controls all humans on the earth (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1–3; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:9; 16:14). Because of the fall in Genesis 3, Satan hijacked the earth from Adam to be his domain (Luke 4:5–8).

In closing this article, we need to be reminded of what it means to *love*. Scripture clearly uses the verb in the *active* sense. *Love* is something we do. When we seek to the good of worldly things, we set our affection on them, and value them. However, the Lord is to be our focus and His person and will be prized in our esteem. When our affections are centered in Him, we work at establishing His values in our personal lives and in our environments (Col. 3:2). To love the world (as controlled by Satan) is to be God’s enemy (James 4:4).

16.

Love Not (1 John 2:15–17)

As we noted earlier, John's declared purpose in writing this epistle is to plead with the reader not to sin (2:1). Jesus propitiated the sins of His people and serves as their advocate (vv. 1, 2). No one understanding this truth deliberately keeps on sinning. So, how does one keep from sinning? The answer is clear: we know him when we keep his commandments (v. 3). If sin is defined as lawlessness (3:4), then keeping the law of Christ is to sin not.

Keeping the Lord's commandments is not something we do to earn His favor. Rather, it is His favor (grace) to sinners that enables them to keep His commandments. This enablement is further strengthened by our knowing (a relational term) the Lord (vv. 5, 6).

However, what is often missed is that knowing Him is also a *community* thing. Abiding in Him involves His body, the church. If we know Him (salvifically) we have become members of His body. Therefore, it is very important that believers assemble (Heb. 10:24, 25). Assembling is not church attendance; it is operating as a body, each part dependent on that which other parts provide (1 Cor. 12:24–26). That is loving one another as Christ loved us, and it is the heart of John's message.

I was struck by the title of a blog article: "Christianity Is Not about a Personal Relationship with Jesus."* The author argued that Christianity is not about individual relationship to Jesus; it is church relationship. We were all baptized into *one* body (Eph. 4:1–6). We are encouraged to pray, "*Our* [not my] *Father who art in heaven. . . .*"

There are but three divisions of mankind: Jew, Gentile, and the church (1 Cor. 10:32). Christ's blood bought the church (Act 20:28). All the gifts of grace are given to the church (1 Cor. 12:28) for the church (2 Cor. 8:1). Indeed, the God who put all things under Christ's feet and made Him head over all things has given Him to the church (Eph. 1:22, 23). Every gift that benefits the spiritual life of the saints has been given to them through the church (Eph. 4:7–16). It is the church that God has made to be the window for displaying His multifaceted wisdom to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (Eph. 3:10). It is in Christ through the church that God will be glorified throughout all generations (Eph. 3:21).

So, if someone claims to have a relationship with Jesus Christ but does not obey Him, that one is lying (1 John 2:4). To know Christ is to love Him, and you love Him by caring for His body, the church. That love is demonstrated by keeping His commandment to love one another. However, the temptation for all of us is to think that we can love Christ and still love the world. The world is based on individualism and self-indulgence. It operates on the lie that the Devil sold Eve in the Garden—you can be your own god. You cannot live that philosophy in Christ's body.

*Chad Bird, www.chadbird.com, 4/26/17

17.

In Whom Do You Lie? (1 John 2:15–17)

John closes his epistles with three powerful summary statements beginning with “*we know*” (5:18–20). As we have noted, John’s purpose in this epistle is to exhort the children of God not to sin (2:1). Thus, he closes the epistle by stating the fact that the child of God does not keep on sinning, first, because “*He who was born of God [the man Jesus Christ] protects him.*” So, what or whom does Christ protect His child from so that he does not continually sin? It is the “*evil one;*” the one who cannot touch or make effective contact with the child of God. Second, John answers the question of why Jesus protects His children from the evil one. The rest, the world, “*lies in the power of the evil one*” (5:19). The Greek is more specific. “*The whole world lies in the evil one.*” Third, the Son of God came and has given His children understanding about how and why things are the way they are in order that His children may *know* Him, that is, *love* Him. This is true because His children are “*in Him who is true, in Jesus Christ*” (5:20), unlike the world that lies *in* the evil one.

The world sins because it *lies* in the evil one and, therefore, does not know (love) the Father or the Son (3:1). The verb used here, *lies* (*keimai*), is unusual, speaking either to the inability of those subjected to the evil one or to their unwillingness to assert themselves to be free of him. Jesus, as Savior, did confront the evil one: “*The ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me [why?], but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father*” (John 14:30, 31). Do you hear what Jesus said? His obedience provided the means for the Spirit of God to work for the destruction of the evil one’s power (John 16:7–11). That is why John exhorts the children not to love the world.

To love the world is to identify with the world as it lies in the power of the evil one. The evidence that the evil one has control is that one does his will, which is to sin and keep on sinning. The means that Satan uses to maintain his control is lust or desire—that longing for what one thinks is necessary to be fulfilled and satisfied. That is why the very last line in this epistle warns the little children, “*Keep yourselves from idols*” (5:21). To know and love God through obedience is to understand that there is no satisfaction in sinning. The person and will of God must be the sole source of fulfillment and happiness (2:17).

There is a very subtle deception that Satan works in the lives of Christians. That deception lies in convincing the believer that God wants His people fulfilled and happy with what is in the world. Their conscience is quieted by the false idea that their desires are right because they depend on God to provide them. Tragically, this quest is both incompatible with God’s love and its realization is temporary. Only those who *do* the will of God abide forever.

18.

The Spirit of Antichrist (1 John 18–27)

Following the flow of John’s argument, remember that his main focus is that God’s children are not to sin (2:1). In developing his thought, John first encourages us with the truth that we have an advocate with the Father, the very One whom God sent to propitiate our sins (2:1, 2). Second, John reminds us that to know Christ is to keep His word because this is the means whereby God perfects us in love (2:4). Keeping His word involves living in the same way He did—abiding in Christ (2:5, 6, 28).

Obedience to Christ’s law is how we demonstrate that we know Him and are abiding in Him (2:7–14). However, a grave danger to our living out the Christian life is that we live in the world. The world is a highly organized system of rebellion against God, operating through strong desires of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life (2:15–17). The world also willingly lies under the power and control of the evil one (5:19). To live under the world’s influence (to love the world) is to remain outside the love of the Father. Only one who does the will of the Father abides forever (5:17).

Next, John develops the temporary flow of history, reminding his readers that it was a *last hour* (2:18). The Greek has no definite article before *last*. The term *hour* (used only here) relates to a period of time in history. The eschatological period that ends history is called “*the last days*” (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3) or “*the end of the age*” (Matt. 13:39ff; 24:3; 1 Cor. 10:11).

Last hour signifies a crisis point at which that period ends and a new era begins. John was not thinking of the end of history but that a crisis at the time he wrote indicated a point at which a new period was about to commence. All crisis periods cause people to wonder if their last hour could be *the* last hour. We know that in the last hour the Antichrist will come (2 Thess. 2:3). In John’s last hour many antichrists were present. This brings us to ask, what was the crisis of his hour, and what constitutes an antichrist?

The term *antichrist* is composed of the preposition, *anti* (*over against* or *in place of*) and *Christ* (*anointed one*); that is, one who claims that he is in the light (1:7) but is really in the darkness. “*They went out from us*” (2:19). The *they* refers to the antichrists. What they went out from is somewhat uncertain. Perhaps the *us* might be better understood as true believers, those who walk in the truth and light, as opposed to false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1).

They went out from us because they were not “*of us*”—of the truth. This is supported by verse 21: “*No lie is of the truth.*” These antichrists denied that Jesus was the Christ, rejecting both Father and Son (v. 22). Satan is a deceiver (Rev. 12:9). His agents are deceivers (1 John 2:26); however, God’s Spirit has given His own an anointing to know the truth (vv. 20, 27).

19.

The Spirit of Antichrist, Part Two (1 John 2:18–27)

Previously we addressed “last hour” (2:18, no definite article) that John warned his readers had come upon them. This reference must not be confused with the last days (Acts 2:17, quoting Joel 2:28; see also 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3), the period of time from the resurrection of Jesus Christ until His second coming. This last hour (a Greek term used only in this verse) is a period of crisis which ends one era to begin a new era. According to the testimony of the church fathers (before A.D. 67), John joined other believers in fleeing Jerusalem, as per Christ’s warning in His Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:15ff), settling near pagan Ephesus. It is most likely John recognized the new crisis coming with the Roman Domitian persecutions, his epistle being written to prepare the believers of that time (the A.D. 90s).

We should also note Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 also must be understood as teaching the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, answering the question of the disciples about His declaration of its destruction (Matt. 24:2, 3). However, there is a second meaning in these words that pertains to a future “hour” preceding His return (Matt. 24:36–44).

Just as Jesus warned against deception (and believe me, there is plenty around to deceive us), John also warned us not to be deceived (2:26). Satan desires to render believers ineffective by keeping them in ignorance or in sinful living. He will bring false believers and false teachers to infect the body. When these false believers are exposed by the light, they depart from the body (2:19). Unless a believer is spiritually aligned with Christ and His will through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit (2:20, 21, 27), he is susceptible to the lies of antichrists (2:22). When, through the power of the Spirit, one receives and believes the truth, keeping away from sin and temptation, the truth abides in him. We are to let that truth abide in us as it empowers us to abide in Christ (2:24, 25, 27).

When one denies Christ, according to the term used here, he may do so on two levels: (1) he may simply say “no” to Jesus. No one who claims to be a believer can say that, for he has, at some point, said “yes” to Jesus. Thus, (2) the denial is a refusal to acknowledge the claims of the Christ. There are two classifications of people in the world: those live according to the world and those who should live according to the will of God (2:15–17). One either abides in the world system or they abide in the Son. True believers, however, may be deceived and remain in the world system. That is why John admonishes believers to “*love not the world*” and to “*abide in him*.” When the truth abides in us, then we will abide in Him and have “*have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming*” (2:28). Since we do not know when Christ is coming, we must always be ready. To abide in Him is the sure way to dodge any embarrassment when He comes.

20.

Abide in Him (1 John 2:28, 29)

Having declared to his Christian readers that they are not to sin (2:1), John explains that obedience is the means whereby Christians keep from sinning (2:3–6). This obedience is described as *abiding* (*meno*—as relating to time, place, and condition: to dwell, to continue, to remain in a place, to stay, to remain unchanged, to endure, to persevere, and to wait). This abiding marks a disciple of Christ (John 8:31) because the ability to obey correctly and consistently rests on the abiding presence of Christ and His Spirit in the believer (John 14:10, 12–17; 25).

Abiding in Him (2:28) can be defined as conscious submission to Christ and His purpose for the believer (“*the will of God*,” 2:17) through faith (“*walking*,” 2:6) and a loving relationship to Christ (2:4). This relationship is informed by the Word of God and empowered by the Spirit of God. Thus, an abiding believer practices righteousness (2:29). This is due to his obedience as the believer, demonstrating conformity to Christ. However, we must be careful because obedience is not a *means* for one to be right with God but rather the proof that he is already right with God. It reveals a relationship built on submissive love to and identification with Christ (John 14:15). It shows that one’s claim to new birth is valid (2:29).

In John 15 Jesus used a vineyard to illustrate the truth that believers cannot bear real spiritual fruit unless they, as branches, abide (remain) connected to the life-source, the true Vine (15:4). Bearing fruit is the natural work of the vine. The branch does not bear fruit in order to get into the vine or to prove its sincerity to the vine. Rather, fruit is the evidence that the branch is abiding in the vine. This reliance on the vine in bearing fruit brings joy to the believer and glorifies the Father (John 15:8–11).

Thus, the obedience of abiding demonstrates the relationship we have with Jesus and the necessary relationships with others in Christ that our connection involves (2:10). Abiding is the means that God uses to wean us off self. Love is self-sacrificing because it is others focused. Paul Tripp had an article in his *Wednesday’s Word* (5/31, by email) entitled “Deconstructing the Kingdom of Self.” In it he offered questions to ask based on five manifestations of self: (1) self-focus, the root of selfishness; (2) self-righteousness, the root of pride and judgment; (3) self-satisfaction, the root of discontentment; (4) self-reliance, the root of independence; (5) self-rule, the root of one’s god-complex.

We are to abide in Him so that when He returns, we may have confidence and not shrink in shame when we are to appear before Him. This abiding keeps us from the deception of antichrists. It keeps us from loving the world because we are not distracted from doing the will of God, by which we abide forever.

21.

Discernment and Deception (1 John 2:18–29)

As we have before noted, John is warning his believing readers, whom he calls “children” (2:1) of three things. First, they are warned that the identifying mark of a true believer is his obediently loving other believers (vv. 7–14). Second, they are warned against loving the destructive world in which they live as controlled by the anti-God world system, corrupted flesh, and the devil (vv. 15–17). Only those who do the will of God abide forever. Third, they are warned against the deception of contemporary antichrists (vv. 18–25).

One very important point that we must not miss is that John is addressing the believing *community* who are in Christ, His church. The individuals affected by antichrists went out from “us,” the true community (v. 19). In contrast, the remaining believers, the true community, has been given for its protection an anointing of discernment from the Holy Spirit (vv. 20, 27). The “you” of verses 20 and following is *plural*. Individuals (and even whole bodies of individuals) can be deceived even if they are true believers (v. 26; see also Matt. 24:4; 23, 24; 2 Thess. 2:3; Rom. 16:18). However, Jesus protects His church, even though some, because they carelessly fail to hold the anointing proved, may stumble for a time.

So, how can we avoid being taken in by an antichrist? We are to “*abide in Him*” (vv. 27b, 28). In other words, stay put in the Christ and His community where the anointing abides in and teaches us. This anointing prepares His own for His return so that they will experience the eternal life promised to them (vv. 25, 28).

John identifies antichrists as liars—those who operate outside the truth and who deny that Jesus is the Christ (vv. 21–23). Antichrists imitate the true Christ in order to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Thus, the Good Shepherd, Christ, has provided His own with the anointing (a *christos*) by the Holy One—the Spirit (v. 20). By this anointing they have all knowledge to discern and escape Satan’s deception. Again, John tells us exactly what to look for: “*If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him*” (v. 29).

The term *Christ* (*Christos*) means “anointed one,” the Greek form of the Hebrew *mashiyach* (1 Sam. 2:10; Psa. 2:2). He is the promised fulfillment of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15; see John 4:25; 29; 17:3). Since Satan was unable to prevent His coming into the world, the deceiver has turned his attention to stealing, killing, and destroying Christ’s work. This is the mystery of iniquity that Paul warned about (2 Thess. 2:3–8).

22.

Duty in Light of Destiny (1 John 2:26–3:3)

From the dark side there are those who are deceiving fallen humanity in order to prevent them from knowing God. Tragically, this deception includes many professing Christians. They profess a relationship with God; however, deep down, they know something is amiss. Although they claim life and light, they know only darkness and emptiness. Pride, which the deceiver utilizes to perfect his work in damning their souls, prevents them from honestly owning their true condition. They simply cannot bring themselves to humble their hearts before God and to cry to Him for mercy.

Even true saints must be aware and alert to the deceivers, whose business is to hinder the advance of the Kingdom and hobble the soldiers of the cross in final conflict before the glorious appearing of the Christ. However, John assures us that we have an anointing—an innate *knowing* through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and protect us. Yet, if we are not abiding in Him—maintaining a relationship with Him—we can be side-tracked and ineffective in our service.

John directs us to keep abiding in Christ so that we may have confidence and not shame when He appears. This is our assurance that we are born of Him because we persist in righteousness. To encourage this abiding, John points to the love the Father has shown us in calling us sons of God. We are sons of God now but we are not now like Jesus. However, when He appears, we will be like Him because we will *see* (fully comprehend: *cf.* Job 19:26, 27 and 42:5, 6) Him as He is.

John speaks of our *knowing* the truth (2:20, 21). On the other hand, he speaks of the world not *knowing* Christ (3:1). There are two different Greek terms used here. The world does not *know* (*ginosko*) God, but believers do *know* (*oida*) Him. In John 8:55 Jesus said to the Jews who claimed God as theirs that they did not know (*ginosko*) Him but that Jesus did know (*oida*) Him. The Jews did not perceive the Father as He is while Jesus perceived Him fully, having relational knowledge of the Father. Another example is Matthew 7:23 where Jesus will say to many seeking approval at judgment day, “*I never knew (ginosko) you,*” meaning, “*I have never related to you in a way to approve you.*” In Matthew 25:12 Jesus tells the foolish virgins, “*I do not know (oida) you,*” meaning that they stood in no relationship to Him because they were not *prepared* to do so.

Oida is a perceptual knowledge in the fullest sense, particularly in relationship. *Ginosko*, on the other hand suggests a knowing that comes short of relationship. Another way to understand the difference is in the process of learning. One may be studying something and puzzling over a subject (*ginosko*). But suddenly understanding kicks in, and he exclaims, “Now I see!” (*oida*). This knowing produces a longing and hope of being like Jesus, and that longing will drive us to pursue purity which identifies us with Him who is pure.

23.

What Kind of Love (1 John 3:1–3)

John demands that his reader focus on a startling, unbelievable, but glorious truth: “*See, (look at and consider; oida) what kind (quality) of love (agape, active love vs. phileo, responsive love; Titus 2:4) the Father has given (or granted; John 1:12) in order for us to be called sons (teknon; male progeny or posterity) of God and so we are*” (1 John 3:1).

Let this truth seize your soul. God has made it possible for some to be His descendants, inheriting and enjoying all that the Father has and is. What a privilege. How many “Christians” are there who want only to escape punishment and gain heaven at death? The relationship that John describes here is so much more than that offered by typical soul-winners.

Sons of God uniquely refers to beings that have their creation through the direct act of God. In the Old Testament the *sons of God* were angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Deut. 32:8; Gen. 6:1, 4). The only exception before Christ was Adam, who was created directly by God (Gen. 2:7; Luke 3:38). Jesus was *born* into the world as the truly unique Son (*huios*) of God (Luke 1:35; Matt. 4:3, 6; 16:16; John 11:4, 27). Believers can never be the *huios* of God, but because of Christ, we are the *teknon* of God—through union and adoption, but we are no less truly heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (John 8:15–17).

This declaration of sonship (vv. 1, 2) comes at this point as part of John’s argument begun in 2:1. We are not to practice sin because (1) Jesus is sinless and we are to be like Him. (2) We are under Christ’s new commandment (vv. 7–14). (3) We are no longer part of the world system (that which is in rebellion against God and bent on establishing a new order without Christ; vv. 15–17). (4) We have discernment and Spirit-enabled knowledge to understand and avoid the power behind this rebellious antichrist world system that denies both Father and Son (vv. 18–26). (5) We have a responsibility to abide in Jesus so that when He returns to avenge this antichrist rebellion, we will have confidence and not shrink back (vv. 28, 29). (6) We are now children of God and the world cannot know us (3:1–3).

Not only is it God’s intention to take some of fallen humanity and adopt them as His own progeny, this status is *now* (v. 2)! We do not need to wait for Christ’s appearing for this to be a reality; one becomes a child of God at his rebirth, his salvation. Because of this powerful truth, the world does not know us (the *teknon*) because it does not know Jesus (*the huios of God*). When Christ does appear, His children will then be instantly changed into His likeness because we shall “see” Him as He is (3:2; 1 Cor. 15:50–52).

24.

Sin and Lawlessness (1 John 3:4–10)

How does one know for certain that he is saved by Christ and is a child of God? This question is answered in the following verses as John continues the argument that God's children are not to sin (2:1). We are waiting for Jesus to return as promised (2:28). In the meantime we must beware of Satan's ploy to deceive God's children by introducing antichrists (2:18–27). The believer protects himself by abiding (remaining) in Christ—consciously focusing on the truth received by the anointing of the Holy Spirit (2:26). In the text before us, John elaborates on this truth.

We have the hope of full transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ but only when He returns and we “*see Him as He is*” (3:2). When this hope thrives in the believer, “*he purifies himself as [Christ] is pure*” (v. 3; Rom. 8:13). Purifying is a ceremonial act to prepare one for service to God in worship (Gen. 35:2; Num. 8:21; Isa. 52:11; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

In verses 4–10, John answers three questions: (1) *what* does this purifying look like, (2) *whom* does this work pertain, and (3) *why* is it important? To answer these questions, other terms need to be understood: *practicing, sinning, lawlessness, righteousness, and seed*.

First, observe the comparison of verses 3 and 4. *Hoping* is paralleled with *practicing*. One who hopes in Christ practices *righteousness* (what harmonies with God's law), which is evidence of his *abiding* in Him (2:28, 29). *Abiding* (present imperative) is commanded of us because it is enabled in us by His Spirit (2:20, 27) through regeneration (2:29). In contrast, one who makes a practice of sinning (defiling himself) is not abiding in Him (3:6) and is, thus, not being His child (3:9).

Sinning is defined as practicing lawlessness (*anomia; iniquity; 3:4*). Lawlessness and righteousness are opposite “*works*.” Lawlessness is rebelliously living outside of God's rules—His will for us. Righteousness is obedience to God's will and rule. Habitual sinning identifies one with the works of the devil and being his child (3:10). Habitual righteousness identifies one as a child of God.

To continue to practice sinning means that one remains in the power and control of the devil because that is what the devil does. Jesus' first appearing was for the purpose of destroying the “*works*” of the devil (3:8). Bear this in mind, sinning is identified with Satan's rebellion, and those who practice sinning identify with Satan in that rebellion. On the other hand, no one born of God continues to practice sinning because God's “*seed*” (*sperma*, God's DNA) is in him since God is his Father (3:9). This truth goes back to Genesis 3:15 (3:10; *cf.* John 8:39–44). Therefore, to answer the question that introduced this article, one need's only evaluate his life by identifying his works—practicing righteousness or sinning.

25.

Sons of God (1 John 3:4–10)

It may seem that John shifts from one subject to another in this letter: (1) The message we have heard (1:5–10); (2) Christ our advocate (2:1–6); (3) The new commandment (2:7–14); (4) Love not the world (2:15–17); (5) Beware of antichrists (2:18–27); (6) behave like children of God (2:28–3:10); and so forth. The fact is, there is one message with various aspects. That message is “*the life [eternal life] made manifest*” in order for us to have “*fellowship [full integration of life in Christ] with God*” (1:1–4). Now, for us to benefit fully from this life (that “*our joy may be complete,*” 1:4) we must walk in the light; not sin; keep His commandments; avoid the world, antichrists, and such; and behave like His children.

On the negative side, whoever “*makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness*” (3:4). In other words, sinning is breaking His commandments. Christ appeared to take away the sins that resulted from violating His commandments. None of those sins was in Him (3:5). If you know Him and keep in fellowship with Him (abide in Him), then you cannot keep on sinning (v. 6). Do not be deceived or deceive yourself. Fellowship with Christ requires that one walk in righteousness, confessing sin (1:9) and keeping His commandments (2:4). That person will experience the perfected love of God (2:5). Simply stated, we are to walk as He walked (2:6).

Here is a black-and-white issue. Sinning is of the devil, being introduced into the human race in the beginning (3:7). The judgment of the devil requires a child of the woman to come and put a stop to his nefarious deeds (3:8; Gen. 3:15). How does Jesus destroy the works of the devil? He does it by creating a new creature that will not practice sinning (3:9). God reorders his DNA—His seed (*sperma*). This new genetics (*gennaos*, “to be born of”) makes it impossible for the child (*teknos*) of God to act like a child of the devil (John 8:44).

John’s point is that no one who has been born again, having become a child of God and having the Holy Spirit and the seed of God in him, can keep practicing sin and being lawless (v. 9). This fact clearly reveals the distinction between those who are children of the devil and those who are the children of God. The children of God practice righteousness because Jesus is righteous. Children of the devil practice sin because Satan practices sin. Whose child are you?

To clarify things even more, John adds that whoever does not love his brother is not of God (v. 10). John develops this truth in vv. 11–24, which we will deal with in future messages. Right now, however, understand that the root of sin is self. On who is focused on himself cannot love his neighbor. Love demands selflessness.

26.

What Loving the Brethren is not (1 John 3:11–15)

We enter a new section of John’s argument that believers must not sin (2:1). This section (3:11–24) actually continues and expands on what was covered in 2:7–11. In a real sense, we are shown two opposites: *sinning* over against *loving*. Sinning is selfish; loving is selfless.

The adversary, Satan, is set on destroying all that God is doing in the earth. He is a deceiver and a liar, often appearing as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Jesus said, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy*” (John 10:10). In contrast, Jesus said, “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*.” The thief is Satan, and he has his agents who operate within the sheepfold in order to disrupt and destroy the sheep. On the other hand, Jesus came “*to destroy the works of the devil*” (3:8). He does this through a new creation (1 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). This is what John is describing in this epistle—what the new creation looks like and how it operates.

Here is a very important truth: one is both selfishly sinning and advancing Satan’s efforts to destroy the sheep or he is selflessly serving Christ by loving the brethren. Christ-followers are His agents to further His agenda of *abundant life*, blessing and helping all around him through humble, sacrificial, selfless, and loving service.

One of Satan’s deceitful ploys is getting believers to think that *sinning* is doing immoral and illegal things that are quite obvious. The rich young ruler, for example, thought himself to be okay because he kept the obvious commandments of second table of the law (murder, adultery, stealing, and lying; Matt. 19:16–30). His pride blinded him to the fact that he was guilty of violating the first commandment and that his wealth was his god. Jesus demands that we follow Him in humble submission in every area.

Sadly, the deceiver tricks many Christians to likewise set their own markers to evaluate their spiritual progress. Like the young ruler, they often conclude, “*All these have I kept. What do I still lack?*” (v. 20). When Jesus asks of them the seemingly impossible, they slip away grieving because their pride gets in the way of obedience.

John begins by showing what love is not. Cain and Abel illustrate the point. That might seem a little extreme, but the point here is whether a professed believer acts more like Cain than Abel. Cain’s jealous rage was retaliation against God’s rejection of his offering. However, hatred need not be expressed in such a violent way. Hatred manifests itself when one simply ignores a brother because of some difference of opinion. It need not be a skull-smashing stone. It can be a snide and derogatory comment. It can be just doing *nothing* when Christ expects selfless, sacrificial, service to another in His name. Not loving is hatred. Whoever does not love (hates) his brother is “*a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him*” (v. 15). Ouch.

27.

Not a New Thing (1 John 3:11–15)

The teachings of Jesus are the substance of “*the message that you have heard from the beginning*” (v. 11). John was not teaching a new message (2:7–9). The evil nature of humans is to seek constantly for some new thing (Acts 17:21). This message is not a new thing. If it is regarded as new, the newness is due to the passing darkness due to the ever-increasing light of truth and righteousness. The test to show where one is walking in the light is simple: how do you regard others? John summarizes the teachings of Jesus: “*that we should love one another*” (v. 11).

What does love look like? John approached the subject by first showing us what love is not, setting forth the example of Cain (v. 12). Cain is mentioned only three times in the NT (Heb. 11:4, 1 John 3:12, and Jude 11). The story of Cain is told in Genesis 4. The first son born to Adam and Eve was received with great expectation. Did she think that Cain was the promised seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15)? Eve announced, “*I have gotten a man from the LORD.*” This phrase has resulted in a number of interpretations (beyond the scope of this article). What we want to note is that she gave this declaration to explain her naming of this son *Cain* (*Qayin*, which is a sound play on the verb *qaniti*, “I have obtained” from *qanah*; “to obtain or acquire”). She referred to the divine name, Yahweh, the God who keeps His promises. In Exodus 6:3, 4 we have an explanation of the divine names. God appeared to Abraham as El Shaddai, the God who gives fertility. Yahweh is the name of God who keeps covenant and promises. Eve calls Him Yahweh. She believed that Cain was the fulfillment of a covenant promise. How wrong she was.

Tragically, this son was fathered by fallen Adam, who “*fathered a son after his image*” (Gen. 5:3). Cain, in the image of Adam, “*was of the evil one.*” Only two kinds of people live on earth. Those who are born of the flesh operate in their nature and follow the evil one. Those who have been born anew by the Spirit follow after righteousness. Cain murdered his brother because he was jealous. Jealousy is a disposition of soul that protects self. Carnal people relate to others by putting self first. They can be very nice people as long as self is favorably treated. Anything that threatens self in any way will be met with anger and resentment. Abel’s acceptance before God resulted in Cain’s jealous anger, especially in light of his rejection. God mercifully provided a second chance (Gen. 4:6, 7) but he refused to repent and obey God. Jealousy led to hatred, which led to murder. John describes the consequence of self—evil deeds (v. 12). These deeds may be simply ignoring another while inwardly fuming with rage. Anger may evidence in biting and cruel words, hurtful gossip, vengeful plans, or injurious acts. Anger is always hate-driven, which, Jesus argued, is nothing less than murder (Matt. 5:21, 22).

28.

By This We Know (1 John 3:16–18)

After showing us what love is not (1 John 3:11–15), John now turns to what real love is at verse 16. Remember, John is answering the question about how we may know that we have eternal life (vv. 4–10). Love provides the distinguishing marker (v. 10) and the marker relates to practice living right (righteousness). The opposite is the practice of sinning, which is of the devil (v. 8). The example is Cain “*who was of that evil one*” (v. 12) who hated then murdered his brother. Sinning is evidence that one is controlled by the devil. The sinless Jesus *appeared* the first time to take away sin (v. 5). He will appear a second time to complete His redemptive work (vv. 2, 3). Those who have this hope will, in the meantime, actively seek to purify themselves because He is pure (v. 3). This purifying work relates to selfless love.

One may know one is a true believer because he loves (v. 14), which sets him over against those who, like Cain, do not love (vv. 12, 15). Those in the world do not love the saints (v. 13). Believers, however, love each other as Christ loved them (v. 16). Thus, love is recognized by selfless sacrifice. John applies this fact in a practical way—opening one’s purse to relieve the needs of others (v. 17; see also James 1:26, 27; 2:8, 9, 14–17). James adds to our understanding by teaching us that keeping the commandments is definitely connected to loving one’s neighbor because it does them no harm (James 2:10–13).

Here, however, we need to be very careful. Self can deceitfully work its way into this scenario. When one intellectually accepts the premise that sacrificial service is the proof of regeneration, the flesh will seek to mimic real love. This is exalts self. On the other hand, selfless and sacrificial love fixes on the Lord first and, then, in obedience, seeks the welfare of others (Matt. 22:36–40). This kind of love does not exalt self but brings glory to God. Real love is the fruit of genuine spiritual life (vv. 19–24).

Jesus taught that some will own Him as Lord and will claim to have supernatural works as proof—prophecy, exorcisms, and miracles. However, Jesus will reject them because He does not *know* them (Matt. 7:21–23). It is not what these people said or did but how they did not relate to Jesus. *Knowing* is a relational term—an intimate relational term. Their supposed works for Jesus did not glorify Him. Only those who deny self to serve Christ in the will of the Father will enter the kingdom. When asked what they had to do to work the works of God, Jesus told the Pharisees that the work of God was to believe on Him (John 6:30, 31). They gave away their true condition by asking what He would do for them like Moses did for their fathers. Flesh elevates itself. The true believer elevates Christ.

29.

To Lay Down One's Life for Another (1 John 3:16)

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death" (1 John 3:14). Believers are not to be like Cain *"who was of the evil one"* (v. 12). Cain was the son of Adam in Adam's own image (Gen. 4:1; 5:3). Satan deceived Adam into disobeying God by (1) lying to him that he would not die as God warned him (Gen. 3:4), and (2) he would become like the *elohim* (the supernatural beings in the divine council—Psa. 82:1; Gen. 3:5). Why did Satan go after these newly created creatures in God's newly formed creation and to tempt them into sinning against their Creator?

In Psalm 8 we find a clue—God's purpose for Adam to have dominion over the work of His hands (vv. 4–6). Although created in the very image of God (Gen. 1:27) but *"a little lower than the heavenly beings [the elohim],"* God honored Adam by giving him this authority. Because of Adam's failure, this purpose was hijacked by Satan; after all, he is the *"god of this world"* (2 Cor. 4:4). God, however, transferred this authority to Jesus Christ, the last Adam (Heb. 2:5–9).

Perhaps Adam's authority caused Satan to succumb to jealousy. Ezekiel 28 addresses the Prince of Tyre and the evil power behind him, Satan. The Lord said to him, *"You were the signet of perfection [better, the shining one], full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden [that eliminates the king of Tyre], the garden of God . . . Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor"* (vv. 12, 13, 17). Satan's corrupted wisdom perverted his opinion of himself, thinking that to be in the image of God made him superior, to be served and made much of—his opinion of what god-ness should look like. Sadly, fallen humans have also fallen for that lie.

Jesus warned His followers not to mimic the rulers of the Gentiles by lording it over others but rather serving them (Matt. 20:27, 28). Jesus came to show us what God is really like by *servicing*, not lording. He laid down His life for us, and, if we are truly His, we must lay down our lives for others (1 John 3:16; see Phil. 2:1–11).

We naturally love to be regarded as important, and we jealously protect our perceived superiority over others. Every problem in the church with respect to relationships can be pinned to this cause. We are too easily offended when we are not recognized and appreciated. Anger and fear surface when our perceived importance is overlooked or threatened. *"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice"* (James 3:14–16).

30.

Our Confidence before God (1 John 3:19–24)

Being born again and having one's life in Jesus Christ and holding to His values have great advantages. We know that we are of the truth. There is so much falsehood in the world with conflicting claims to reality. All worldly knowledge has but one design—to provide false confidence through beliefs that prevent one from knowing to the truth. The gospel of Christ aims at the one part of the human complex that destroys this deceptive work of the evil one—the conscience.

In innocence the conscience is child-like in its confidence before authority. There is no guilt or shame, and the conscience is at peace. However, when guilt is present, confidence is lost and the soul hides because fear takes hold. Fear is the conscience's warning that certain penalties are impending. In self-protection, the soul withdraws in fear of the higher authority, be it parent, law, or God.

Conscience is the great asset in the Holy Spirit's glorious work of restoration, whether in saving the soul or the ongoing work of holiness. The conscience is a judge of sorts, sitting in the courtroom of the heart. When the Spirit brings conviction of sin, the conscience rules either in favor of the prosecution or against it. However, sometimes the conscience may be too sensitive with guilt still troubling a forgiven believer. In such a case there is a higher court to which one may appeal—“*God . . . [who] knows everything*” (v. 20). However, in a ruling of acquittal, one has confidence (peace) before the law (v. 21). Remember, though, that conscience is but a lower court. The greater assize awaits, and the highest tribunal overrides all lower courts (Acts 17:31, 32).

Courts operate to enforce law and dispense penalties for those who violate the law. Under the old covenant, the law was given to inform of sin and warn of sin's very harsh penalties. The Spirit uses law in the conscience to destroy all self-confidence and to bring the guilty to beg the mercy of God for the grace that alone can restore the soul before God. That is because Christ in His death purchased full salvation for those in whose stead He suffered. Through Christ guilt is purged and confidence is restored (Rom. 5:1).

John calls his readers “little children” (v. 18). This section (vv. 16–24) addresses the issue of the conscience in order to encourage believers that their King has graciously made them friends and children, not subjects and servants (John 15:15). Due to the grace of salvation, the severe aspects of the law have changed toward believers. God is now a Father before whom His children may live in confidence. They are free to ask and receive things from Him because they keep His commandments (the rules that a father make for his children for their good), and do what pleases Him. Children want to love and to please the Father (v. 22). In turn, the Father wants His children to trust in the “name” of His Son (meaning that believers lovingly and joyfully commit to what His Son is doing) and that they love one another (vv. 23, 24).

31.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error (1 John 4:1–6)

John closes Chapter 3 with: “*And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us*” (1 John 3:24). Then he opens Chapter 4 with a warning: “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits*” (1 John 4:1). God’s children are overcomers. They are not maybe overcomers someday if all goes well. John declares, “*You . . . have overcome* [perfect active indicative, meaning that you have already overcome them and continue to do so] *them* [the false spirits of the antichrists—v.3]” (v. 4). We are to live like overcomers. However, that does not mean that you cannot be fooled by the false spirits of antichrist. They are deceivers (2:26), so we need to be very alert and watchful so that we may not fall for the lies of the enemy.

There is one clear indicator to determine the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error (v. 6)—speech that betrays point of origin. The spirit of error is from the world and speaks the language that worldly people hear (v. 5). The Spirit of truth is from God and those that are from God hear Him. Each group listens (*akouo*, to listen with understanding and comprehension) and their comprehension is shown by the action they take. John argues that those from God behave in a way that shows that they are from God. Love is the language of heaven. It enables those whose nature is self-centeredness to die to self and live to benefit others (3:16–18).

Beware. The spirit of error uses a false love-language. The difference is subtle. For example, homosexual sin is condemned in Scripture, but there are many voices that are urging Christians in the name of love to be tolerant and accepting of those who practice this sin. Being tolerant and accepting allows one to feel good and to protect oneself from appearing hateful and bigoted. This false love is self-promoting while appearing Christian. We test the spirit by comparing our thinking with Scripture that promotes real love by condemning sin and glorifying Christ. Truly loving someone requires one to pursue another’s freedom from sin and its consequences through the power of the Spirit (3:16).

In Revelation 12 there are three scenes concerning the spiritual war that God is waging with the dragon. The third scene (vv. 13–17) describes the dragon’s activity during the gospel age. God’s protection of the woman (the covenant community of faith) frustrates Satan, who, in fury, makes war on “*the rest of her offspring*”—the individual believers who keep His commandments and the testimony of Jesus (that He “*has come in the flesh,*” v. 2). Therefore, know that Satan is coming after you, but understand that you are already an overcomer, even when it does not appear so. You are here to demonstrate God’s power over the enemy, holding ground already won by Jesus Christ until He either takes you in death or comes again. Your responsibility is to fight the good fight, watching and praying, and dying to self by killing the deeds of the flesh.

32.

Test the Spirits (1 John 4:1–6)

The religious segment of the internet has been feverish for a long time over the signs that the end of the world was near. September 23 with its constellation alignment preceded by the extraordinary solar eclipse convinced many that something big was going down on or near that date. Other doomsday advocates were warning that Planet X, Nibiru, would be appearing and passing by to rain unimagined destruction on earth (Rev. 8:10). Adding to the frenzy was the fact that the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah (beginning the Jewish year 5778), was to be celebrated the evening of September 20, 2017. The New Year is also known as *Yom Teru'ah*, a day of sounding the Shofar (the last trumpet?). Not only that, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) begins at sundown September 29. With all this, September 2017 certainly must mean something.

The silence of those certain that the rapture of the church was to take place on the 23rd is deafening. If the tribulation period began that day, it is a very quiet apocalypse so far. As one meme testified, “Boo, that was the worst apocalypse ever!”

This is exactly what John warns about: “*Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (4:1). The tragedy of these false prophets (many of whom claimed to get their information directly from God through visions and dreams) is that their failed predictions only confuse, frustrate, and discourage their followers, an end that delights Lucifer.

It is my opinion that the confession John presents involves much more than a surface reading indicates. Confessing that Jesus has come in the flesh (v. 2) is more than acknowledging that Jesus took on flesh and blood. Many interpreters want to see this as the New Age Gnostic heresy that the material world is inherently evil; thus, Jesus only *appeared* to come in the flesh. While the seeds of Gnosticism were sown at this time, this was not the issue. John emphasizes the *incarnation* as the key to God’s program to restore the creation to the righteousness of the original creation, beginning with the seed war announced in Genesis 3:15. This is seen in the war of *spirits*—the Spirit of God versus the antichrist spirit of the world.

True believers have overcome the false spirits because they have the Holy Spirit within them testifying to the truth. This fact raises an important question: how can true believers get caught up with false end-time signs? Jesus warned of this in Matthew 24:24. That is why John exhorts the reader to *test the spirits*.

It is probable that Satan himself is author and instigator of much of the end-times doctrine so widely accepted in the churches. These teachings will produce scoffers in the last days (2 Peter 3:3). The plethora of dates from the date-setters will eventually wear the saints down and make them a laughing stock to the world. However, before then, there are those who will make a fortune selling their sensational books, movies, and documentaries because the world listens to them.

33.

Antichrist Spirit (1 John 4:1–8)

Three groups are segregated in this chapter (the Greek *emphatic*)—*you*, *they*, and *we*. *You* identifies the reader. *They* refers to the *antichrists* of the world (vv. 1–3). *We* signifies the apostles who are of Christ. Thus, John places the obligation upon the reader to “test” the spirits—the information they receive to see whether that information is from God (v. 1). The criterion for evaluating information is that the Spirit of God elevates Christ manifest in the flesh and all that this truth indicates. The problem is there are those in the world who identify as from God who are actively seeking to deny, obscure, and replace the purpose of God in the incarnation with a false message (v. 3).

True believers have the Holy Spirit because they are from God. This enables them to overcome the antichrists. However, not every reader is a true believer; so, for the assurance of believers and the identification of unbelieving readers, John offers this simple test: who do you listen to? Antichrists are of the world and those of the world hear them. The apostles are from God and whoever is from God hears them. Who are you listening to, the Spirit of truth or the spirit of error? What distinguishes these spirits? It is *love*.

Love is from God (v. 7), and those who practice love demonstrate that they are from God. Beware, for here is another truth that the antichrist spirit seeks to pervert. We read that we should love one another, and the flesh begins to take action. We redefine love to make it some kind of emotional response, and then try to work up flesh-gratifying feelings. When that doesn't work, we pray for God to help us. When it does not appear that He has heard our prayer, we shrug our shoulders and resign from the obligation. We reason that we are just human, and if only others sought to be more loveable, we might love them better.

Therein lies another problem: we believe that loving is something that we are able to produce in response to the directive, another lie of the antichrist spirit. No aspect of our spiritual life and growth is in our power to do. It is all of the grace of God working in us (John 15:5; Gal. 5:6). God pours *His* love into us by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). It is Christ in us who produces *His life* in us (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21). He loves others *through us* (1 Pet. 2:5; 2 Cor. 3:3). The law tells us what to do but has no ability to enable obedience because of the flesh. Grace enables that obedience through the Spirit (Rom. 8:9–17).

We hear God because we have been born of Him. We obey God because the Spirit of God works obedience in us. Our obedience is a fruit of love and is, therefore, a selfless act as revealed in Christ's giving of Himself. Does anyone recognize how impossible it is for the flesh to love another as it loves itself (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; note 19:16–22)?

34.

God Is Love (1 John 4:7-12)

By this time in the discussion, John expects that the reader has digested all the salient points that form the foundation of the major premise he advances. The point is that those who belong to Jesus are children of God and, as such, they will be evidencing all that that relationship entails. They walk in the *light* (1:5ff), the light of truth and integrity about their true condition (2:12–14). Then, there are the *means* that God has provided in Christ for real and lasting change in spite of the formidable opposition arrayed against them—the world, the flesh, and the devil (2:15–17). The path through this mine-field requires faith, discernment, and the abiding attendance of the Spirit (2:28). Those who keep His Word have the promise of God’s love *perfected* in them (2:5). It may seem like a very daunting project, but victory is assured (5:4).

At this point in the discussion (4:7–12), John may seem as if he is repeating himself, insisting that if we are truly God’s children, we must love one another (2:7–10; 3: 10, 11, 14, 16–23). In the paragraph before us, *love* appears some 27 times in 14 verses (4:7–21). Twice in this section John reminds us that “*God is love*” (vv. 8, 16). In other words, love is from God, originating in God, and only in God. It is, however, an attribute that God shares with His creatures through His Spirit. Love, like life or faith, cannot originate in us. Because we are creatures, we can love, but only in a very distorted and self-seeking way that always puts self into it somehow. Sin has so corrupted us that we cannot love without the flesh’s contaminating every attempt to love.

Thus, truly loving others selflessly is an outward mark of the inward reality of God’s abiding. The pattern for this selfless love is Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as the propitiation for our sin when we had no love for Him (vv. 9, 10; Rom. 5:8). Jesus is the pattern and example of what love looks like and what it does (v. 11). As the Spirit works in us to kill self and flesh, love is perfected in us (v. 12).

What John does not discuss but what we need to understand is the process by which love is perfected. We must overcome the flesh in order for the Spirit to fill us with life and love. May I assure you that you will go through this process whether you know it or understand it. It is the path of crucifixion described by Jesus in Luke 9:23 and 14:27. Paul informs us that we are to *reckon* (put to account) our involvement or co-crucifixion with Christ (Romans 6:5–11). The sole path to life and love is death to self (Gal. 2:20; 5:24), and it is not a do-it-yourself project, nor is the Lord asking you to cooperate in it. That is probably why John does not write about it. He is interested only that we see the fruit of it.

35.

We Have Come to Know (1 John 4:13–21)

The goal of our redemption is our conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 3:2; Rom. 8:29). In 1 John 4:12, John states that “*no one has ever seen God.*” In the context of his argument, this statement must be understood, not as a mere reaffirmation that God is invisible, but to impress upon the reader that God exists in a dimension that is out of our realm of experience. We believe in Him. We pray to Him. We long to see Him and be with Him, but the fact is, He remains outside of our sphere of reference. However, He has manifested His love for us by sending His Son to us (v. 9) and giving His Son as a propitiatory sacrifice (vv. 9, 10). The purpose of the giving is that “*we might live through him.*” With that information, John presses the reader again with an expected response to accompany one’s understanding of God’s loving purpose—“*if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*” (v. 11).

This verse (11) must be carefully examined to understand it. The grammar is such that the English translation misses it entirely. It involves the little word, *so* (*houtos*, meaning *thus*, or *after this manner*; John 3:16). John is saying that if God loved us in this way (sending His Son to save us, v. 10), then we must love on another in the same way (note 3:16–18). If we love in this way, it is because God dwells (abides) in us and perfects His love in us (v. 12).

This response is, then, the evidence that we truly are His children (v. 13). We know with assurance that we abide in Him and He in us. This *knowing* is possible because His Spirit has been given to us. The whole focus of verses 13–21 is to develop the mechanics of our loving others and the goal of such love.

First, it reveals the fact that we have seen and testified that the Father sent the son to save the world. We must not take the term, *world*, to mean solely the people who populate it. Sin has so corrupted God’s created order that drastic measures were required to restore it (Rom. 8:19). The saving of the world requires redeeming some out of every nation to provide the Second Adam with the posterity necessary to have proper dominion over the renewed creation.

Second, it reveals that we need a correct and proper understanding of the incarnation (v. 15). Again, a casual reading may cause the reader to miss the very important truth that is set forth here. Psalm 2 addresses this incredible fact (Psa. 2:7, 8). In this, we understand the love that God has for us—that we are counted among the rescued and equipped, sons of the living God, sharing with Jesus the victory over the evil one.

36.

Perfect Love (1 John 4:16–21)

There are thirty-two verses in first John that reference loving God and others. That involves nearly one third of the whole epistle, which shows that *loving* is extremely important. Loving is powerful evidence that one is truly born of God (3:9, 10; 4:7; 5:1). Loving God is possible only because He first loved us (4:19). Greater still, He not only loves us, but He who is love personified abides in us (*meno*, to remain or continue; 4:16). This fact of God's taking up residence in the believer by His Spirit (4:13) and remaining in him is the means God uses to perfect (*teleioo*, to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, and bring to an end) love in and through that believer (4:12).

This perfecting work enables the believer to obey and keep His Word (2:5). This obedience in turn will give the believer full confidence in the day of judgment. Sadly, there are many who teach that salvation exempts Christians from judgment, using John 5:24 and 16:8. Both of these references speak to freedom in justice. Christ has taken the punishment of His own, leaving them free of guilt and justified before God's justice. Nevertheless, there are several references that make it clear that believers will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:27; 10:30; James 2:12; 3:1; Rev. 20:12, Matt. 25:31–46). However, the abiding presence of God will result in fearless confidence (*parrhesia*, boldness due to freedom and assurance) in the day of judgment (4:17). This statement clearly reflects Jesus' own words in Matthew 25 as what people did to the vulnerable—the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the ill-dressed, the sick, and the imprisoned. “*Love does no wrong to his neighbor*” (Rom. 13:10). More than that, love actively seeks to help those in need (1 John 3:17, 18). Therefore, one who actively pursues the welfare of others, particularly the vulnerable among them, demonstrates God's indwelling presence. He has no fear of judgment because “*perfect love cast out fear*” and “*fear has to do with punishment*” (4:18).

If ever there was a time when God's people need to live in fearless confidence, it is now. Events in the world are very rapidly deteriorating into open hostility. Anger and hatred between people of differing opinions is rapidly escalating towards violence. Scripture declares that “*in the last days there will come times of difficulty*” (2 Tim. 3:1). People will be “*abusive*” (*blasphemos*, speaking evil, slanderous, reproachful, railing, abusive), “*heartless*” (*astorgos*, inhuman and unloving), “*unappeasable*” (*aspondos*, implacable, unable to resolve differences so as to come to terms), “*slanderous*” (*diabolos*, one who acts like the devil”), “*without self-control*” (*akrates*, intemperate), “*brutal*” (*anemeros*, not tame, savage, fierce), and “*treacherous*” (*prodotes*, a traitor). It is not that people are getting worse but that whatever God has used to restrain the evil corruption of human nature is being removed. The Lord is now in the process of exposing all the deep and hidden vileness of the unregenerate (Matt. 10:26; Mark 4:22; Luke 12:2; 1 Cor. 4:5). This exposure will bring about times of tribulation and distress, but also signals Christ's imminent appearance and “*the day of the Lord*” (Isa. 13:6, 9).

37.

Overcomers (1 John 4:20–5:5)

True believers possess *eternal life*, which is not a reference to duration but to the *quality* of life. It is spiritual life that transcends our present temporal life that is under the curse of death (Rom. 5:12, 21; 6:23; 8:2), the penalty Adam incurred for eating the forbidden fruit. Thus, unregenerate life is but a process of eternal dying (Gen. 2:17). Physical life is the breath of God in the human soul (Gen. 2:7). Sin (corrupted nature) destroyed the quality of this life-principle (Eph. 4:22), effecting all of Adam's descendants.

So as not to encourage false security (see 4:15–17), John reiterates the test of love. God is love (4:8, 16). Thus, *love (agape)* is the restored principle of spiritual life in the believer who is "*born of God*" (3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). Sin's corrupting human nature is evidenced by self-seeking (the pursuit of selfish desires); so, love (spiritual life) transforms this aspect of human nature. This brings John to ask, how can one claim *restored* life while practicing *corrupt* life (4:20)? How can one profess to love God while hating one's brother who is in the image of God? One's actions betray one's profession.

We have "*this commandment*": "*whoever loves God must also love his brother*" (4:21). A *commandment* is a prescribed rule or principle that governs kingdom life—restored life. The commandment is easy (5:3) because one is "*born of God.*" Without restored life, commandments are impossible and burdensome (Deut. 5:29; Rom. 7:14–20). We also understand that the commandments have now been reduced to loving God and loving others (Matt. 22:26–40; Rom. 13:8–10). Love for God is the inner principle; while love for the brethren is the outward manifestation.

The argument that John uses is called in logic an "irregular Sorites." The argument is as follows:

- 1> Everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God.
- 2> Every child of God loves the Father.
- ✱ Thus, everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ loves God.
- 1> Everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ loves God.
- 2> Everyone that loves God loves His children.
- ✱ Thus, everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ loves God's children.

The argument continues: everyone who loves God's children is keeping God's commandments because that is how he loves God. This is what makes keeping commandments non-burdensome (5:3).

Keeping commandments is the *means* for those born of God to overcome (*nikao*, victorious) the world (*cosmos*, the sum of all evil forces antagonistic to the spiritual life). If one has been born of God, he loves God and God's children, thus keeping God's commandments. By this he overcomes the world. What, then, enables the overcomer? It is his faith in the fact that Jesus is the Christ—the Messiah/King bringing in the kingdom of God (1 Sam. 2:10; Psa. 2:2; Dan. 2:45, 46; John 1:41; 4:25, 26; 17:3; 20:31; Acts 2:36; Matt. 16:16, 17). We are back to the first argument. If one is born of God, he keeps God's commandment (because he loves the Father), which is loving God's image-bearers. In this he overcomes the world, having kingdom life due to his trusting the King, Christ Jesus.

38.

The Victorious Life of Obedience (1 John 5:3–8)

As we saw last week, love for God and love for God’s children is the core motive for obedience to God’s commands (1 John 5:3). This obedience is possible because the new birth gives the believer a new nature that conforms to God’s nature (1 John 3:7–10). Peter calls this new nature “*divine*”—like God’s (2 Peter 1:4). In order for believers to “*partake of the divine nature,*” God has granted them “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*” through “*precious and very great promises*” (2 Peter 1:3). This is a glorious truth, but there is another consequence—those partaking in this new nature are also ones who have “*escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire [lust].*” The term *corrupt* is *phthora*, which, in the active voice means “to destroy or ruin,” but in the passive voice, “to perish” (1 John 2:15–17). John puts it this way: “*Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world*” (1 John 5:4).

One might summarize the conflict as being that of *love* (selfless giving) versus *lust* (selfish grasping). The term *world* (*cosmos*) is used in various ways. One use is that God has now expanded His interest beyond Israel in fulfillment of the promise that in Abraham “*all the families of the earth shall be blessed,*” including Gentiles—the whole world (Gen. 12:3). The term *world* is also used of God’s *created order* hijacked by Satan, who now rules as its god (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan’s purpose and work is to corrupt God’s creation through *lust* (*epithumia*, evil cravings which drive one to reject God’s Word and disobey His commandment; Mark 4:19; Matt. 5:28; Eph. 2:3; 4:22; Titus 3:3). Jesus Christ came to destroy these works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

In Corinth, Paul’s goal was fulfilling God’s will in betrothing the church to Christ as a “*pure virgin.*” However, conditions in the church led him to fear that, as the serpent had deceived Eve, they were being led astray (2 Cor. 11:2, 3). A *pure virgin* is one who is chaste and uncorrupted. Their corruption was in their toleration of sinful practices and receiving of false apostles (1 Cor. 5:1, 2, 9–13; 6:9–11, 15–20; 2 Cor. 11:13–15). The world is corrupt because of the lust of the flesh, and hell is the place where corrupted flesh will be eternally *destroyed* (not annihilated, Gal. 6:8; James 1:14, 15; 2 Pet. 2:12; Rev. 11:18).

John tells us that those born of God have escaped this corruption because they have *eternal* life (vv. 5, 11). One cannot have eternal life and live by the lusts of his flesh (Gal. 5:13–26). Lust corrupts the flesh of the natural (mortal) man (John 8:44; Isa. 24:3, 4; Ex. 32:7, 8). When Jesus comes, the resurrected body of the saints will be immortal (1 Cor. 15:50–54). In the meantime, we must continually fight against lusting flesh through the power of the Spirit (Rom. 6:9–14; 13:14; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; Titus 2:12).

39.

Water and Blood (1 John 5:5–12)

The paragraph before us begins with a rather cryptic reference to water and blood, both being essential as they relate to Jesus the Christ. Three interpretations have been given to explain the reference to water and blood. (1) A.W. Pink suggests that water and blood refer to what came out of Jesus when the soldier pierced His side with a spear (John 19:34). (2) Some have offered that water and blood point to the two ordinances, baptism and communion. Both of these explanations are weak at best. The first is but romantic piety, while the second is totally groundless scripturally. (3) The best explanation is a third and the view we take in this lesson—that water refers to Jesus’ baptism at the opening His earthly ministry and the blood addresses His crucifixion that closed it.

It is very likely that John is defending the incarnation of the Son of God against the heresy that the Spirit descended upon the man, Jesus, at His baptism, but left Jesus just before He was crucified. Matthew 3:13–17 documents the baptism of Jesus. Baptism was a right of cleansing with respect to repentance. It was identified with the entrance of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2). John the Baptist “*baptized with the baptism of repentance*” (Acts 19:4; Mark 1:4). Jesus’ response to John’s objection was, “*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*” (Matt. 3:15). Jesus had nothing for which to repent, thus, fulfilling righteousness must have a connection with the kingdom and God’s purpose to restore all things (Isa. 53:11). In Isaiah 9:7, the child born and the Son given (v. 6) will sit enthroned over David’s kingdom “*to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness.*” Jesus is identifying Himself with His people as their hope and means of righteousness (Rom. 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9).

The context supports this third view. First, there is the immediate affirmation of the Father and the descent of the Spirit (note 1 John 5:6b; Isa. 11:2; 42:11; 61:1). Second, there is the immediate testing of Christ as the second Adam, affirming His righteousness (Matt. 4:1–11; note v. 17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15).

John speaks of the Spirit’s testifying and His truthful witnessing in agreement with the water and blood. The King James has a clause known as the Johannine Coma: “*For there are three who bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three who bear witness in earth, the spirit and the water and the blood . . .*” (the underlined portion). No manuscripts earlier than the 14th century have this clause, which makes its authenticity suspect.

John is not proving the doctrine of the trinity but refuting the heresies about His genuine humanity and divine/human status. Nevertheless, those who are truly believers have no problem accepting this testimony that Jesus Christ came by water and blood, witnessed to by the Spirit as true (vv. 9, 10). This is kingdom truth, and those who hold it have eternal life.

40.

That You May Know (1 John 5:13–15)

The section provides closing and summary remarks to the epistle: “*I write these things to you . . .*” (v. 13). The closing statement to the whole argument of John’s epistle is found in the verses prior to verse 13 (vv. 11, 12). It is a testimony, a legal statement of a matter of truth. Recall that the purpose of John’s epistle was to warn believers about sinning (2:1). Sin destroys the fellowship that God intends believers to share with Him and fellow believers (1:3). To experience the fullness of joy in this fellowship (1:4), believers must “*walk in the light*” (1:5–10). Thus, what follows in the whole epistle tells believers how to stop sinning and to walk in the light in order to obtain a fuller experience of their eternal life in this present age.

The verb in this closing statement, *to write*, is in the *aorist* (past tense); *I wrote*. The KJV and other translations translate this a bit better as *I have written*. It should read, “*I wrote these things.*” *Things* refer to the content of the whole epistle. Understanding these things and incorporating them into one’s life enables one to live out this *eternal life*. This life is the gracious gift of God, who has also provided clear guidance on how believers can best experience this life (5:11). Remember, *eternal* does not refer so much to *quantity*, the length or span of this life, but to the *quality*, that is, life experienced in the eternal or heavenly realm—God’s life.

This gift of eternal life is in God’s *Son*. Again, John’s language must be understood. When John uses the term, *Son*, he specifically addresses the incarnation of Jesus (Isa. 9:6). This use of *Son* counters the false teaching that Jesus was either a spirit manifestation only (not flesh) or that He was a mere man that the Spirit of God possessed and used until the crucifixion. Thus, when reading *Son* in the text, understand that John is emphasizing Jesus’ incarnation as the God-man sent to save His people from their sins (Matt. 3:17).

Next, John points to *assurance*. Knowledge of eternal life is based on knowing the facts of salvation. However, knowing (*oida*, to understand something through knowledge gained) the facts of salvation does not mean that one is saved. Lots of people are sure of things that simply are not true. Neither does confidence assure one’s relationship to God. John Bunyan had a very morbid outlook; yet no one who knows John Bunyan would question his salvation. It is equally true that many who are very careless seem to have no doubts.

Confidence is based on understanding that one is to live according to the principles of trusting the Son, walking in the light, not sinning, not seeking the world, and loving (sacrificially serving) God and His people. That is what constitutes *believing*. Knowing the facts of the gospel, trusting the promise of the gospel, and living out the life promised in the gospel is what gives one confidence before God. One’s prayer life is where this confidence is truly experienced (vv. 14, 15).

41.

Keep Yourselves from Idols (1 John 5:13–21)

These final verses may not seem like a conclusion but they are. The final verse really seems out of place—a kind of afterthought tacked on. Not so. Idolatry is simply substituting something in the place reserved for God only in one's life. This verse forms a final statement to John's argument.

The flow of thought begins in verse 16. The previous verse (15) speaks of a believer's confidence in prayer because, being secure in that relationship, he prays with confidence. Prayer is a powerful and effective tool that God graciously uses in His ongoing work of reclaiming the nations for the kingdom of God. Thus, verse 16 provides discerning believers guidance in praying for others.

Nevertheless, it must be confessed that John's words here are difficult to follow, yielding a variety of interpretations, even supporting the false notion of Romanists that there are mortal and venial sins. The bigger issue is how one discerns whether a "brother" is committing a sin "not leading to death" so that he can pray for his life? We all sin, and we know that the wages of sin is death. Yet, we are also informed that believers are justified. Is there a sin that a believer commits that is not covered by the blood? Then, this instruction must point in another direction.

Satan has spies infiltrating the visible body to disrupt and hinder the work of God. The sin that leads to death is one that involves such people, passing themselves off as believers. These people have a clear and correct understanding of the truth but overtly purpose to work against the Lord. With illuminated minds these "brothers" willfully and deliberately sin against Christ and His body with malice (Heb. 10:29; Rom. 16:17, 18). This sin is unpardonable (Matt. 12:31, 32).

Now, it is nearly impossible for another believer to discern the true spiritual state of his fellow Christians. One only hopes that his fellow is among the elect. However, we are urged to get wisdom and find the understanding that God gives (5:20). Such wisdom is to be sought in Scripture with urgency and diligence (Prov. 2:1–8; Heb. 5:14). The Lord desires for His people to be fully aware (1 Thess. 5:4–11); therefore, we are to watch and pray, being discerning as to the dangers that lurk in every corner. Watchful praying enables one to be sensitive to even subtle nuances. Such believers are watchmen on the wall, ready to sound the alarm in times of danger (Matt. 26:38, 40; Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 4:16).

Constantly sinning saints are a contradiction (1 John 5:18). Those who practice sin are like those of the world, lying in the power of the evil one (v. 19). True saints know Him who is true and are in His Son who is true. That is *eternal life*, and it is the exercise of eternal life that ought to be the saints' normal existence. False brethren are all about self, asserting *self* to create division in the body. Therefore, "*Keep yourselves from idols*"—self-promotion.