

1 John

1:1 That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we looked at and our hands touched, constituting the message of Life (περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς).¹

1:2 Indeed, Life was made to appear, and we have seen and are bearing witness to and proclaiming to you eternal Life, which was a possession of (πρὸς) the Father and was made to appear to us.²

1:3 That which we have seen and heard, we are indeed proclaiming to you in order that you also will have a common understanding with (μετά) us. And our understanding is in common with (μετά) the Father and with (μετά) His Son, Jesus the Messiah.³

1:4 And we are writing these things in order that your joy may be full to the utmost.⁴

1:5 This is the instruction (ἡ ἀγγελία) which we have heard from (ἀπὸ) him and are repeating to you—that God is light. Indeed, in (ἐν) Him there is no darkness.⁵

1:6 If we say that we have a common understanding with (μετά) Him and yet we are living in (ἐν) the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth.⁶

1:7 But if instead we are living in (ἐν) the light as He is in (ἐν) the light, we do have a common understanding with (μετά) one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin.⁷

1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in (ἐν) us.⁸

1:9 If we are owning up to our sins, He is faithful and upright so that He forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.⁹

1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His message (ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ) is not in (ἐν) us.¹⁰

2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you do not sin. Yet, if someone sins, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus the Messiah, the Righteous One.¹¹

2:2 And he himself is the propitiatory offering (ἱλασμός) for our sins—and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world.¹²

2:3 And we know by this that we have come to know him, if we keep (τηρῶμεν) his instructions (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ).¹³

2:4 The one who says, “I have come to know him” and does not keep (μὴ τηρῶν) his instructions (τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ) is a liar, and the truth is not in (ἐν) this one.¹⁴

2:5 But whoever keeps (τηρῇ) his message (τὸν λόγον), truly by means of this God’s love has achieved its intended purpose. We know by means of this that we are in (ἐν) him.¹⁵

2:6 He who says that he remains in (ἐν) him, just as that one walked, indeed he himself thus is obligated to walk.¹⁶

2:7 Beloved, I am not writing a new teaching (ἐντολὴν καινὴν) to you but an old teaching (ἐντολὴν παλαιάν) which you have had from the beginning. The old teaching (ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιά) is the message (ὁ λόγος) which you heard.¹⁷

2:8 On the other hand, I am writing to you a new teaching (ἐντολὴν καινὴν), that which is true in (ἐν) him and in (ἐν) you, because the darkness is passing away (παράγεται) and the true light is already shining.¹⁸

2:9 The one who says that he is in (ἐν) the light and hates his brother is still in (ἐν) the darkness.¹⁹

2:10 The one who loves his brother remains in (ἐν) the light, and there is no stumbling in (ἐν) him.²⁰

2:11 But the one who hates his brother is in (ἐν) the darkness, and he walks his life in (ἐν) the darkness. Indeed, he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.²¹

2:12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.²²

2:13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you have known that which was from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one.²³

2:14 I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you know that which was from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the message of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) remains in (ἐν) you. And you have conquered the evil one.²⁴

2:15 Do not love the world (τὸν κόσμον) nor the things in (ἐν) the world. If someone loves the world, the love for the Father is not in (ἐν) him,²⁵

2:16 because all that is in (ἐν) the world—the strong desire of the flesh, the strong desire of the eyes, and the self-flattering claims of existence—is not from (ἐκ) the Father but is from (ἐκ) the world.²⁶

2:17 And the world is passing away (παράγεται) and its strong desire, but he who practices the will of God remains into the age.²⁷

2:18 Children, it is the last hour (ἔσχατη ὥρα), and just as you heard that opposition to the Messiah is coming, even now many opponents of the Messiah have become apparent, from which we know that it is the last hour.²⁸

2:19 They went out from (ἐκ) us, but they were not from (ἐκ) us. For if they were from (ἐκ) us, they would have remained with (μετά) us — but, so that they could be revealed, because not everyone is from (ἐκ) us.²⁹

2:20 And you have an anointing (χρῖσμα) from (ἀπὸ) the Holy One, and you know all things.³⁰

2:21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because every lie is not from (ἐκ) the truth.³¹

2:22 Who is the liar except he who denies that Jesus is the Messiah. This person is an opponent of the Messiah, who denies the Father and the Son.³²

2:23 Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father. He who acknowledges the Son also has the Father.³³

2:24 As for you, let what you have heard from the beginning remain in (ἐν) you. If that which you have heard from the beginning remains in (ἐν) you, indeed you will remain in (ἐν) the Son and in (ἐν) the Father.³⁴

2:25 And this is the promise which he promised us—eternal Life.³⁵

2:26 I have written these things to you concerning those who are deceiving you.³⁶

2:27 And as for you, the anointing (τὸ χρῖσμα) which you received from (ἀπὸ) Him remains in (ἐν) you, and you have no need for someone to teach you. But just as His anointing teaches you concerning all things (it both is true and is not a lie), and just as it taught you, remain in (ἐν) it.³⁷

2:28 And now, little children, remain in (ἐν) it so that, when he is revealed, we may have courageous confidence and not be ashamed before him at his grand appearance.³⁸

2:29 If you know that He is righteous, you understand that, indeed, everyone who practices righteousness has been born from (ἐκ) Him.³⁹

3:1 Look at how great a love the Father has given to us, that we are called children of God. For sure we are! Therefore, those in the world do not recognize us, because they do not know Him.⁴⁰

3:2 Beloved, we are now children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. We do know that, when he is revealed, we shall be like him, because we shall see him just as he is.⁴¹

3:3 And everyone who has this hope based on it purifies himself just as that one is pure.⁴²

3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness. Indeed, sin is lawlessness.⁴³
3:5 And you know that that one was revealed so that he would take away sins. So, in (ἐν) him there is no sin.⁴⁴
3:6 Everyone who remains in (ἐν) him does not sin. Everyone who sins has neither seen him nor known him.⁴⁵
3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous just as that one is righteous.⁴⁶

3:8 He who practices sin is from (ἐκ) the devil, because the devil continues to sin from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose—so that he would destroy the efforts of the devil.⁴⁷

3:9 Everyone who has been born from (ἐκ) God does not practice sin, because His seed remains in (ἐν) him. And they are not able to sin, because they have been born from (ἐκ) God.⁴⁸

3:10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious.⁴⁹

Everyone who does not practice righteousness is not from (ἐκ) God, including everyone who does not love his brother,⁵⁰

3:11 because this is the instruction (ἡ ἀγγελία) which you heard from the beginning, that we love one another⁵¹—

3:12 not like Cain. He was from (ἐκ) the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his actions were evil and those of his brother were righteous.⁵²

3:13 Therefore, do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.⁵³

3:14 We know that we have departed out of death into Life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother remains in (ἐν) death.⁵⁴

3:15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that every murderer does not have eternal Life remaining in (ἐν) him.⁵⁵

3:16 By this we have come to know love—that that one gave up his existence for us. Thereby, we have a moral obligation to give up our existences for the brethren.⁵⁶

3:17 Now, the person who possesses the sustenance of the world and sees his brother in need and closes off his inner resource of compassion towards him, how can love for God be the case in (ἐν) him?⁵⁷

3:18 Little children, let us not love with thought or speech but in (ἐν) action and truth.⁵⁸

3:19 And by this we shall know that we are from (ἐκ) the truth. Indeed, we shall convince our hearts before Him,⁵⁹

3:20 because, if our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts and He knows all things.⁶⁰

3:21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.⁶¹

3:22 Indeed, that for which we ask, we are receiving from (ἀπὸ) Him, because we keep His teachings (τὰς ἐντολὰς) and we practice the things that are pleasing to Him.⁶²

3:23 And this is His teaching (ἡ ἐντολή)—that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus the Messiah, and we love one another just as he gave this instruction (ἐντολήν) to us.⁶³

3:24 Now he who keeps his teachings remains in (ἐν) him and he in (ἐν) him. Indeed, by this we know that he remains in (ἐν) us, by virtue of the Spirit that He gave to us.⁶⁴

4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit but examine the spirits to see if they are from (ἐκ) God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.⁶⁵

4:2 By this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that acknowledges Jesus to be the Messiah, as having come in the flesh, is from (ἐκ) God,⁶⁶

4:3 and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus as such is not from (ἐκ) God. Indeed, this is the spirit of opposition to the Messiah, which you have heard that it is coming, and it is now already in (ἐν) the world.⁶⁷

4:4 You are from (ἐκ) God, little children, and you have conquered them, because greater is the One who is in (ἐν) you than the one who is in (ἐν) the world.⁶⁸

4:5 They are from (ἐκ) the world. Because they speak from (ἐκ) the world, indeed the world listens to them.⁶⁹

4:6 We are from (ἐκ) God. The one who knows God listens to us. The one who is not from (ἐκ) God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.⁷⁰

4:7 Beloved, we should love one another, because love is from (ἐκ) God. Indeed, everyone who loves has been born from (ἐκ) God and knows God.⁷¹

4:8 The one who does not love has not known God, because God is love.⁷²

4:9 By this God's love was made known among (ἐν) us—that God has sent His unique Son into the world in order that we, through him, would Live.⁷³

4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiatory offering for our sins.⁷⁴

4:11 Beloved, if God loved us in this way, indeed, we are morally obligated to love one another.⁷⁵

4:12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in (ἐν) us, and His love has achieved its intended purpose in (ἐν) us.⁷⁶

4:13 By this we know that we remain in (ἐν) Him and He in (ἐν) us, because He has given us from (ἐκ) His Spirit [his spirit?].⁷⁷

4:14 And we have seen and are bearing witness that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world.⁷⁸

4:15 Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in (ἐν) him and he remains in (ἐν) God.⁷⁹

4:16 And we have come to know and have believed in the love which God has in (ἐν) us.

God is love, and he who remains in (ἐν) love remains in (ἐν) God, and God remains in (ἐν) him.⁸⁰

4:17 By this love has reached its intended purpose with (μετά) us so that we may have bold confidence in the day of judgment, because just as that one is, so also are we in (ἐν) this world.⁸¹

4:18 There is no fear in (ἐν) love, but love that has reached its intended state discards fear, because fear involves punishment. And the one who fears has not reached his intended state in (ἐν) love.⁸²

4:19 We love because He first loved us.⁸³

4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and he hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.⁸⁴

4:21 Indeed, we have this teaching from (ἀπὸ) Him, that he who loves God should also love his brother.⁸⁵

5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born from (ἐκ) God, and everyone who loves Him who fathers people loves him who has been born from (ἐκ) Him.⁸⁶

5:2 By this we know that we love God's children, whenever we love God and practice His teachings.⁸⁷

5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His teachings. And His teachings are not difficult to carry out,⁸⁸

5:4 because everyone who has been born from (ἐκ) God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world—our belief.⁸⁹

5:5 Who is the one who conquers the world except he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?⁹⁰

5:6 This is the one who came through water and blood. Jesus is the Messiah—not by means of (ἐν) just water, but by (ἐν) water and by (ἐν) blood. Furthermore, the Spirit is the one who bears testimony, because the Spirit is truth.⁹¹

5:7 So there are three which bear testimony—

5:8 the Spirit and the water and the blood—and the three do establish one claim.⁹²

5:9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. For this is the testimony of God, that He has born witness concerning His Son.⁹³

5:10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in (ἐν) himself. The one who does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that of which God has given testimony concerning His Son.⁹⁴

5:11 In addition, this is the testimony, that He has given us eternal Life, and this Life is in (ἐν) His Son.⁹⁵

5:12 The one who has the Son has Life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have Life.⁹⁶

5:13 I have written these things to you so that you will know that you have eternal Life—to those who believe in the name of the Son of God.⁹⁷

5:14 Now, this is the confidence that we have towards Him, that if we ask for anything according to His will, He listens to us.⁹⁸

5:15 And if we know that He listens to us, to whatever we ask, we know that we have from (ἀπὸ) Him the requests which we have asked.⁹⁹

5:16 If someone sees his brother sinning a sin whose end is not death, he will ask and He will give him Life, to those who are sinning whose end is not death. There is sin whose end is death. I am not talking about that, that he may ask.¹⁰⁰

5:17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin whose end is not death.¹⁰¹

5:18 We know that everyone who has been born from (ἐκ) God does not sin. But he who was born from (ἐκ) God will hold on to him, and the evil one will not touch him.¹⁰²

5:19 We know that we are from (ἐκ) God, and that the whole world lies in (ἐν) the evil one.¹⁰³

5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and He [he?] has given us understanding in order that we may know the truth. Indeed, we are in (ἐν) the truth, in (ἐν) His Son, Jesus the Messiah. This is the true God and eternal Life.¹⁰⁴

5:21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.¹⁰⁵

¹ ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς – John does not announce himself or his role at the beginning of this letter, because it is really not a letter. It is a treatise on the apostolic message as received by the true apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus. Therefore, John just dives into his response to the false teachers, whom he has described in 2 and 3 John. Thus, 2 and 3 John help interpret this letter. It is not about loving everyone. It is about not rejecting authentic Christians who claim that Jesus is the Messiah and are following the apostolic message while a person pursues a religious system such as the Mosaic Covenant as described by erroneous Judaism.

There is a group of false teachers who say they know better than the true apostles what Jesus taught, because they claim to have been eyewitnesses of him. According to them Jesus never said he was the Messiah, and he cannot be anyway because he was crucified by the Jewish leadership. Therefore, they claim that Jesus was an ordinary rabbi who taught and encouraged people to follow the Mosaic Covenant. They also claim that, even though he ran afoul of the Jewish leadership, he promoted obedience to the Mosaic Covenant as the proper focal point of anyone's relationship with God. These false teachers are different from the ones Paul addresses in Galatians, because the latter at least believed in Jesus as the Messiah while also teaching that the Mosaic Covenant should be at the center of any sinner's relationship with God.

In this letter, John makes it clear that the older generation of Christians heard correctly the gospel from the apostles such as Paul and John, while the younger generation are now hearing it correctly from their parents. But the false teachers are splitting up families because the younger generation do not know if they should trust their parents or these teachers who are bringing a different message. John writes that the issue here is that the spirit of antichrist, i.e., opposition to God's Messiah, is at work in these teachers, because they deny Jesus as the Messiah.

In this introduction of 1:1-4, John re-establishes his apostolic authority on the basis of his and the other apostles' eyewitness experiences of Jesus as the Messiah and his message of *aionic* life, i.e., eternal life. (Where John refers to eternal life, I capitalize the letter "I" of Life.) While many interpreters believe that John is addressing the problem of incipient Gnosticism, and specifically Docetism where Jesus was considered to appear to be only a material, human being because he was simply a ghost or spirit (cf. 4:2), as well as considering human beings to be free from sin and immorality if we ignore our material selves and take into account only our spirits, 3 John and certain clues in 1 John show us that he is addressing the same kind of issue as Paul in his letters, that of Jewish teachers who focus on the Mosaic Covenant and, in this case, deny that Jesus is the Messiah, probably because the whole concept of a crucified Messiah (King) makes no sense to them.

It would also be easy to think that John is referring to the same concepts as in John 1:1. But, again, 2 and 3 John as cover letters, as well as the neuter relative pronoun ὃ (*ho*) show us that he is referring to "that which" Jesus first taught regarding the gospel and "that which" the apostles heard from his mouth and that ultimately comes from God the Father, the transcendent creator of reality. This is also why he mentions "the message of Life" here in v. 1. He is not referring to the "Word of Life," i.e., Jesus, as some people interpret the phrase τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς (*tou logou tays zoays*). Instead, John wants to go all the way back to "the beginning," to the first notions that the apostles learned from Jesus as the primary communicator of the NT message of himself as the Messiah, and John wants to include everything else that they learned after that. In other words, this is all about the information from Jesus and of Jesus as the Messiah which results in eternal life through him alone for human beings who are in need of God's mercy. And it is about the fact that the true apostles had physical contact with Jesus and the effects of his miracles. For example, when he healed lame people, the disciples could touch their legs and feel their strength. This is unlike the false teachers who claim to have been eyewitnesses of him. If they had been, they would have come to the conclusion that he is the Messiah. Consequently, John and the other apostles personally experienced the audible, visible, and tangible evidence of Jesus' authority over reality as the Son of God, the final, eternal Davidic King from the Father, the transcendent Creator of reality. Therefore, there were these three ways of hearing, seeing, and touching that John received information to substantiate the truth of the message that Jesus taught, which included the fact that he is the Messiah. By mentioning these facts, John is establishing his apostolic authority, which people like Diotrephes, who has been influenced by Jewish teachers of the Mosaic Covenant and has rejected Jesus as the Messiah even after hearing the apostolic message, are denying (cf. 3 John).

The "message of life" is the teaching from the Father through the Son that explains eternal life, both what it is and how to get it (cf. John 1:4), in contrast to the message that is being proclaimed by Diotrephes and any false teachers, who reject the apostolic message, deny that sin is the profound problem that it is, deny that Jesus is the crucified Messiah who brings propitiation (a place of mercy) for sins and forgiveness through his death, and consequently mistreat authentic Christians who have grasped these vital points of theology. The false teachers would consider eternal life something to be obtained through strict religious obedience of the Mosaic Covenant (and probably therefore earning it), thus missing the whole point of Jesus as our offering and High Priest as the author of Hebrews explains.

As I said, it is helpful to see that John is referring to the "message of life" (περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς) and not to the Word, i.e., Jesus, as some interpreters think, by comparing what he is saying here with **1 John 2:7** "Beloved, I am not writing a new teaching (ἐντολὴν καινὴν) to you but an old teaching (ἐντολὴν παλαιάν) which you have had from the beginning. The old teaching (ἡ ἐντολὴ ἢ παλαιά) is the message (ὁ λόγος) which you heard." The logos (ὁ λόγος) in both cases is the information being conveyed by Jesus and the apostles. It is not Jesus himself.

Another implication of this letter is that it is a good defense against any message that comes from the world and not from the Bible as to how to obtain “life,” a full and satisfying existence, whether on this earth or after death if people are even thinking that the latter is a possibility. And, by definition, any message from the world is going to deny that Jesus is the Messiah and what this means in its entirety. Therefore, the “life” which the world is going to promote is actually death, because it will ultimately lead to eternal death and destruction at the final judgment of God.

² καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ὁ ἑώρακαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν – The description of eternal life and the way to get it was brought to light (“made to appear”) in the person of Jesus and by his teaching and performance of miracles to back up his claim to be the Messiah. Indeed, God the Father, the transcendent creator, made this message appear through the existence, actions, and spoken words of Jesus. In other words, eternal life comes through Jesus and guarding his teachings, instructions, and commandments, not through Moses and guarding the teachings, instructions, and commandments of the Mosaic Covenant—even though it is entirely appropriate for the Jews to obey it (with changed hearts!) since it is their national covenant, given to only them by God around 1500 B.C.

Again, the “we” here are the apostles, rather than the plural of authority. John is speaking on behalf of all the apostles to emphasize their authority. We can call this the plural of apostolic identity since John is refuting the false teachers who deny the authority of the true apostles and are claiming it for themselves as though they are apostles.

Cf. John’s use of “I” in 5:13 – **5:13** I [a genuine apostle] have written these things to you so that you will know that you have eternal life—to those who believe in the name of the Son of God.

Cf. **2 John 5** Now I [a genuine apostle] ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new teaching, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

Cf. **3 John 9** I [a genuine apostle] wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes [who is pretending to be an apostle of Jesus(?)], who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we [all genuine apostles] say.

The outcome and benefit of Jesus’ message as the Messiah is eternal, i.e., *aionic*, Life. John is claiming that the true apostles are the bona fide spokesman for God and Jesus regarding exactly what eternal Life is and how to get it. Also, they have the three ways that they have interacted and continue to interact with the truth of this message—seeing the effects in Jesus’ ministry (especially his miracles), bearing witness to it as apostles (claiming that they were eyewitnesses of Jesus and his teaching and miracles), and proclaiming it as apostles to others in order that they believe it.

John refers to God as the Father of the final Davidic king, Jesus, who is the Son of God (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14) and the ultimate source and owner of the message and information that came to the apostles which He planned to come to the apostles through Jesus and that they passed on to others in the 1st century Roman Empire. God the Father was the possessor of this message and the whole idea that He would cause Jesus to be the most important character in His story that glorifies Himself and Jesus.

Therefore, for the false teachers to be speaking on behalf of God by focusing on the Mosaic Covenant is to deny God’s claim as the source of Jesus and his message of eternal life, as well as God’s claim of Jesus as the Messiah through the three ways that He affirmed this fact—1) the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:27), on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), and during Jesus’ last days in Jerusalem (John 12:28), 2) Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3), and 3) his crucifixion (cf. 1 John 5:6-9 – **1 John 5:6** This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus the Messiah; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the [source of] truth. **1 John 5:7** For there are three that bear witness: **1 John 5:8** the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. **1 John 5:9** If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has born witness concerning His Son.)

Indeed, Jesus as the Messiah with his message of eternal life was made to appear by the transcendent God specifically to the apostles. This, as above, is not the plural of authority, but the plural of apostolic identity. John is speaking on behalf of all the apostles to emphasize their unity in knowing and understanding the message as those sent by God and Jesus to proclaim it with the level of authority which they do. He will go on to say that anyone does not listen to them, then he does not know God (cf. **1 John 4:6** We [apostles] are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error).

³ ὁ ἑώρακαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ’ ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία ὅδε ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – John wants his readers to have an understanding of the true gospel that matches that of the apostles and therefore is shared in common with God the Father and His Son, Jesus the Messiah. (cf. 2 John 11 for a similar use of the verb form of κοινωνία, but where it refers to a sharing in the evil deeds of false teachers; **2 John 10** If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting. **11** For the one who gives him a greeting participates (κοινωνεῖ) in his evil deeds.). 1 John is about knowing and believing the truth about Jesus as the Messiah from his true apostles as opposed to sharing in the “knowledge” and belief of the false teachers and apostles, which is why it makes sense that κοινωνία here refers to common *understanding* of the truth and not “fellowship” as we typically think of this word, i.e., being together and sharing the same religious experiences.

Only the apostles can authoritatively say that their understanding of the biblical message exactly matches that of God’s. But this is the point, to listen to only them and no one else about the truth of God and His Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. In this letter, the concepts of “Son of God” and “Messiah” as connected to Jesus are key for John the author. And of course they should be since these words refer to his all-important role as God’s proxy and the king of Israel in addition

to his being the high priest and offering for sinners so that he may be their advocate before God the Father (cf. 1 John 2:1-2). However, it is only by means of a clear understanding of these words as used in the Old Testament that someone can interpret John correctly. Within the context of the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 2, 8, and 89, they refer to God's human proxy on earth, whether it be David or Solomon or Jesus. These terms also refer to God's designated eternal High Priest for sinners according to Psalm 110, in which case only Jesus fulfills this responsibility by his death and his becoming a propitiation and place of mercy as John will indicate in this letter (Paul speaks of the same thing in Hebrews). Thus, the words "Son of God" and Messiah" do not refer to Jesus as the co-eternal 2nd person of the Trinity. They refer to his role as King of Israel and Anointed One, i.e., special person among the Jewish people who fulfills all that the Old Testament predicts about him as king, priest, and prophet (spokesman for God).

⁴ καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ᾗ πεπληρωμένη – (MT – ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν) – John's readers have had their joy robbed from them by the false teachers who are proclaiming a message of eternal life that they say can come from only following the OT Torah and Mosaic Covenant—thus making oneself worthy of eternal life. This is a message which ignores the complete and eternal forgiveness from God that comes from Jesus and through Jesus and his one sacrificial offering to God of himself. Thus, I do not think that John is referring not to "our joy" (the joy of the apostles), but to "your joy" (the joy of his Christian readers), because he is concerned about his readers' salvation and their persevering in holding on to the apostolic message which they first received from John and other teachers clearly associated with John and the other apostles.

It is only a proper understanding of the entire biblical message with the gospel of Jesus in the NT being central that can provide a sinful human being with the correct motivation for being genuinely joyful in his life by virtue of the Bible's unique position of spelling out God's plans to grant mercy and life eternal to sinful human beings through Jesus as the one and only propitiatory offering and advocate before God (cf. 1 John 2:1-2).

This is joy which is intended to exist even in the midst of life's trials and difficulties and is the supernatural result of fully grasping the message of God's eternal mercy through Jesus as our intercessor. This is joy which is "full to the utmost," and which comes from confidence in the apostolic message of belief in Jesus' as sacrificial offering (and therefore place of God's mercy), priest, and king, not in promoting the Mosaic Covenant as the false teachers are doing. Salvation is through Jesus as the crucified Messiah, not through Moses as strictly the law-giver and through the animal sacrifices stipulated by this covenant.

By extrapolation, salvation is through belief in and obedience to Jesus, not in following a religious system, even a Christian religious system as something claiming by its teachers as having been stipulated by God and Jesus. They did not teach a religious system. They taught belief and love for one's fellow believers (cf. 1 John 3:23 This is His [God's] teaching, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus the Messiah, and love one another, just as he [Jesus] taught us.)

⁵ Καὶ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία – See also 1 John 3:11 for ἀγγελία – 3:11 because this is the instruction which you heard from the beginning, that we love [be committed to] one another.

The false teachers claim that they have heard straight from Jesus what they are teaching about the primary importance of the Mosaic Covenant. Obviously, John as one of the true apostles begs to differ, and he declares that "this [that which he is saying in this letter] is the bona fide instruction from (ἀπὸ) Jesus ("him"). In addition, John is declaring that all the apostles agree with one another about what is the true message of eternal life, so that he as one representative of the whole group of apostles is proclaiming it to his readers who are being wrongly influenced by the false teachers.

"Light" refers to intellectual truth which leads to a correct understanding of God and reality, which includes repentance for one's sin and obedience to God's moral commandments so as to be primarily and fundamentally committed to Him and His people—and to believe that Jesus, not an animal sacrifice according to the Mosaic Covenant, is our only and necessary advocate before God in order to obtain His eternal mercy.

A major theme in John's New Testament documents is light vs. darkness, i.e., accurate understanding of God and reality, especially a person's immoral condition with Jesus as advocate at the final judgment (cf. 1 John 1:8-2:2) vs. some other religious perspective that does not adequately and accurately understand the Bible. This true understanding comes from God through Jesus as the Messiah vs. an erroneous understanding of especially the Mosaic Covenant and the Messiah which comes from Jews such as Diotrefes who misunderstand the Bible and are seeking to influence Christians to abandon their belief in Jesus as the Messiah and to focus on the Mosaic Covenant.

Cf. John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9,10; 12:35-46 and 3 John.

John has already said that the message which he is proclaiming was "a possession of the Father and revealed to us" (v. 2). Now he is saying that this message came "from him," i.e., from Jesus, so that John and his fellow apostles, not Diotrefes and his followers, have the truth, because they indeed were taught by Jesus and commissioned by him to be his apostles.

There are two options for what John means by "in Him there is no darkness" – 1) that God ontologically contains no lies or erroneous ideas; 2) that the group who are "in God" by virtue of their following Him appropriately as sinful human beings do not subscribe to lies and false teaching. In this context, it does not make sense that John has to state that God is filled with only truth, because certainly Diotrefes and the false teachers believe this. It makes more sense that John is claiming that people who authentically follow God, especially the genuine apostles, are also not adhering to any lies that this world promotes as truth in rebellion against God, especially the lies of the false teachers who are obsessed with the Mosaic Covenant.

So John finishes his thought in this verse by saying that being a member of the group who are following God (“in Him”) means that a person is also believing truth and not falsehood. To be taught of God is to tolerate no known lies in one’s mind. This person is not engaged in believing the false ideas about God and Jesus of the false teachers. Instead, all those who are “in [God]” are also those who have recognized the truth of the gospel and are living their lives on the basis of this truth—believing that Jesus is the crucified Messiah and embracing and being committed to fellow Christians as those with whom they worship God properly.

In this letter, John uses several prepositions with much significance. These prepositions are “in” (ἐν), “from” (ἐκ), “from” (ἀπὸ), and then also “of” (the genitive case such as “the message of God” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) in 1 John 2:14). “In” (ἐν) = to be a part of what someone is doing in such a way that they have a common understanding of reality and a common goal, such as to be “in Him,” i.e., in God, in this verse, or to participate in that which exists, such as “living in the darkness” in v. 6.

“From” (ἐκ) = to have as one’s source someone such that a person is coming from a place where his thoughts, actions, and goals match that of the source, such as all things being “from the world” and not “from the Father” in 1 John 2:16; but in 1 John 2:19, for example, this preposition first means the former but then in the second instance means something closer to “of” as I describe next.

“From” (ἀπὸ) = coming from someone as the source of that which a person receives, such as in v. 5 the message of truth that came from Jesus to the apostles.

“Of” (the genitive case) = to belong to someone or something, such as “the message of God” in 1 John 2:14.

Thus John employs these prepositions to nuance his teaching in this letter. But they can be a little difficult to interpret exactly.

⁶ ἔάν εἰπώμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν – It is important to recognize that these “if” (ἐάν + the subjunctive) sentences do not comprise commandments as though responding to them as religious practices that a person must ritually and consistently perform is what John and the apostolic message are proclaiming. Instead, these statements are like the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of Matthew 5 where Jesus is describing, not commanding, the inner life of an authentic believer. Therefore, John in these “if” sentences of 1 John 1:6-10 is describing the important characteristics of those who understand God, that they practice the truth of the apostolic message and face into the depth of their sin so as to appeal to God through Jesus and his death for mercy and forgiveness.

Here the “Him” is God again and His teachings that have come through Jesus the Son. It is a contradiction to say, as the Jewish false teachers do, that one has a common understanding of reality with God if the person denies the truth that God has presented, especially through Jesus that he is the Messiah and that only he can “cleanse” a person of his sin (cf. 1:7,9). So if “we” (the true apostles) were to say, “I agree with God,” and deny that Jesus is the Messiah while also promoting the Mosaic Covenant as THE center of one’s relationship with God, then “we” would be lying and not following (practicing as a committed lifestyle) the truth of God. This is to be and to live in intellectual darkness, not realizing how much sin is in you that requires the kind of confession that needs Jesus’ death, resurrection, and advocacy (and not the Mosaic Covenant sacrifices and offerings) to resolve it (cf. 1:7-2:1).

Thus, John is stating categorically that not doing or practicing the Bible in line with the true, apostolic message is exactly the case with Diotrephes and the unbelieving Jews who are trying to influence John’s readers away from embracing Jesus as the Messiah and away from believing just how deep their problem of sin is.

John uses the verb ποιῶ a lot in this letter as here, οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν = we would not be practicing the truth. And it seems appropriate to translate it as “practice” as referring to the kind of lifestyle that a person is committed to and pursuing.

⁷ ἔάν τ’ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν, ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων, καὶ τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας – Here it also makes sense that “He” refers to God who is “in the light” (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ) in the sense that He is immersed in truth, indeed the truth of the gospel of Jesus as crucified Messiah for the forgiveness of sins. Also, the “we” still refers to the true apostles, and John is describing only a hypothetical situation in this verse.

For the apostles to live (περιπατῶμεν) in a manner commensurate with God and His message is to have an understanding of reality that matches that of God and includes a proper and profound appreciation for the necessity of Jesus’ existence and role in order to become forgiven by God for one’s sins, instead of thinking that the basis of one’s forgiveness is the sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant. So here at the beginning of the letter John is establishing the most important reason for believing in Jesus as the Messiah. God’s mercy and eternal salvation come through him and not through the Mosaic Covenant as Diotrephes and the false teachers are claiming.

John uses Old Testament terminology to indicate that through Jesus’ death as an offering, like the animal offerings of the Mosaic Covenant, “we” (the true apostles again here) gain forgiveness and mercy eternally from God, which is what Diotrephes and the false teachers are giving up by not admitting the depth of their moral problem while also claiming that animal sacrifices are sufficient and also by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and their advocate at the judgment (cf. 1 John 2:1).

Leviticus 16:29 “This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you **16:30** for it is on this day that atonement shall be made (כִּפּוּר) (ἐξιλάσεται) for you to cleanse (קָדַשׁ) (καθαρίσαι) you; you will be clean (קָדַשׁ) (καθαρισθήσεσθε) from all your sins before Yahweh. **16:31** “It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for

you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute. 16:32 “So the priest who is anointed (אֲשֶׁר־יִמָּשֶׁחַ אֹתוֹ) (ὁν ἂν χρίσωσιν αὐτόν) and ordained to serve as priest in his father’s place shall make atonement (וְכָפַר) (ἐξιλάσεται): he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, 16:33 and make atonement (וְכָפַר) (ἐξιλάσεται) for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement (וְכָפַר) (ἐξιλάσεται) for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. 16:34 “Now you shall have this as a permanent statute, to make atonement (וְכָפַר) (ἐξιλάσκεισθαί) for the sons of Israel for all their sins (וְכָפַר) (ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν) once every year.”

Probably, Diotrephes’ and the Jews’ objection to the notion of Jesus as the Messiah, i.e., “His Son,” is the apostolic claim that in him is combined the roles of king/ruler of Israel and of the eternal Kingdom of God and of priest and advocate at the judgment (cf. Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews – “a priest according to the order of Melchizedek), and that it was necessary for Jesus as our priest to suffer death on the cross as the one and only acceptable propitiatory offering to God and place of mercy. The false teachers are probably claiming that the death of Jesus as a good rabbi meant that there was a problem with his message that got him in trouble with the authoritative Jewish leaders as the correct Bible teachers of his day, thus proving that he was not the Messiah.

Instead, John is saying that the ONLY way to gain God’s forgiveness is by depending on Jesus’ sacrifice and the role of intercessor for which he qualified by dying on the cross, NOT by depending on one’s natural human performance of animal sacrifices in line with the Mosaic Covenant.

Thus, “His” as the possessive pronoun of Son refers also to God and not to Jesus. Consequently, vs. 5-7 are all about what it means to be the genuine apostles who are agreeing with what God believes to be true that results in embracing Jesus (and not the Levitical priests) as the one who obtains eternal forgiveness for one’s sins.

If the correct apostles are living according to God’s truth, then they and God have a common understanding of the gospel with one another, and the apostles are gaining eternal forgiveness through Jesus and his propitiatory and sacrificial death.

⁸ ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, ἑαυτοὺς πλανῶμεν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια τῷ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν – After establishing in v. 7 that Jesus is the basis and means for God’s forgiveness, John goes on to explain that the false teachers who claim to have “no sin” because they are up to date on their MC sacrifices (or at least would be if they lived in Jerusalem), thus implying that that they need no other means by which to obtain God’s mercy and forgiveness, are deceiving themselves by rejecting the significance of Jesus as the crucified Messiah.

John is saying that if “we” (the true apostles) were to claim that we have no deep sin problem, guilt, and blame before God, because we are, in our minds, adequately keeping Old Testament Torah and the Mosaic Covenant, which is permitting us to make ourselves worthy of God’s forgiveness and cleansing us from our sin through our religious practices of repentance and offerings at the temple, then the death of Jesus, the Son of God and King of Israel, means nothing to us in terms of its bringing forgiveness from God through his intercession at the final judgment (cf. 2:1; Romans 5:20; 7:7ff.). “The truth is not in us.”

Thus, John is setting himself and his fellow apostles apart from Diotrephes and the false teachers. The very statement, “The Messiah died for our sins,” is supposed to catapult any sinful human being into an understanding of the depth of his sinfulness and need for God’s mercy apart from anything else he does that could possibly solve the problem, including OT sacrifices and religious actions of either an OT sort or a “Christian” sort. (cf. Romans 6:1ff).

Anyone who refuses to acknowledge the depth of their immoral condition is engaged in moral and spiritual self-deception and is, in effect, rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. The false teachers of course are explicitly denying the meaningfulness of Jesus’ role and death. They fail to realize that his death proclaims that all human beings stand condemned before God with no ability on their part to resolve the problem—even by bringing to the Jewish temple the appropriate sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant. It is only God through the crucified Messiah and the inward work of His Spirit which results in genuine belief and moral obedience and can bring about mercy and forgiveness.

A general principle that follows from John’s statement is that sinful human beings tend to think that they are better morally than they are and that their outward religious actions adequately please God for making an appeal to Him for His mercy. This is why we hear people say, “I’m a good person,” and they mean that they have no deep problem of sin that cannot be solved by them. Another popular statement is, “People are good and have the potential for evil,” when it is the other way around. Plus, any true biblical goodness happens by means of God’s grace.

John 3:27 John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.”

1 Corinthians 1:20 Where is the sophist? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God shown that the wisdom of the present realm is preposterous? 1:21 In other words, because the present realm did not understand God by means of their wisdom in the midst of the wisdom of God, God was pleased via the foolishness of the official announcement to save those who believe. 1:22 For example, Jews ask for signs and Greeks seek for wisdom, 1:23 but we proclaim a crucified Messiah, on the one hand scandalous to Jews, and on the other hand preposterous to Greeks. 1:24 But to the called, both Jews and Greeks, this message is about THE MESSIAH, the power of God and the wisdom of God, 1:25 because God’s foolishness is wiser than man’s, and God’s weakness is stronger than man’s.

⁹ ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν. πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος, ἵνα ἀφῇ ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας τ καὶ καθαρίσῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας – If “we” (the true apostles) are continuing to acknowledge and groan over “our” continued problem of sin and guilt within the fabric of our being at the level of our defining essence and which never goes away within the present realm so that it requires God’s independent mercy apart from any effort on “our” part to solve the

problem, then THE issue in “our” (indeed, any sinful human being’s) life is to acknowledge “our” sinfulness so that “He” (God) will forgive and cleanse us of our sin.

Consequently, with the death of the Messiah which illustrates what we deserve from God, we can repent and expect complete forgiveness from Him along with the true apostles for all eternity through Jesus’ intercession and advocacy. In other words, the condition which God has placed upon sinful human beings in order for them to receive His eternal forgiveness is that they own up to the depth of the problem of their sins and acts of unrighteousness, which are neither acceptable nor pleasing to God, and appeal to Him for undeserved grace and mercy.

This “He” in this verse and v. 10 is God as in v. 7. God the Father is faithful to His promise in Genesis 12:1-3 that He will bless genuine believers who are imitating Abraham’s faith by forgiving them because they own up to their humanly insoluble moral problem. And remaining faithful to His promise is obviously the right thing for Him to do. Again, John uses Old Testament terminology where “cleanse” = forgive (cf. 1:7) in order to say that God responds with mercy to those who acknowledge the profundity of their need for mercy. It is as “simple” as this, but acknowledging our sin with the genuine humility, which the Bible requires, is completely impossible for all sinful human beings apart from God’s causation through His Spirit’s changing them inwardly. Along with grasping the reality of divine determinism as the umbrella over even man’s “free-will” (free from the creation) and accountability before God, the idea of acknowledging our profound sin is right near the top of THE most important concepts to understand and live by. It is at the top with embracing Jesus as the crucified Messiah and one’s advocate before God (cf. 2:1).

¹⁰ ἔαν εἰπώμεν ὅτι οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν, ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτόν, καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν –

Continuing in the same line of thought as the previous verses, John is saying that if “we” (the true apostles) claim that we have not done anything wrong or are not evil to a depth that “our” own religious actions in following the Mosaic Covenant cannot motivate God to forgive “us” and grant “us” eternal life, then “we” are also claiming that God is lying about the depth of “our” sin that He is teaching through Jesus’ death on the cross. This would mean too that God’s message of truth that comes through Jesus (cf. 1:1) is certainly not what “we” are claiming to believe. It is “not in us” in the sense that it is something which we embrace and consider as truth.

If a sinful human being thinks that his religious performance of the OT Mosaic Covenant (or NT Christianity by extrapolation) is sufficient to please God and gain His eternal mercy and life, then he does not understand God, the nature of his sin, and God’s purposes for Jesus as intercessor and advocate. Again, this is how John (with his fellow apostles) is setting himself apart from Diotrephes and the false teachers who are rejecting Jesus and holding on for dear life to the Mosaic Covenant.

¹¹ τέκνια μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἁμαρτήτε. καὶ ἔαν τις ἁμαρτή, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον – Now John turns his attention specifically to his readers and calls them “My little children (τέκνια – a word he uses 6x in this letter),” because they have either become Christians through his ministry or they are maintaining their faith through it (after probably having become Christians through Paul’s, another apostolic co-worker’s ministry, or their parents initially). The parents and their children are John’s spiritual children, while he will also emphasize the importance of their being “born of God” and His children ultimately.

John does not want his readers to “sin,” but here he must be talking about their sinning in the same manner as Diotrephes and the false teachers who are rejecting Jesus as the Messiah because of his death by crucifixion. John’s readers should not allow their natural born hostility towards God to get the best of them so that they listen to Diotrephes and others with the result that they reject the true message of Jesus as the Messiah—thinking that they can propitiate their sins themselves through their offerings to God as required by the Mosaic Covenant (or at least by following the MC as closely as possible apart from their offerings while living in western Turkey). This would be to “sin” in the most grievous manner. Thus, John is certainly not calling them to be morally perfect, but he is encouraging them not to commit the unpardonable sin of dismissing Jesus’ teaching and sacrifice after hearing about him through the apostles (and specifically through John and then through their parents).

Then John speaks generally of sin as part of the normal course of human existence in this life, even as Christians. If someone admits his sinfulness is such that he needs a helper (παράκλητος), an advocate, before God other than the bulls and goats that he would offer via the Mosaic Covenant, then...

We have someone who will appeal to God the Father for mercy at the final judgment. And of course it is Jesus, not some bull or goat which a person sacrifices to God according to the Mosaic Covenant. These offerings merely point to a person’s need for a crucified priest, i.e., Jesus (cf. Hebrews 9), so that the word Messiah here means not king but mainly priest.

Cf. [Isaiah 53:11](#) As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the **Righteous One**, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

John is more than likely referring to the Isaiah 53 verse above to highlight Jesus’ role as helper, advocate, and priest. He is the only morally perfect human being and icon of the invisible God who, by his propitiatory offering (2:2), becomes the basis for obtaining God’s forgiveness and mercy that results in eternal life. No one else and nothing else, i.e., nothing else within the Mosaic Covenant (or the Christian “religion” by extrapolation), can do so.

¹² καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν. οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ ἴμόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου – This is what Diotrephes and the false teachers are refusing to grasp about Jesus, that as the Messiah he could fulfill his role (during his first appearance) only by offering himself to God as the Jews would offer bulls and goats as sin offerings according the Mosaic Covenant. And as a result of his propitiatory offering for our sins, he and his death on the cross become the basis of forgiveness for “the whole world,” i.e., for all mankind of all time.

Thus, a Jew, indeed the final Jewish, Davidic King of Israel, becomes king, priest, and propitiatory offering for not only the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. And this Jew offered himself for not only his own ethnic group, but also for all other ethnic groups so as to qualify to be their priest, helper, and advocate before God. Jesus thus acts as ALL mankind's high priest and offering for sin, indeed our only high priest, etc., and he becomes the means to eternal forgiveness by qualifying to act as our helper and advocate before God the Father at the final judgment. Since what Jesus has done involves his death, it makes sense to translate ἱλασμός as propitiatory *offering* and not just propitiation. Cf. Romans 3:21-26; 4:25; 5:6-10. See note also at 1 John 1:7.

Assuming that John is writing to Christian communities who are mainly Gentile but also with a minority of Jews in western Asia (modern Turkey), then his point is to remind them that Jesus' death applies to all Jews and Gentiles who are willing to embrace him as the Messiah. In this way, Jesus becomes the focal point of everyone's relationship with God, while the Mosaic Covenant fades into the background for the sake of the restored Kingdom of Israel and the Jews after Jesus returns.

Cf. **Leviticus 25:9** 'You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement (כִּי־יִסְכֹּחַ) (ἱλασμός) you shall sound a horn all through your land.

Cf. Numbers 5:8; Psalm 130:4; Amos 8:14; Ezekiel 44:27 – The NAS95 translates ἱλασμός as atonement, guilt, or sin offering.

The word ἱλασμός is used only twice in the NT – here and in 1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (ἱλασμός) for our sins."

The word ἱλάσκομαι is also used only twice in the NT – in Luke 18:13, "**But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me (ἱλάσθητι), the sinner!'**", and Hebrews 2:17, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (ἱλάσκεσθαι) for the sins of the people."

The word ἱλαστήριον is also used only twice in the NT – in Romans 3:25, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation (ἱλαστήριον) in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed," and in Hebrews 9:5, "and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat [place of propitiation] (ἱλαστήριον); but of these things we cannot now speak in detail."

This word refers to the place where a sinner finds God's eternal mercy and forgiveness by appeasing His anger and making Him happy. Jesus is this place, and those who do not appreciate this fact, such as Diotrophes and his followers who are false teachers, are calling God a liar and courting eternal disaster and destruction by rebelling against Him. "Atonement" does not quite work for translating this word in either the OT or the NT because it means compensation, i.e., making a full payment for what one has done wrong. But not even Jesus' death has done this. His death propitiates God (offers a "soothing aroma") whereby He is no longer angry with the sinner so that the sinner is reconciled to God. But God's forgiveness, by definition, means that no one actually pays the penalty of complete destruction that any sinner deserves. His forgiveness means that He does not require complete payment of justice. Therefore, propitiation is the only right word for what both the OT and the NT are getting at when it comes to escaping God's wrath and recompense for a sinner's sins.

¹³ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκωμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν – John continues with referring to the "whole world" and present realm who do end up embracing Jesus' significance as the propitiatory offering for them. Diotrophes and the false teachers claim to have known Jesus personally and exactly what he taught—that everyone is obligated to obey the Mosaic Covenant and that he is not the Messiah. But John presents here a vital criterion for determining whether or not "we" (all sinful human beings who say that they believe in Jesus) are authentic "Christians." Do "we" embrace everything that Jesus taught, including that fact that he was going to die, rise from the dead, and become the helper and advocate for sinners—as well as love (be committed to) all those who embrace him as the Messiah, as John will go on to indicate in a moment? Therefore, John will highlight the answer to the question, "How does a person know that he really knows Jesus and is guarding Jesus' instructions?" By his being single-mindedly devoted to the message that Jesus is the Messiah and that this message commands us to love and be committed to one another who embrace it (and, by inference, to believe in Jesus as the Messiah).

If God's inner work within us ("God's love" for us through His Spirit) relentlessly and irreversibly moves us to consider worth keeping, protecting, and guarding (τηρῶμεν) in our own hearts and minds Jesus' instructions, his "Torah" (cf. Deut. 17:19; 1 John 2:5), in our hearts and minds, that includes his death as the most profound message about the depth of our sinfulness and need for him as our advocate along with the importance of loving others who embrace this truth, rather than rejecting or doubting the veracity of Jesus' teachings, then we can truly say that we know Jesus. Obviously this is in contrast to the false teachers who claim to know Jesus but actually both reject his teachings and reject the people (including the most important ones from the standpoint of learning his teachings, the apostles) who believe, keep, and obey his teachings.

Thus, it makes more sense to translate τὰς ἐντολάς as instructions or teachings and not just commandments. John is referring to the entirety of Jesus' teachings, i.e., his whole message, during his three-year ministry on earth.

Cf. **John 14:15** "**If you love Me, you will keep My commandments [instructions]** (τὰς ἐντολάς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε)."

Cf. **John 14:23** Jesus answered and said to him, "**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word** (τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει);

and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 14:24 “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.”

¹⁴ ὁ λέγων ὅτι ἔγνωκα αὐτὸν καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν ψεύστης ἐστίν, ὁ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν – This statement by John is almost too obvious. Of course anyone who claims to know someone but does not adhere to what the person has said, at least by affirming what he says, is lying and really does not know the person. Nevertheless, John wants to emphasize how wrong the false teachers are and how right the other apostles and he are. Diotrephes and other false teachers must have been claiming to know Jesus, if not personally, at least his teaching, so that they could speak authoritatively about him, in fact, more authoritatively than John and the other apostles. They also must have been saying that Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah as the apostles were saying and that everyone should follow Moses and the Mosaic Covenant. In their opinion, Jesus was just a decent rabbi who unfortunately ran afoul of the Jewish leaders. John is saying that there is a problem with the person who does not consider exactly what Jesus said about mankind’s moral problem and God’s solution of his death on the cross as the most precious intellectual property to keep, preserve, and protect.

Very simply, the person who does not believe that Jesus is the crucified Messiah and does not “love” those who believe this is a liar, and God’s truth is not in this person. The above kind of person is lying about what Jesus said, so that another way to say this is that the truth of God and the biblical message is not a part of who they really are.

¹⁵ ὃς δ’ ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ὁ ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν – Cf. 1:1,10. John is speaking of someone like the apostles who relentlessly embraces Jesus’ teaching with the same pertinacity and fervor.

The intent of God’s loving work (God’s love) through His Holy Spirit within human beings is to cause them to recognize and irreversibly embrace as true the apostolic message from Jesus about man’s deep, immoral condition and need for unmerited mercy that ultimately will come through Jesus’ help and advocacy as our Messiah and High Priest at the final judgment. God’s loving work achieves its intended purpose by causing a sinful human being to believe the truth about Jesus and to persevere in believing this truth. This is the necessary divine inwardness that must take place in sinners in order for them to obtain God’s eternal mercy and life.

The false teachers must be saying that God loves them because of their obeying the Mosaic Covenant so strictly and keeping it at the center of their relationship with God. However, John begs to differ. He is claiming that God loves people in whom He works and causes them to embrace and keep Jesus’ message which is the apostolic message of his being the Messiah who died for sinners and becomes their *parakletos* and advocate at the judgment. This is what it means to be “in” Jesus and to know exactly what he proclaimed about himself as the Messiah.

We, i.e., all authentic believers, know that we are true disciples and followers of Jesus when we embrace and live by his teachings regarding eternal life that have come from the Father. Thus, to be “in him” is the same as “knowing him” and “keeping his instructions” (cf. 2:3,4). The key as John lays it out in this letter is to confess the profundity and humanly insoluble nature of one’s sin as well as to love and be committed in supporting and encouraging others who do the same—all on the basis of Jesus’ death as that which demonstrates man’s sinfulness and which qualified him to be our helper and advocate at the final judgment, so that a sinner ends up believing this about Jesus. To count on Jesus’ being our advocate and propitiation before God, rather than counting on the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant (or any other religious activity, even “Christian” activity) is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

¹⁶ ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιπατήσεν, καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν – This is the person who claims that he “knows” Jesus (even through only the apostolic message) and is persistently following him and his teachings. John is stating that to “remain” or “abide” in Jesus is the same as *living like* Jesus according to God’s definition of morality, which in the context of this letter is loving and being committed to those who embrace and guard the same message that he is, i.e., the message that he is the suffering and crucified Messiah.

And look how much Jesus loved himself and others who believed back then and believe now in him, by obeying God all the way to the cross in order that he may intercede for sinners. He lovingly sacrificed himself for sinners, and this was the role that God required of him. We, too, should fulfill our roles as best as we understand them to be of what God requires of us, including expressing sacrificial love to other believing sinners in order to encourage them to persevere in their belief.

John is not suggesting that Christians must live morally perfectly as Jesus did, but that they are biblically obligated by their belief in Jesus to pursue the same moral standard of Jesus that he demonstrated in his life in the light of the profound immoral problem of humanity that was not only part of Jesus’ teaching, but also was what helped guide him in his life as he proceeded toward the cross in order to qualify to be our advocate at the final judgment. Thus, Jesus’ teaching includes loving those who follow the apostolic message from God through him on the basis of a new, inward commitment to the same values and perspective as Jesus.

Cf. vs. 7-11 where John will go on to point out that all these people who are questioning the original message given to them by the apostles really do have the truth. The upshot is that from truth comes love for one’s fellow Christians, not rejecting or ostracizing them as the false teachers are doing and commanding others to do likewise. Therefore, John is implying that his readers, both the parents and their children, will remain committed to the apostles’ and his understanding of Jesus and his message, because God has started them down this road and will Himself remain committed to making sure that they do.

By extrapolation, a person who has received a changed inwardness by the Spirit of God is obligated to relate to God in the same manner as Jesus did. Jesus loved God, worshiped God, submitted to God, prayed to God, obeyed God, hoped

in God, etc., so that all authentic Christians are morally obligated to do the same. Therefore, just because God always is the initiator in our relationship with Him as Christians, we still choose to do all that Jesus did short of our being the Messiah.

¹⁷ ἡγάπητοί, οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς· ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε – John's point is that Diotrephes and any false teachers are basically bringing a “new” message, which itself is the old message of erroneous Judaism, that of strictly following only the Mosaic Covenant without recognizing the depth of one's sin and exactly who the Messiah is going to be—a man who suffers death on behalf of the nation of Israel and believing Gentiles.

2 John 9 – “Everyone who ‘advances’ and does not remain in the teaching of the Messiah does not have God.” John certainly is not going to change the message that he has been proclaiming as an authoritative apostle and that his readers first heard. It is the correct “new instruction” (cf. v. 8) so to speak, the “new” Torah of Jesus as the Messiah, which he revealed when he appeared on earth to live out his role with the goal of being the crucified Messiah, of rising from the dead, and of eventually becoming the king of the restored Kingdom of Israel and the eternal Kingdom of God. [Deuteronomy 17:14](#) “When you enter the land which Yahweh your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’ ¹⁵ you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves. You may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. ¹⁶ Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since Yahweh has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’ ¹⁷ He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away. Nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. ¹⁸ Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, ²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.”

In the above Deuteronomy passage, it sounds as though God is saying that the king of Israel, even the final king, the Messiah with a capital “M,” Jesus, should place the Mosaic Covenant at the center of every Jew's (and Gentile's by extrapolation) life, and that he himself should follow and obey it as the core of his relationship with God. Certainly, the Jews will follow the Mosaic Covenant in the millennial kingdom on the land of Israel, while they primarily believe in Jesus as their King and eternal High Priest. Thus, the rest of the Bible makes it clear that it is the King as both ruler and priest who is actually at the center of every true believer's life—whether Jew or Gentile. This was the message of Jesus as the Messiah but remains offensive to the Jews because of their and the Talmud's misunderstanding of the OT.

So John is reminding his readers that the very first information which the older generation of Christians heard about Jesus is exactly what he is communicating to them now—and he would not change it for any reason. This is the apostolic message and account from God through Jesus of how sinful human beings can obtain eternal life, i.e., through believing in Jesus as the propitiatory offering to God (cf. 2:1,2). Therefore, the false teachers who say that the Messiah would never die, thinking that Jesus was just an unfortunate rabbi, are not really teaching Jesus' “message.” John calls Jesus' message the “old teaching,” because it is what the older generation of Christians first heard from him or Paul, and it is old in comparison to the “new” and erroneous information which they are receiving from the false teachers. This is again a reference to the first time when John's readers heard the information about Jesus, either from John himself or from those who had been sent out by John (cf. 3 John 3ff.). It is not a reference to the beginning of or before the beginning of creation as the phrase “in the beginning” in John 1:1 means. Similarly the phrase “the word/message” (ὁ λόγος) does not refer to the Word, i.e., Jesus, as some interpreters think, but to the message which Jesus taught that was regarding eternal Life as John explains in 1 John 1:1, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked at and our hands touched, constituting the message of Life (περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς).”

¹⁸ πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει – John is now claiming that his information about Jesus as the Messiah is in a certain sense new. It is new because Jesus has appeared and revealed himself to the world, which had not happened before.

Therefore, his message is a kind of new instruction, a new Torah, that was “in” Jesus (in his mind, heart, speech, and actions) and thereby came through him from the Father (cf. 1 John 1:2; Deut. 17:19). It is also in addition to the Mosaic Covenant as well as certainly different from it as especially the false teaching of Diotrephes and the unbelieving Jews who misunderstand the Mosaic Covenant and the whole biblical message.

The neuter relative pronoun ὃ is best translated “that which” and is referring to the entirety of the new teaching which Jesus presented. This new teaching is the truth that Jesus held and taught and that any authentic believer in Jesus holds, believes, and proclaims as he first and the apostles second did. Thus, Jesus' message of his being the crucified, risen, ascended, and returning Messiah enters into the minds and hearts of his believers and becomes just as much theirs as it was his within him.

John goes on to say that the newness of this “new teaching” of Jesus is in the fact that it will eventually cause the erroneous teaching of the Mosaic Covenant by problematic and worldly Judaism and people like Diotrephes (and the erroneous and deceptive ideas of all other cultural and societal lies in world history) to disappear when God fulfills His promises to the Jews and brings about a massive revival amongst them when Jesus returns and restores the Kingdom of

Israel (cf. Romans 9-11; Revelation 19,20). Nevertheless, the correct understanding of the Mosaic Covenant and Jesus as the Messiah has occurred already to some degree among the Jews and has also occurred among John's readers, who are most likely a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Indeed, they are all fulfilling the central idea of the MC by their love for one another (cf. Romans 13:8 – Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Covenant/OT Torah).

This also means that any lie and false idea in human history will disappear and be replaced with only the biblical truth of Jesus, etc. when he returns and establishes the first stage of the Kingdom of God. Thus, Jesus' first appearance set in motion a chain of events that will culminate in his return, regardless of how far out in the future it is. God's ultimate goal is to bring about the Kingdom of God through the Messiah Jesus, so that as Christians obey the gospel in this world, they are a light shining in the darkness of the lies, sin, and immorality of the unbelievers (even those involved in worldly Judaism) and thereby giving notice to the "darkness" that its end is imminent and pending. All it will take is Jesus' return. It is not as though the darkness of the lies of this world was already passing away during OT times, but now that Jesus as made his first appearance, the light of God's truth is that much more prominent and obvious.

Titus 3:3 Formerly, we were indeed foolish, disobedient, deceivers, enslaved to our passions and various pleasures, living in a state of evil and envy, and hating one another. **3:4** But when the kindness and love for mankind of our savior, God, appeared, **3:5** He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we did in a state of righteousness, but on the basis of His mercy through the washing of rebirth and renewal brought about by the Holy Spirit. **3:6** He poured him out richly on us in view of Jesus Christ, our savior, **3:7** with the result that we were declared justified by means of His grace, and we became heirs in accordance with the hope of eternal life. **3:8** This is a trustworthy statement.

¹⁹ Ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν ἢ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι – Here John presents a practical and vital example of how to know that this new and correct teaching through and from Jesus is in existence in the world. He is speaking of the person who claims that he is following the teaching of Jesus that comes from God and yet is pursuing the Jewish traditions derived from the Mosaic Covenant with the wrong perspective on man's sinful and immoral condition and on the need for Jesus as intercessor at the judgment, and, therefore, on the fact that Jesus is the Messiah.

These same people are like "Diotrephes...[who] does not receive the brethren..., and he forbids those who desire to do so and throws them out of the church (3 John 9,10)" – i.e., anyone who ostracizes and is unsupportive of genuine Christians who appropriately confess their deep sinful and immoral condition, who claim Jesus as the only valid sin offering before God, who pursue loving authentic Christians with the same belief as theirs, and who look forward to Jesus' intercession as High Priest before the Father at the judgment. John is saying that from the lies and falsehood of claiming to know and believe Jesus and then wanting nothing to do with someone who is rightly following Jesus comes "hate." Thus, hate is not a feeling per se. It is an unwillingness to be supportive of and committed to a person because of their different belief, when their belief is actually in the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. The person who "hates his brother" in this way is probably not a genuine believer because he is not embracing the apostolic message of John and the others. And in this context, this "hatred" towards authentic Christians is while embracing worldly and erroneous Judaism.

Is defiantly rejecting God's message about man's deep sinful condition and need for unmerited mercy, thus, in effect, rejecting Jesus as the Messiah? In other words, is ignoring God's definition of morality while pursuing biblical sin also a rejection of Jesus as the Messiah—no matter how much someone attends a so-called "church" that claims to be "Christian"? It would seem so, especially when it is accompanied by a commitment to any religious system that promotes religious practices, even Christian ones, more than the actual truth of the Bible. Therefore, one of the most important litmus tests of genuine belief is the willingness to be dedicated to the spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical well-being of people who are sometimes very similar culturally, ethnically, physically, linguistically, etc. and sometimes very different from you, but they embrace the same apostolic message of Jesus as King, Priest, offering, and leader with humble and constant acknowledgement of their sin and need for God's undeserved mercy for their eternal salvation while looking forward to eternal life that will also come by His grace.

²⁰ ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει, καὶ σκάνδαλον ἔν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν – Here John addresses the same issue that Paul does, for example, in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4 of the importance of Christians' maintaining the unity that comes from having been inwardly changed by God through His Spirit, the "unity of the Spirit," which results in belief in the truth of God and holistic support for those who do likewise. Thus, the one who "loves" his fellow Christian also persistently follows the truth of God's message regarding our profound need for mercy and obtaining it through Jesus as our advocate who offered himself to God. Thus, the "one who loves his brother" is the one who has the same belief in the same apostolic message and who cares for his fellow Christians with respect to their physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs.

As a result, there is nothing that is going to make this authentic believer stumble in the "darkness" of the lies and falsehood of someone like Diotrephes and fall to his eternal destruction by rejecting the truth of the gospel that has come from God through Jesus. In other words, John is convinced that authentic Christians remain authentic Christians so that they never "stumble" and fall into abject unbelief. They genuinely persevere in their belief in the message of Jesus as God's Messiah and in their love for those who believe likewise.

However, if people change the message, for example, by changing the definition of Messiah so that, in their minds, Jesus becomes someone different from what the Bible actually teaches, then Christians' "love" for these people is somewhat restricted by these particular false ideas. Nevertheless, no Christians since the apostles have a completely

accurate understanding of the Bible, which means that all of us Christians should remain very humble and patient with our fellow “Christians” while we all continue to work out our understanding of the Bible.

²¹ ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ – Here John is making a direct statement against Diotrephes and those like him who ostracize genuine Christians. The so-called Christian, e.g., Diotrephes, who ostracizes and is unsupportive holistically and biblically of authentic Christians, is in the midst of stumbling to his eternal destruction. Diotrephes and the unbelieving Jews are blinded by their defiant rebellion and sinfulness which they are unwilling to recognize. They cannot see and embrace the truth of God’s message of mercy through Jesus as both Messiah and Advocate at the judgment—because they have not been changed inwardly by God and His Spirit. In this way, they do not see where they are going. They believe they are living godly lives before God (through strict outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant which they think is earning God’s favor and blessings), but they do not (and cannot) recognize that they are instead headed down a path to eternal destruction. Their own arrogance and self-righteousness prevents them from recognizing the truth of the biblical message.

²² γράφω ὑμῖν, τέκνια, ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ – These next two paragraphs of 2:12-14 seem best to be taken as finishing the section begun in 2:1 when John first addressed his readers as “My little children,” and he is assuring them, both young and old, that they are believing the correct message—that which was “from the beginning” when he (or Paul) taught the apostolic message to them. In other words, the religious system of Diotrephes centered in the Mosaic Covenant and rejecting Jesus as the Messiah is wrong and does not result in eternal forgiveness of sins. It is John’s message that does.

Thus, John is addressing everyone who is a “descendant” of his by virtue of believing the apostolic message that he proclaims, whether the person heard this message directly from John or from Paul or from one of John’s co-workers. Or the person, who lives in Asia, i.e., western Turkey, may have heard it from Paul and is now being shepherded and taught by John and his co-workers if Paul has died. The phrase “little children” pertains to both the older generation and the younger generation, the “fathers” and the “young men.”

John is saying that on account of Jesus’ “name,” i.e., all that he is as the Messiah, that he is both the one human, propitiatory offering for sin by his death and the only legitimate helper and advocate for sinners at the final judgment, and not on account of John’s readers’ obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and its animal offerings, that they have eternal forgiveness of sins with the promise of eternal life, which is the most important issue in any human being’s existence. Yes, the Mosaic Covenant is one way and even a correct way to deal with sins and forgiveness as prescribed by God for the Jews as an ethnic group and as His chosen, national people. But it was never intended to be the basis of a sinners’ eternal forgiveness. This comes only through Jesus as Son of God and propitiatory offering in order for him to qualify as the one who intervenes and intercedes on behalf of sinners at the final judgment.

²³ γράφω ὑμῖν, πατέρες, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, γράφω ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι, ὅτι νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρὸν. – Now John speaks specifically to the older generation and then the younger generation. The older generation were the ones who first heard the gospel from him, Paul, or their co-workers and passed it on to their children. Therefore, they have come to know (and believe) John’s gospel, the apostolic message, implying that any change in it or deviation from it by the false teachers should absolutely be avoided.

John also says that the younger generation have conquered “the evil one” (as I think is the correct way to translate τὸν πονηρὸν). This is Satan, and the younger generation have rejected his lies and the evil which he perpetrates (such as the erroneous Judaism of misunderstanding the Mosaic Covenant) by their embracing the same apostolic message which their parents taught them. John implies that the false teachers have given in to Satan’s lies, while the genuine Christians have conquered him, God’s archenemy, because they have embraced John’s gospel instead of the message of the false teachers to the effect that Jesus is not the Messiah and that the Mosaic Covenant alone is central to any sinner’s relationship with God and acquiring eternal life.

1 John 5:5 – “Who is the one who conquers the present realm [and Satan who influences it to reject God] except he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Which is to say that the sinner who wholeheartedly embraces the identity and role of Jesus of Nazareth ends up conquering all the influences in this world that would lead him from the truth and into eternal condemnation and destruction.

²⁴ γράφω ὑμῖν, παιδία, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, πατέρες, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς. ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, νεανίσκοι, ὅτι ἰσχυροὶ ἐστε, καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει, καὶ νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρὸν – With a different word this time, παιδία, but with basically the same meaning, John is repeating the point he made above, that forgiveness of sins comes through knowing the Father according to the truth which the Father has conveyed to sinful human beings through Jesus the Messiah and his apostles. And because the people to whom John is addressing this letter are “descendants” of his by virtue of believing the apostolic message that he has proclaimed and continues to proclaim, then they qualify as knowers of the Father and therefore forgiven by the Father. It makes more sense here to translate the aorist ἐγνώκατε (and the other three aorist verbs in this verse) with the present tense, that John is stating simply the fact that all these Christians know the Father.

This pertains to both the older generation (“fathers”) and the younger generation (“young men”). And they have come to know the Father of the Son of God who is their Father too, all by virtue of embracing the apostolic message of Jesus as Messiah and advocate which they have heard. Thus, Jesus is the final Davidic king and ruler of Israel and the cosmos.

As above, John encourages both the older and younger generations that they have believed the truth in contrast to the

message of the false teachers. John's truth is that which the older generation believed when they first heard it from an apostolic source and that makes the younger generation strong in their understanding of reality and ability to combat the evil one, Satan, and win that battle against his lies, specifically the lie that Jesus is not the Messiah, for the sake of receiving eternal life.

²⁵ μή ἀγαπάτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἂν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ – Here is the third and last section of the first part of the letter.

Are things really this bad with the false teachers that John associates them with the “world,” the cosmos, and its complete unwillingness to be committed to biblical morality and obedience to God? Apparently so. This is how serious the issue is when people reject Jesus as the Messiah as taught by the Bible. Now that Jesus has made his first appearance, belief in him and all that he means is the litmus test of a sinner who hears the apostolic message and loves God instead of loving the world.

John's use of the word κόσμος is probably the same as Jesus' use of it in, for example, [John 15:18](#) “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. [15:19](#) “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” Jesus is speaking specifically of the Jewish culture in Israel that is focused on the Mosaic Covenant, just as Diotrefes and the false teachers are in the context of John's three letters. The cosmos/world comprises the communities of people who are fundamentally hostile to God and the biblical truth, whether their lifestyle is non-religious and just plain immoral or religious and quasi-moral like that of the Jews and their erroneous Judaism of Jesus', Paul's, and John's day (or characterized by being committed to some other kind of religious system that exists in global cultures). Even erroneous Christianity with its obsession with religious practices and doctrines that were derived by men after the apostles is an equal part of the “world” as abject immorality and erroneous Judaism.

The primary exhortation of this section is for John's readers to love the Father and not the “world,” i.e., the present realm, especially the ideas and pursuits of Diotrefes and his fellow false teachers, with all their lies, faults, and pursuits that originate with Satan (cf. [1 John 3:8](#) – He who practices sin [as a committed lifestyle] has sided with the devil...) and whom John is categorizing as unbelievers. Instead, to love the Father results in believing the apostolic message and embracing and caring for one's fellow Christians.

Thus, John is exhorting the recipients of this letter not to be deceived by the false teachers who deny that Jesus is the Messiah. He is encouraging them not to have a subjective orientation that buys into the world's culture where everyone is selfish and out for themselves, which is to say not to become devoted to this distorted mindset that comes so naturally for us evil human beings. This would include even the unbiblical and erroneous Judaism of the false teachers that is fundamentally opposed to God and his truth, even while claiming to know and worship God.

Cf. “all” in v. 16 and how Jesus characterizes the world/cosmos in [John 7:7](#) when he addresses his unbelieving brothers, “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.” Of course Diotrefes and the false teachers are going to reject and ostracize John and those who follow his apostolic message, because the latter “testify” to the effect that the former's “deeds are evil.” A person cannot be a Christian and most likely be loved and embraced by the prevailing culture. There is also [John 12:19](#), “So the Pharisees said to one another, ‘You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after him.’” Here the Pharisees call the Jews who have believed in Jesus “the world,” demonstrating that this word was common among even unbelieving Jews for labelling those whom they considered to be unbelieving Jews!

Cf. [Matthew 6:24](#) “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and earthly provisions.”

Buying into the cosmos/world and its culture, which has sided with Satan, and its rejection of God is obviously mutually exclusive with loving God. Either complete commitment and selling out for the culture is a person's orientation, or complete commitment and selling out for God is. You cannot serve God and mammon = material and earthly provisions. John's exhortation is to reject the attitude that makes the stuff of this world, even physical life, primary. The most valuable thing for a person to own is a changed inwardness and subjectivity with a primary desire for moral goodness and eternal salvation, not a huge quantity of whatever “assets” he can acquire in this world, whether physical, social, or political assets—or the militant and stubborn commitment to agendas created by human beings, e.g., social justice, environmentalism, etc. that make for world-historical importance as Kierkegaard talks about in CUP.

²⁶ ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἔστιν – There are two sources of what drives people spiritually and morally among human beings in this realm of inhabitants. There is God the Father who changes people's inwardness and subjectivity so that they are driven to face into the depth of their sin and to appeal to God for mercy and forgiveness while also having a genuine desire to pursue biblical morality and goodness as they await God's promise of eternal salvation and life. And there is the “world” where people are characterized by the inwardness with which they are born so that they are driven by the strong desire of their “flesh” which leads them to choose to sin, by the strong desire of their eyes which also leads them to consider the things of this world as more important than genuine worship of God and His promise of future eternal life, and by the things of this world that they are involved in from which they derive their sense of worth and value, particularly power, authority, force, and control over others, instead of valuing God's grace and love for them as sinners that will provide them eventually with life in the eternal Kingdom of God.

The “all” here that is “in the world” is obviously everything apart from what God is doing through His sovereign grace and mercy to rescue sinners from His wrath and condemnation.

The bottom line of what John is talking about here is our natural born sinful humanity, our “flesh,” whose fundamental passions lead us to defy God and His moral commandments, especially the commandment to embrace and deal with the depth of our sin properly. John calls this “the strong desire of the flesh,” i.e., a person’s humanness and inherent moral depravity. We so easily and quickly choose to do evil instead of good. It would certainly come as a surprise to Diotrefes and his fellow false teachers, but all three things mentioned in this verse are the primary, existential driving force in those adhering to their unbiblical Judaism and manner of following the Mosaic Covenant. So abject, immoral sensuality that rejects Jesus as the crucified Messiah is one example of our sinfulness, while biblical looking and religious Pharisaism (and other kinds of religious systems, even a Christian looking religious system) that also goes so far as to reject Jesus as the Messiah (even while claiming that Jesus is the Messiah) is another. In other words, sin can look very obvious like that of the society of the immoral Roman Empire, and it can look less obvious like that of the Jewish society that was sincerely seeking to follow the Mosaic Covenant which God had required of them.

John also refers to “the strong desire of the eyes.” These are the evil desires that are in conjunction with our looking around at the world and seeing things (material, social, emotional, religious) that we think we cannot do without if we are going to find satisfaction and fulfillment in our lives. And ultimately this phrase is referring to the basic inclinations that stem from our sinfulness and that also lead us to pursue that which is contrary to truth.

Then John lastly refers to the “self-flattering claims of existence.” These are the self-flattering, inflated assertions that created human beings make about their self-importance during this existence in the present realm along with their pursuits, even, in this context, in regard to their moral capability and their knowledge of the truth that actually results in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and those who fully embrace not only the depth of their sinfulness but also Jesus as their advocate at the final judgment (cf. Diotrefes, 3 John 9 “I [a genuine apostle] wrote something to the church; but Diotrefes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we [all genuine apostles] say”). In other words, these are the claims where a person says, “I _____ [and then fill in the blank],” when the blank refers to what I need to tell someone about myself in order for them to be impressed with me and for me to feel good about myself. It is not that saying something about myself and my accomplishments is morally wrong. It is when I combine doing so with my insatiable and prideful need to rely on the approval of others and my external actions and accomplishments for my believing that I am a valuable and important human being by means of these things and accomplishments. This is instead of looking to only what God is doing inside of me and my unequalled desire for eternal salvation from God’s condemnation and for moral righteousness. But this takes divinely created humility within us to embrace the apostolic message of the Messiah in such a way.

John uses the partitive ἐκ in ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς referring to these things’ not being sourced from or a part of God’s ultimate project centered in the Davidic Covenant with Jesus as his Son and final king, but sourced from and a part of the “world’s” project within God’s story and whole project. The world’s project is for us to make ourselves as important as possible in the eyes of other, created human beings through strictly human effort, achievement, and acquirement.

²⁷ καὶ ὁ κόσμος παράγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ ποιὼν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – This is the second time that John has mentioned that the negative aspects of this present realm are passing away (cf. 1 John 2:8 – the darkness is passing away). The evil and immorally dark situation of this world is temporary, at least to the extent that, when Jesus returns, Satan will be imprisoned and unable to influence cultures, etc., and people will be unable to harm the Jews and rebel against Jesus who will be ruling over the whole world during the millennial kingdom.

Therefore, John may very well be referring to only Jesus’ return and the ensuing millennial kingdom whereby the hostile world and cosmos that has existed from the time of Adam and Eve will actually “pass away” in the sense that it will not dominate the inhabited earth. In this way, Jesus and the restored Kingdom of Israel will dominate the world, with the result that people like Diotrefes and his false teachers will not be able to get away with what they are currently doing publicly. Maybe people like him will continue to be unbelievers, but they will not have free reign as they currently do in John’s day and have continued to have up to our day.

Another possibility is that John is not providing any details of the end of this cosmos to the effect that there will first be the millennial kingdom and then the new and eternal heavens and earth. Instead, he is merely emphasizing that God will destroy evil completely and forever, while goodness and morality will continue and become perfect into eternity. However, I just wonder if the “great nation” of the Jews was so prominent in the minds of the apostles because it was so prominent in the Old Testament and in Jesus’ teaching that the first option is correct.

John is also declaring that the subjective orientation of human beings that characterizes people in this world will not always be dominant so that Jesus’ rule and believers’ subjectivity will dominate the next age of the millennial kingdom and on into eternal life (cf. 2 John 2). God’s project is not ultimately the perpetuation of the present world and its kind of people, so that even the millennial kingdom will be the beginning of the eternal Kingdom of God and will be radically different from what has been the case since Adam and Eve. The “eternal” existence of the next realm after Jesus’ return that will last forever with people who are oriented towards God will dominate cultures throughout the world. Therefore, to count on this world alone to satisfy and fulfill us is to misunderstand God and not to love Him. To love God is to love His whole project that includes and emphasizes His promise to make the Jews a “great nation” on this present earth is what we should look forward to. The difficulty is that this present world feels so profoundly substantial and thus important to us, which, along with our sinful orientation towards ourselves that leads us to defy God, results in our passionately pursuing making more out of our present existence than we should. John, here, is defining value based on eternal longevity and God’s ultimate moral project. Evil will eventually wane tremendously and then disappear, but goodness, even of the kind that characterizes authentic believers, will eventually dominate so that moral

perfection will become eternal.

And John states in the second part of this verse that the sinful person in the present realm who practices a lifestyle which God desires and commands us to do, i.e., believe in Jesus as the Messiah and love one another (“righteousness” in 1 John 2:29 – everyone who practices righteousness has been born of Him), will go on existing (μένει = remain, abide) “into the age.” This will be first during the millennial kingdom after Jesus returns to this realm and then during the eternal age of the new heavens and the new earth of Revelation 21. John is implying that the person who does not practice God’s will and commandments will pass out of existence after the judgment. Only Jesus and authentic believers will exist in the Kingdom of God of the “great nation” of Genesis 12:1-3 and in the eternal realm of the new earth of Revelation 21. The story for all others will end so that they will no longer exist.

²⁸ Παιδιά, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, καὶ καθὼς ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν, ὅθεν γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν – This is the only use of “last hour” in the Bible. Jesus’ first coming marked the beginning of the age before God ends the present age and starts the final age with the millennial kingdom and then a completely new creation that will be the eternal Kingdom of God. John must know this from Jesus’ teaching and his own correct understanding of the Old Testament, particularly the prophets. Therefore, the “last hour” for John is all the time leading up to the Jesus’ parousia as God disciplines the Jews for their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and the hostility against God of the cosmos/world dominates global culture.

Hebrews 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, in the light of whom also He made the world .

Genesis 49:1, “Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, ‘Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come (עֵת הַיָּמִים אֲחֵרִים) (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν).”

Also Numbers 24:14, “And now, behold, I am going to my people; come, and I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come [in the last of the days] (עֵת הַיָּמִים אֲחֵרִים) (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν).”

Even though John must know from the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 that the time between Jesus’ first and second appearances will be long, nevertheless, this whole period of history is the “last hour.” It is God’s winding up the relatively long course of human history with all the events that culminate in Jesus’ return, the millennial kingdom, and finally the eternal earth. As I mentioned in a previous note, Jesus’ first appearance starting a chain of events that will culminate in this return and restoring the Kingdom of Israel on this earth, the first stage of the Kingdom of God. Then God will destroy the present realm, create a new heavens and a new earth, and this second stage of the Kingdom of God will persist into eternity.

And from all quarters of humanity, perhaps especially from the Jews, before and near the second coming of Jesus the Messiah and before the mass revival of the Jews (cf. Ezek. 37, Rom. 11), there will be opposition to Jesus as the Messiah.

John is saying that even now before the final days of “the last hour,” opposition to Jesus as the Messiah has arisen within the Christian community, in spite of people being exposed to the apostolic message *from John or any of the other apostles and their co-workers*. The combination of the future coming of the Messiah and opposition to the Messiah now, even in John’s day, is clear indication to him that “it is the last hour” just before the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel.

2 John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus the Messiah as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the one who opposes the Messiah.

²⁹ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξηλθαν ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν, εἰ γὰρ ἔξ ἡμῶν ἦσαν, μεμενῆκεισαν ἂν μεθ’ ἡμῶν – ἄλλ’ ἵνα φανερωθῶσιν ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν – John is saying that the false teachers started within the community of believers who had heard the apostolic message from those such as John and Paul and their close associates and believed it (= of us, ἐξ ἡμῶν), but they became persuaded to abandon the gospel and revert to a Judaistic message that denies that Jesus is the Messiah. In this context, this must have happened because of the influence of people such as Diotrefes and those who are false teachers like him.

Thus, these “opponents of the Messiah” left the apostolic community and traveled away theologically and physically from the apostles while claiming to be from Jesus and the apostles, i.e., while claiming to adhere to and proclaim the same apostolic message as Jesus and the apostles. But, because they lacked proper inwardness (as we know must be the case from how the Bible describes the vital change that must take place within sinful human beings), they focused on the Mosaic Covenant, distorted the gospel message by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, and ostracized God’s people who acknowledge the profundity of their sin and Jesus as the Messiah. As a result, John says that “they were not from us” (οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν). He means that they left the apostolic community and “went out from us” (ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξηλθαν), but they were not aligned with the apostles and therefore were not truly “from us” (οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν). And all this was how they became known as such (φανερωθῶσιν). The revealed themselves as false teachers by abandoning the gospel message of John, Paul, and their co-workers.

This kind of leaving the truth is much more difficult to detect today because no apostle is alive and available to explain the apostolic message accurately, thus making everyone dependent on only the written documents of both the Old and New Testaments, which themselves are difficult to interpret to the point that no theologian or Bible teacher since the apostles has ever understood the gospel completely accurately. Therefore, for any of us to claim completely and absolutely that someone is not “from” the apostolic community is arrogant and presumptuous. We can only suggest that it is likely and encourage everyone, including ourselves, to continue to study the Bible and learn it as well as possible.

If the false teachers had continued to embrace the apostolic message, then they would have conveyed the truth instead of falsehood, and they would have remained friendly towards John. But, as John states in 3 John 10, Diotrephes is “slandering us [the apostles] with evil words.”

And to demonstrate their lack of authentic inwardness and subjective orientation towards God, the false teachers began to proclaim a completely false message about Jesus (that he is not the Messiah – 1 John 2:22) and about the depth and problem of people’s sin (that it is humanly manageable – 1 John 1:8,10).

And they did this because not everyone who seems to have embraced the apostolic message is an authentic believer.

In addition, John states a very simple principle, that “not everyone is from us [the apostles] (ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν),” which is to say that not every sinful human being in this world is going to embrace the truth of the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah. Implied is that only those who are chosen by God will do so when His Spirit works within them to reorient their hearts and they pursue the truth of the Bible and seek to live in correctly—especially by loving others who embrace this same message of the crucified Messiah in the light of the profundity of human sin.

³⁰ καὶ ὑμεῖς χρίσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου ὁ καὶ οἶδατε ὅτι πάντες – First, John tells these two generations of believers in Jesus that they have received a special mark and change from God, what he calls an “anointing.” This is to say that God has worked within them and caused them not only to understand the information about Jesus that John and others have provided them but also to embrace it with authentic belief in order to gain the eventual outcome of eternal life.

Thus, John is telling his readers that they have all they need to understand the truth about God and Jesus. He is saying, “Don’t change anything.” He is convinced that both the older generation and younger generation of these believers are marked by God inwardly with a change that has produced authentic belief in the true, apostolic message. This is their “anointing,” their literally being “messiahed” or “christed,” i.e., set apart by God for a very special purpose, which is to believe in the apostolic message and eventually to gain eternal life.

Paul uses either πάντες or πάντα – probably the latter. Everything that John is saying regarding the apostolic message is true since they have been taught by the apostle John or Paul or one of their close, legitimate associates, and they have been fundamentally changed by God inwardly. As a result, they certainly should not embrace the ideas of the false teachers. So John is saying, “You know all that matters about Jesus’ being the Messiah, etc., because I and others have taught you well.” But John is not saying that it is the anointing that has taught them all things so that they can now take this spiritual gift and claim to say whatever they think the Spirit is leading them to think and say. It is the apostles who have taught them, and God who has inwardly changed them in order to make them authentically attracted to the truth and thereafter to believe it and live it. The combination of these two elements constitute their being authentic believers.

³¹ οὐκ ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐκ οἶδατε τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀλλ’ ὅτι οἶδατε αὐτὴν καὶ ὅτι ὅτι πᾶν ψεῦδος ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἔστιν – John says that he is not writing to them in order to correct their thinking but to affirm it instead, because they have not yet bought into Diotrephes’ message but are only questioning it. And the reason they are thinking correctly is because they originally received the apostolic message from either Paul or John or others who are closely and appropriately associated with them.

Obviously, John is saying, any idea that does not correspond to the message which he received from God through Jesus is a lie and should not be considered truth. It does not come “from the truth” (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας) as its source and which it matches. And this is clearly the case with the teaching of the false teachers to the effect that Jesus is not the Messiah and that everyone should place the Mosaic Covenant at the center of their relationship with God. A person cannot believe two contradictory ideas—that Jesus is the crucified Messiah and propitiatory offering/high priest of sinners and that Jesus was only barely a teacher of the Mosaic Covenant who somehow ran afoul of the Jewish authorities. The latter is a lie that is not from the truth, while the former is the truth which John’s readers “know” because he has taught them well before.

³² Τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ψεῦστης εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός· οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν – This is the crux of the issue for John and his readers. Should the latter believe Diotrephes and others like him who claim that Jesus is not the Messiah because he ran afoul of the Mosaic Covenant following Jewish leadership and was appropriately sentenced to death for his crime—especially that of claiming to be the Messiah? Or should they believe John and his fellow apostles and co-workers that Jesus is the very center of God’s story, and therefore they should remain committed to all those who believe likewise?

By saying that Jesus is not the Messiah, i.e., the eternal Davidic king of the eternal Kingdom of God, this becomes the crux of the world’s mindset (and that of the false teachers), denying all that it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, that his death communicates the profundity of our moral and sinful problem and that we need his advocacy at the judgment which will lead to his ruling over us in the eternal Kingdom of God.

The denial of who Jesus is can exist for people even while claiming to have known or know Jesus and his teachings, as is the case with Diotrephes in 3 John. Perhaps they acknowledge that he was a great moral teacher, but this is all he is because they claim that the Mosaic Covenant is still the most important element of biblical teaching for anyone and the only legitimate means to acquiring God’s mercy through bringing offerings and sacrifices to God at the temple. In other words, Jesus’ death was meaningless in regard to sin. It only meant that he was so seriously wrong in some aspect of his teaching, that he is the Messiah, that the Jewish leadership correctly concluded that he was guilty of blasphemy and deserved to be executed.

And the false teachers probably also believe that they make themselves worthy of God’s mercy by their obedience to the covenant. Thus, they deny that Jesus is not only the long-expected Messiah, but also that he is the only valid high priest for a sinner who is seeking God’s eternal mercy (cf. Hebrews). In fact, as I said, they probably feel justified in

denying Jesus as the Messiah on the basis of his having been executed by the Jewish leadership who were and continue to emphasize rightly the Mosaic Covenant in the lives of both Jews and Gentiles.

John also claims that by denying that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, these false teachers are rejecting God the Father who sent him. This is their major error because they fail to appreciate the significance of Jesus, his role, and his death as a propitiatory offering for man's sin that led to his resurrection and will lead to eternal life for those who embrace him for who he is.

³³ πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν υἱὸν οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει, ὁ ὁμολογῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει – Because, according to the Davidic Covenant, the king of Israel is the Son of God and God's proxy on earth, to reject the king is to reject God, even if a person claims to be following another important part of the Bible, e.g., the Mosaic Covenant in this case. Therefore, rejecting Jesus' kingly authority would be like rejecting David's or Solomon's kingly authority. And rejecting either Jesus' authority or that of a previous Davidic king is the same as rejecting God the Father and therefore not "having" Him, i.e., not having Him as one's God—regardless of how strongly one claims that He is.

On the other hand, to "acknowledge" (ὁ ὁμολογῶν) Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah is to have God as one's God, which is to believe the truth that He has communicated through Jesus and his apostles. This is how closely tied together are the crucified Son of God and the Father and author of the entire created reality.

³⁴ ὑμεῖς ὁ ἡκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἐν ὑμῖν μενέτω. ἐὰν ἐν ὑμῖν μείνῃ ὁ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἡκούσατε, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν τῷ υἱῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μενεῖτε – John is still saying, "Don't change a thing. You have not only the right message, but by believing in it, you also have eternal life." John of course is referring to the apostolic message that the older generation received from Paul, or him, or their associates. And he is encouraging them to make every human effort to hold on to the message they initially received, because if they do, they will retain their proper relationship with God. They will be "in" God and "in" Jesus instead of out of God and out of Jesus, the latter being where the false teachers are. Thus, John's readers will remain disciples of Jesus as the Messiah and obedient to the Father, even his Father through the Davidic Covenant. They will be followers of the Father's and Jesus' truth that originated with the Father.

³⁵ καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἣν αὐτὸς ἐπηγγείλατο ἡμῖν, τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον – The result of holding on to the original message which John's readers heard will be their obtaining God's promise of eternal life, that which those who believe the apostolic message will receive. This promise began with the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:1-3. God said that He would bless Abraham with not only a "great nation" of people who are his physical descendants, but also eternal life and companions of similar belief in eternity from among both the Jews and Gentiles. Thus, eternal life is the outcome of a person who authentically embraces the Father's message through Jesus that Jesus is the Messiah and all that this means regarding our moral problem and need for the Messiah's advocacy at the judgment (cf. 2:1) as well as the vital characteristic of loving and being committed to fellow believers.

This then is the promise which Jesus promised when he first appeared and declared that he is the Messiah.

For example, [John 5:24](#) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

³⁶ ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν περὶ τῶν πλανώντων ὑμᾶς – Here is the first explicit reference to the false teachers in that they are seeking to influence directly John's readers. It is not simply that his readers have gone astray on their own. There are a group of men whose purpose is to teach a different message from John's. And so his purpose is to refute these false teachers who are trying to deceive his readers and lead them astray into lies and into rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. They are also ostracizing true believers (cf. Diotrephes, 3 John 9).

Cf. [2 John 7](#) For many deceivers (πολλοὶ πλάνοι) have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the one who opposes the Messiah (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πλάνος καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος).

³⁷ καὶ ὑμεῖς τὸ χρίσμα ὃ ἐλάβετε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἔμεινεν ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ οὐ χρειαν ἔχετε ἵνα τις διδάσκῃ ὑμᾶς, ἄλλ' ὥς ἡ αὐτοῦ χρίσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων, καὶ ἀληθὲς ἐστὶν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ψεῦδος, καὶ καθὼς ἐδίδαξαν ὑμᾶς, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ – John repeats the idea from 2:20 that his readers have been "anointed" (christed) by God which has resulted in their believing the apostolic message, and the inward change that God has produced in them along with the apostolic message which they heard and embraced with authentic belief is permanent.

Thus, God's permanent, inward change along with their belief in the apostolic message means that there is no need to shift messages as people like Diotrephes are trying to convince John's readers that they need to do.

Again, two separate things. God's changing them with authentic belief in the truth is permanent, and the apostles have taught them all that they need to know, so that they should simply ignore someone like Diotrephes.

Consequently, John is not claiming that they need no teaching at all. Instead, they need no teaching from anyone who would steer them away from the apostolic message which John and others have taught them. They simply need to stick with what John has said and close their ears to anyone who would present something different to them as truth.

He finishes by urging them to make every human effort to hold on to the truth. The phrase ἐν αὐτῷ seems best to interpret as referring to the neuter anointing (τὸ χρίσμα) and therefore to be translated "in it" instead of "in him" as referring to God or Jesus. The implied effect of holding on to the truth is that they will pursue a lifestyle of loving one another in accordance with God's inner change and the truth that now resonates as truth within them.

³⁸ Καὶ νῦν, τέκνιά, μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ, ἵνα ἐὰν φανερωθῇ σχῶμεν παρρησίαν καὶ μὴ αἰσχυρθῶμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ – As in the previous verse, I have translated ἐν αὐτῷ as referring to the anointing (τὸ χρίσμα). John is exhorting his readers to hold on to all that God has done for them by changing their hearts and causing them to embrace the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah.

The ultimate outcome of authentically embracing and guarding the apostolic message is eternal mercy through Jesus' advocacy at his second coming which John calls his *parousia*. This word refers to Jesus' grand appearance whereby he reveals himself as the champion and king of Israel who destroys their enemies and restores their kingdom on the land of Israel. John would have his readers persevere in their belief so that the apostles and they together as all authentic believers will not be embarrassed by unbelief when Jesus returns, which would demonstrate a lack of beneficial and eternal effect in their lives of the truth which they presented to them.

Or John may be speaking of only his and the other apostolic workers' not being embarrassed by his readers' unbelief. This may seem rather selfish on John's part, but even Paul looked forward to seeing his work validated at the judgment by the authenticity of the belief of people whom he had taught. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:19, "Who is our hope or joy or crown of bragging? Is it not indeed you in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming?"

But the first option is more profound for his readers' sake and therefore I think makes more sense. Thus, at Jesus triumphant and magnificent reentry into the world, all authentic believers will have a bold openness about their faith and a complete lack of any shame or embarrassment that they might have felt before in the face of the strong and hostile opposition of the cosmos/world to God and Jesus.

³⁹ ἐὰν εἴδητε ὅτι δίκαιός ἐστιν, γινώσκετε ὅτι ὁ καὶ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται – Here "righteous" and "righteousness" refer to two slightly different kinds of righteousness. In the first case, "righteous" (δίκαιός) refers to God's moral perfection, while the "one who practices righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) refers to a sinful human being who pursues doing what is right without his being morally perfect this side of eternal life.

John is saying that, if his readers as sinful human beings know and believe that God the Father is morally perfect (and the assumption is that they do), then they will also grasp the theological fact that everyone who is like them and pursues moral goodness as a lifestyle ("practices righteousness"), a moral goodness that is centered in believing in Jesus and loving God's people (the "righteousness" described in this letter by John), does so from a condition of having his inner commitments changed miraculously by God so that his heart matches that of Jesus, while his "flesh" remains immoral. Certainly the false teachers would admit that God is morally perfect. But it makes special sense to an authentic believer that the moral commitments of the person who truly understands God *matches* God's moral commitments, i.e., in the context of this letter, belief in Jesus as the Messiah and loving authentic believers in Jesus, which constitutes his "practicing righteousness." And this is the person who has been fathered by God ("born from Him") (ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται) through the inner work of the Spirit of God) to resemble His moral character in his present life and to inherit His property, which is eternal life and moral perfection after Jesus returns. John is using the metaphor of a second birth to refer to a profound inner change that God produces in sinners, i.e., it comes "from" God through the work of His Spirit, so that the effects are what John is describing in this letter for authentic believers.

As I said, John is assuming that his readers do understand all this so that he will go on to say in the next verse that the false teachers do not. The latter talk as though they know God and what they are talking about, but they are in error because their message differs so radically from that of John and the other apostles—and therefore from God's!

Cf. **John 3:5** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit (ἐννηθῇ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος) he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. **3:6** "That which is born of the flesh (ὁ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς) is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit (τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος) is spirit.

⁴⁰ Ἴδετε ποταπὴν ἀγάπην ἡδὲ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατήρ, ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν, ὡς καὶ ἐσμέν. διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει ἡμᾶς, ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν – In Exodus 4:22, God commands Moses to tell the Egyptian Pharaoh that "Israel is My son, my firstborn," which is the same as saying that the Jews as an ethnic group are "the children of God." But while it is true that the OT declares the Jews to be the "children of God" as physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and followers of the Mosaic Covenant (which must be what the false teachers are saying is all that is necessary to be a child of God), John is unequivocally stating that the true "children of God" are those who are inwardly "born" of God (from the previous verse), resulting in their believing in Jesus as the Messiah and caring for others who believe in Jesus in the same way. And by inference, these would be both Jews, who are slated to obtain God's promise of becoming the greatest nation in all human history as well as eternal life, and Gentiles, who are slated to obtain God's promise of participating in the Jewish promise during the millennial kingdom as well as the promise of eternal life.

John is drawing his readers' attention to how great God's love is—that this is because God has made sinners into His children through the inward work of the Spirit (thus they are "born of God") and through the existence and work of Jesus along with people's belief in him. This is in contrast to what the false teachers are saying—that people make themselves God's children through their own obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, even to the extent that they think that they can earn His love as their "Father" by this kind of obedience.

The "us" and "we" here are more probably John and his Christian readers (and all Christians by extrapolation) and not just John and the apostles.

Thus, the Father of Jesus, the Son of God and final Davidic king, is also the Father of those whose inwardness He has changed so that they authentically obey Him with belief in Jesus and love for those who also believe in Jesus. This means that they are loved by God. And John emphasizes this—"For sure we are!!"

And John goes on to say that people of the world who are characterized by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, which in this context are the false teachers who are promoting an erroneous Judaism, cannot see that believers in Jesus as the Messiah are actually the true "children of God." And the reason they cannot grasp this fact ("recognize us" as such) is because they do not know the one true God in spite of their claim to do so. They know about God by virtue of their

seeking to follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to make themselves worthy of God's blessings, but they do not really know God and His condition of authentic belief in Jesus as the Messiah by means of His grace which must be at work within their hearts to cause this kind of belief.

Thus, the present realm is filled with sinful human beings, including Jews, who reject Jesus as the Messiah while claiming to know the Father by obeying the Mosaic Covenant (or by following a kind of Christianity in according to some of the NT statements but not all of them and an accurate understanding of them). They refuse to grasp the appropriateness of the claims of the apostles and authentic believers who know and proclaim the biblical truth of Jesus as the Messiah and advocate at the final judgment. As a result, believers are out of sync with the world and its misunderstanding of and even rejection of God. The fact that the world cannot rightly discern who believers really are and who they are as unbelievers is because they refuse to discern rightly who God is and what His plans and purposes are.

⁴¹ ἀγαπητοὶ νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν, καὶ οὐπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα. οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτόν, καθὼς ἐστίν – In the present realm authentic believers are simply sinful “children of God” whose hearts and priorities have been changed by the Spirit of God, and when Jesus returns they will become more than just *sinful* “children of God.” They will become morally perfect like Jesus, but this has “not yet been revealed.” In the meantime, it may be that people like the false teachers of an erroneous Judaism believe that they do not need to become better morally, that they are good enough for both the present realm and eternity. They cannot see that Jesus was morally better than they are. Indeed, he was morally perfect, and this is what each sinner should aspire to become by God's grace in eternity when He transforms us from sinners to being just like Jesus (cf. the next verse). Therefore, we have the status of being God's children and heirs of His eternal property. But our moral perfection and final moral condition has not yet been revealed to us or to anyone else.

But we know that when Jesus appears, “when he is revealed,” we shall be exactly “like him” in his eternal and moral nature. We will share his resurrected existence that will be of a completely different order from the one in which we exist now.

To become morally perfect like God and Jesus requires being able to welcome the latter at his second coming because of one's true belief and longing and expectation for this event. It will be then during the first resurrection of Revelation 20 that “we shall see him just as he is” and become like him in his eternal and morally perfect condition.

Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.

⁴² καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἀγνίζει ἑαυτόν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστιν – And everyone who grasps the *eternal* significance of Jesus continually repents of his sin (but not through the Mosaic Covenant) and pursues genuine moral obedience to God. He “practices righteousness” in line with how Jesus lived and died because he ultimately wants to become morally perfect as Jesus has always been.

Thus, in the midst of being a sinner, a person strives for moral purity and obedience with authentic belief just as Jesus has always been morally perfect. The sinners moral purity includes loving and caring for God's people, i.e., other believers in Jesus as the Messiah, which is what the false teachers are not doing. The authentic Christian pursues being like Jesus as he has been, is now, and always will be.

It seems best to translate ἐπ' αὐτῷ with “based on it” rather than “based on him.” The pronoun is referring to the certain knowledge that a sinner has that eternal life and moral perfection will be his through Jesus and not through the Mosaic Covenant. But “based on him” boils down to the same thing.

⁴³ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία – The false teachers believe that they are “lawful” people by their strict outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. John claims that they are practicing sin by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah (cf. 2:2 – person who is a “liar”), implying that this is the greatest lawlessness ever.

Here is a clue that John is writing against those who, like the apostle Paul's Jewish opponents, emphasized the Mosaic Covenant, and, in this case, denied that Jesus is the Messiah. Therefore, in the background of 3:4-7 is the teaching of the false teachers along with the important distinction between a simple transgression of the Mosaic Covenant and actual, biblical sin, which is deeper and has the important inward component of our being evil people. In addition, the false teachers are probably looking at only the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant and defining sin as a transgression against any of these commandments, and no more.

In other words, if the Mosaic Covenant does not explicitly say, “You shall not be a jerk,” then being a jerk is not “lawlessness” and sin per se. In contrast John is pointing out that any sin, even if it is not explicitly spelled out in the covenant, is just as much a violation of the covenant as a transgression against any of the actual commandments and is justifiably damnable. Thus, John's definition of sin points to a person's beingness and actions that are contrary to God's commandments, including and especially the commandment to be inwardly changed in order to believe the truth of the gospel and love God's people who are authentic believers with proper humility.

Jesus makes the same qualification about the depth and inwardness of sin in the Sermon on the Mount, e.g., [Matthew 5:27](#) “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; [28](#) but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” In other words, “religious” people tend to look at only the external elements of morality and thereby trivialize it by ignoring the inward component and the extent of it, e.g., rejecting authentic believers on the basis of strictly their doctrinal differences when they have a genuine desire to pursue biblical truth and obtain God's justification and mercy.

John will go on to say that everyone (like Diotrephes) who rejects Jesus as the Messiah, who ostracizes true believers,

who rejects the truth from God about Jesus as the Messiah is actually acting contrary both to the Mosaic Covenant, which the false teachers claim to be obeying, and to Jesus' instructions and commandments, which they reject anyway because they refuse to believe that a crucified Messiah is the Messiah.

⁴⁴ καὶ οἶδατε ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἐφανερώθη, ἵνα τὰς ἁμαρτίας τ' ἄρῃ, καὶ ἁμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν – In addition to knowing that the depth and inwardness of sin is itself a violation of the Mosaic Covenant, John's readers also know the importance of Jesus, that he alone (and not the Mosaic Covenant) solves the problem of man's sinfulness through his being a propitiatory offering to God so as to become our advocate and intercessor at the judgment. The result is that when a sinful human being is "in Jesus," he does not pursue a life of sin but of genuine righteousness and morality that includes caring for others who believe the same about Jesus.

There are two options for "take away sins" – 1) remove sin altogether from the world or even just from Christians so that they can live a "righteous" life free from sin, or 2) bring about forgiveness from God for our sin. #1 is completely out of sync with the rest of the New Testament and even the whole Bible. Therefore, this is Old Testament terminology—that Jesus through his willingness to die on the cross has qualified to be able to appeal to God for forgiveness on our behalf at the final judgment. And this is instead of any sinful human being relying on animal sacrifices according to the Mosaic Covenant as the means to obtain God's eternal forgiveness. These other sacrifices strictly foreshadow Jesus' offering which is the only one sufficient to provide sinners with eternal mercy. Therefore, when "that one" (= Jesus) was revealed at his first coming, God's purpose for him was to be His instrument of mercy for all sinners.

Several options for "in him there is no sin" – 1) Jesus is morally perfect, 2) sinners who belong to Jesus as their rabbi, Lord, and Savior can live morally perfect lives, 3) sinners who belong to Jesus flee from sin and pursue goodness and righteousness according to God's moral commandments, including loving God, His people, and even unbelievers. #3 is the most coherent in this context where John is encouraging his readers not to allow sin to characterize their lifestyle (cf. 1 John 2:1). The next verse shows this, too.

Thus, Jesus' purpose is to provide forgiveness and the very reason for pursuing biblical goodness in obedience to God in the present realm—in contrast to the Jews' misunderstanding of the Mosaic Covenant that it alone provides these two things.

⁴⁵ πᾶς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει· πᾶς ὁ ἁμαρτάνων οὐχ ἑώρακεν αὐτὸν οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν αὐτόν – John goes on to explain the last statement of v. 5 further by saying that authentic, persevering belief motivates Christians no longer to have a fundamental desire to rebel against God and reject the truth, including rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and ostracizing true Christians—as the false teachers are doing (cf. 3 John 9ff.). Christians remain committed to righteousness and do not purposely and intentionally make room for sin because of their being born of God. They are not committed to sin, and they do not trivialize it the way the false teachers are while actually claiming to obey God by adhering to the Mosaic Covenant.

Those who do make room for sin ("sins") have not really grasped who Jesus is even if they claim that they have seen him and understood his teaching—as the false teachers are claiming. Thus, regardless of the false teachers' claim either to have seen Jesus or to have come to know what he taught through others who have seen Jesus, they are wrong because they are disobeying his instructions and teachings to believe that he is the Messiah and to love others who embrace the same belief. In other words, they have not really seen Jesus.

⁴⁶ παιδία, ἡμεῖς πλανᾶτω ὑμᾶς· ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν – The false teachers are claiming that they are "righteous" and thereby acceptable to God while the followers of Jesus are sinning, unrighteous, and therefore unacceptable to God. The key here is to understand how John is using the two words δικαιοσύνην and δίκαιός in this verse.

"Righteousness" (δικαιοσύνην) = moral goodness as much as a sinner can perform it according to Jesus' instructions and any of them that coincide with the Mosaic Covenant. The first "righteous" (δίκαιός) = doing the right thing by sinners so as to be accepted by God. The second "righteous" (δίκαιός) = doing the right thing with moral perfection by Jesus so as to be accepted by God.

While δίκαιός could mean doing the right thing or pardoned and/or accepted by God, John means doing the right thing and accepted by God for both authentic believers and Jesus. Certainly, Jesus did not need to be pardoned while all other human beings as sinners do. But both are accepted by God because of their commitment to God's program and His definition of morality and moral behavior for both Jewish and Gentile believers. Thus, both believers and Jesus pursue appropriate righteousness and moral goodness before God. Sinners do it as sinners, and Jesus does it as the morally perfect Messiah and icon of God in the story of human history.

John urges his readers not to let anyone deceive them from believing this truth about Jesus and themselves, because they are the offspring of God and believe in Jesus as the crucified Messiah instead of buying into the erroneous, religious system of the Jews which they have derived from the Mosaic Covenant.

⁴⁷ ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἁμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου – There are two kinds of people in this world, those who "are of the devil" in that they side with Satan against God and trivialize biblical morality and sin while remaining committed to immorality. The other kind of people are those who are "of God" ("in Him" and "in Jesus") in that they side with God, extol biblical morality while remaining committed to God and Jesus as the Messiah.

The false teachers have especially sinned by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and focusing strictly on the Mosaic Covenant, thinking that it is the latter that defines one's relationship with God, resulting in the additional sin of

mistreating authentic believers in Jesus as the Messiah. As a result, even though these are Bible-following human beings, their allegiance to the Bible is not with a willingness to embrace all its truth that would lead them to understand that Jesus is the Messiah and to believe in him for the sake of their eternal salvations. Just because people claim to believe in God and obey the Bible does not mean that they are actually doing so.

Cf. Hebrews 2:14, ἵνα διὰ τοῦ θανάτου καταργήσῃ τὸν τὸ κράτος ἔχοντα τοῦ θανάτου, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὸν διάβολον = that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Satan is committed to continue sinning, which he has from the beginning of God's having created him, and those who have sided with him are also committed to doing the same. In addition, the goal of Satan is to keep everyone focused on rebelling against God and to destroy both the Jews as an ethnic group and believers in Jesus as the Messiah, whether Jews or Gentiles. Jesus' goal is to render Satan's efforts worthless by qualifying through his death to bring about the restored Kingdom of Israel for the Jews as God's first promise to Abraham and to rescue from eternal condemnation those whom the Father gives him (cf. John 6) from among both the Jews and the Gentiles.

This is the first of seven instances where John will use the Davidic title Son of God to refer to Jesus. He has called him "His Son," i.e., God's Son in 1:3,7; cf. 2:22, etc. and given him the title Jesus Messiah. This title refers to the king of Israel who is God's human proxy within the creation and on the earth as expressed first by God in the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7.

⁴⁸ πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται – Everyone who has been fathered by God and becomes His child by God's changing his inner commitments through the work of the Holy Spirit does not pursue a life of sin and disobedience to the truth like the false teachers ("does not practice sin"). And this is because God's "seed," i.e., the inner change that God has brought about that will grow into the plant of eternal moral perfection and forgiveness, remains the spiritual and moral orientation in this person.

As a result, authentic believers cannot theologically act contrary to the change of inner commitments that God has brought about. They cannot reject the apostolic message. They cannot reject Jesus as the Messiah. And they cannot mistreat other Christians whose values match theirs. They cannot turn their lives into a sinfest like that of the false teachers in spite of their claim to be following the Mosaic Covenant. It is fortunately theologically impossible for authentic Christians to become and act like non-Christians—especially in this situation of 1 John of rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and not caring for others who believe in him for his propitiation and salvation that comes through his death and resurrection.

⁴⁹ ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστιν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου – Children of God resemble God in their intellectual and moral orientation and pursue goodness while believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Children of the devil resemble the devil in their intellectual and moral orientation and pursue evil—as the false teachers are by rejecting Jesus and the genuine followers of him as the Messiah. They are simply not "loving" the very people towards whom they should be the most loving—Christians.

To be "born of the devil" and therefore his child is to have been born into the human race that is fundamentally rebellious towards God because of people's natural born sinful humanity. It is to be hostile towards God and to manifest this hostility in any number of ways—various religions that identify themselves as religions and simple rejection of all religions, including and especially Christianity.

⁵⁰ πᾶς ὁ μὴ 'ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην' οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ – Here is the second half of the central element of authentic Christianity that John is emphasizing. Everyone who rejects biblical righteousness (that includes belief in Jesus as the Messiah) and thereby is unwilling to care for God's people with the same kind of commitment to Jesus as the Messiah and with the same definition of the depth and extent of sin and morality, cannot truly belong to God. He is not "from God" (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ vs. ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου in v. 8) in that he has not sided with Him in His commitment to goodness and repentance of sin to the depth that the Bible explains. This person is not coming from a place where his understanding of reality and his goals match that of God.

It is not that the Christian is truly "his brother," i.e., the sinner who is acceptable to God and will acquire eternal life, but that the Christian ought to be "his brother!"

⁵¹ Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ῥαγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους – John (or another apostle or co-worker) had already passed on to his readers, especially the older generation when they first heard the gospel, the instruction that Jesus originally gave to only the apostles, that we worshipers of God, who genuinely seek His eternal mercy through only His grace and through Jesus, should care for and be supportive of one another because of our common goal both of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus as our advocate, so that we obey God in the present realm through loving both Him and one another.

Even Paul says in [Romans 13:8](#) "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves has fulfilled the Covenant," indicating that genuine love for one's fellow Christian fulfills the Mosaic Covenant and thereby fulfills the commandment to love God with one's entire being as stated in [Deuteronomy 6:5](#) "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." As John is arguing in this letter, genuine love for other believers cannot happen without genuine love for God, which cannot happen apart from the "anointing" and inward work of the Holy Spirit in a sinner.

Cf. John 13:34,35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The newness of this commandment is in its relationship to Jesus as the Messiah as opposed to finding it in the Mosaic

Covenant in the words, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus loved his apostles (and us) sacrificially, and this is the same kind of love that we are commanded to express towards each other as Christians.

⁵² οὐ καθὼς Κάιν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ· καὶ χάριν τίνος ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν; ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν, τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια – This almost takes one’s breath away, that John uses the example of Cain and Abel to illustrate his point about the false teachers and their treatment of authentic Christians! Cain physically murdered his brother Abel and hid his body in the ground. Is not this a bit extreme to compare it with Diotrophes and others who are only ostracizing Christians from their religious communities? John does not think so. Why? Because the two come from the same “spirit,” a rejection of God and a willingness to follow Satan. Abel was Cain’s blood brother, but, because they were both supposedly worshipers of God, the story works for John to use as an example of someone hating their spiritual “brother.” It is this simple. Abel was a “righteous” man, and Cain was an “evil” man. Righteous people bug the heck out of evil people, who deep within them are envious of God’s acceptance and approval of them. As a result, evil people become hostile towards righteous people and in some way “kill” them, i.e., make them disappear from their presence. In the case of John’s readers, the false teachers are ostracizing them from their religious community and claiming that they are not bona fide worshipers of God. Thus, Cain and Abel were both “worshipers” of God, but only Abel had a changed heart. Cain was like the false teachers and became angry and “ostracized” his brother by killing him after learning that his religious performance was unacceptable to God. False worshipers of God know intrinsically that they are wrong and unacceptable to God and therefore become envious of and even hostile towards genuine believers who reveal their evil by being authentic believers and doing what is biblically good and right.

The “world” does not want to co-exist with Christians, in spite of the bumper sticker that encourages all religions to get along with one another. On the other hand, one of the important goals of Christians is to work to create political and sociological environments where both they and the “world” can live together before Jesus’ return and the final judgment. This is so that both groups and therefore all individuals have as much opportunity as possible to repent, believe in Jesus, and thereby obtain eternal salvation and life from God. But we do know that only the predestined chosen ones will actually do so.

⁵³ *καὶ μὴ θαυμάζετε, ἀδελφοί ὅτι, εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος – With the the example of Cain and Abel, John continues in a manner that is just as remarkable. First, he encourages his readers not to be surprised that people, who can be classified as “the world,” rebels against God in the present realm, even if they claim to be servants of God through the Mosaic Covenant (or “Christians” in the church) are so offended by their authentic belief in Jesus and pursuit of genuine morality, that they end up wanting to “kill” them—to push them away, out of their lives, and to eliminate their offense. Thus, this includes any in the religious world, whether Jews, Christians, etc. If they are not truly fathered by God to believe that Jesus is the Messiah so that the religion of the Mosaic Covenant or their misunderstanding of the NT becomes more important to them than simple belief and biblical morality, then they can be categorized as the “world,” the cosmos, who will oppose authentic Christians with every fiber of their being—as Cain did with Abel and literally murdered him.

It is so easy for religious people of the cosmos to dismiss non-religious Christians of authentic belief because the “worship” of God by the latter looks so unsubstantial to them. Religion and the system of religion just feels so worthwhile, important, fundamental, essential, and satisfying to people who actually love religion more than they do God in the midst of their abject unbelief and unchanged hearts. Raw Christian belief and love for God and others is so simple and too simple for the religiously minded.

As far as John’s encouraging his readers not to be surprised if the world of unbelievers hate them, he got this from Jesus and what he said about the apostles in the midst of the “world” of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem who were committed to the Mosaic Covenant – [John 15:18](#) “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. [15:19](#) “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. [15:20](#) “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. [15:21](#) “But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. [15:22](#) “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. [15:23](#) “He who hates Me hates My Father also. [15:24](#) “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. [15:25](#) “But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.’”

⁵⁴ ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς ὅτι ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν ὁ μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ – This is the litmus test for true faith—apart from belief in Jesus as the Messiah and all that this means. The person who is genuinely committed to his fellow believers in Jesus can know that he has exited from a legal position before God of receiving eternal death and condemnation and moved into a legal position of mercy, salvation, and eternal life (cf. 3:15). This inward commitment that reveals itself in a person’s outward actions of loving and caring for the people who are just like him, authentic believers in Jesus as the Messiah and lovers of God and one another, is the manner in which John states the condition which God has placed on sinful human beings to obtain His eternal salvation. And it is noticeably salvation by works except for the fact that no one can earn it. It is a gift of God’s grace, which results in salvation by gracious works as opposed to salvation by worthy works.

John is expressing this in the context of the false teachers who are focused on the Mosaic Covenant and are rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. They are ostracizing true believers and thereby stand eternally condemned before God. Their

“love” fails the litmus test because they are encouraging the wrong people in their obedience of God. They are encouraging those who are committed to following the erroneous, religious system of the misunderstanding of the Jews of that day instead of encouraging authentic believers in Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah. They remain in a state of eventually incurring God’s wrath, condemnation, and destruction (the final characteristic of “death”) at the final Great White Throne Judgment after the millennial kingdom (cf. Revelation 20).

⁵⁵ πᾶς ὁ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἐστίν, καὶ οἶδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένουσαν – Again, John is using remarkably strong language, but this is the truth. He is as explicit as he can be as to the seriousness of the lack of belief and its resultant mistreatment of authentic Christians. Like Cain and Diotrephes, every false teacher or “Christian” who ostracizes genuine believers who seek God’s eternal mercy through His grace and Jesus’ death as the Messiah has a spiritual and moral inwardness like Cain, i.e., anti-God. John categorizes this person as a “murderer,” someone who goes so far as to kill authentic believers physically or who kills them by rejecting them as Christians and ostracizes them from their so-called “Christian community” (“church” in our day).

And every Cain-like worshiper of God will receive God’s eternal condemnation and destruction, regardless of how fervently they worship God (such as diligently obeying every commandment of the Mosaic Covenant in the case of Diotrephes in John’s day or fervently singing songs to Jesus in churches in our day) and claim to be following the truth of the gospel and therefore have eternal life.

⁵⁶ ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς ἑθεῖναι – This is the measure of love, and John knows it very well because he heard about it from Jesus in the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17. It is Jesus’ love for us whereby he gave up his physical existence for sinners, and ultimately for sinners who become genuine believers through God’s drawing them to himself (cf. John 6). Therefore, John is saying that authentic Christians are morally obligated to emulate him and give up their “lives” and even physical existences for their fellow Christians.

Cf. John 15:12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 15:14 “You are My friends if you do what I command you.”

⁵⁷ ὃς δ’ ἂν ἔχῃ τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ ἰκλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἢ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ῥέμνει ἐν αὐτῷ – This the second time that John has used the term βίος in this letter. In 2:15 it refers to the things that make for existence in the present realm that people use to flatter themselves that they are worthwhile and valuable in contrast to their deriving their worth from what God is doing within them—giving them authentic belief and an unequalled desire for goodness and eternal life. Here, the meaning is basically the same, the things that make for sustenance and existence in the present realm. The person who refuses to respond to the teaching of the message that resides in him from Jesus to love and care for those who also believe that Jesus is the Messiah, so that he withholds the things in this world that are important for existing in this world and thus to show love, such as demonstrating hospitality to the emissaries from John, is not a true follower of Jesus. Christians are to hold on lightly to the external things that make for existence in the present realm while holding on tightly to the promise of internal things that will make for having existence in the eternal Kingdom of God.

The words that John uses for what prevents a person from being willing to meet the needs of those who are deprived of the things permit existence in this realm are, “and he closes (καὶ κλείσῃ) his ‘τὰ σπλάγχνα.’” These last words are defined in BDAG as inward parts, entrails, heart, and the feeling of love and affection. Definitely they refer to something within us human beings that results in our acting in a compassionate and charitable manner towards people in need. Probably John is referring to that tug at our hearts and wills when we recognize that someone is definitely in need, and now we have a choice. Do we choose to help meet that need, or do we walk away. John is saying that people who walk away from helping to meet the needs of committed believers in Jesus have shut down their willingness to do what the gospel calls us to do in loving one another. As a result, he can ask the rhetorical question about how this same person can love God at the same time? And the implied answer is that it is impossible for this to be the case.

The basic principle is this. God’s love for human beings that He gives to them exhibits itself through self-sacrifice of the things that make for existence in the present realm in those who have been inwardly affected by the change that God has brought about. And this is what Jesus himself demonstrated (cf. 3:1). It would seem then that the false teachers with their Cain-like spirituality are withholding money, food, and clothing from authentic Christians. This is exactly what Diotrephes is doing and demanding that his followers do in 3 John. Thus, they lack the genuine self-sacrifice that Jesus demonstrated as the Messiah by going so far as to give up his physical life for those who truly want God’s mercy. Thus, they demonstrate that they lack authentic faith and are false teachers who are rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. This passage cannot be used to prove that if there is one person out there in the whole wide world who is hungry or in need, then we are not being good Christians. John is speaking to the specific situation of his readers who are being forbidden by Diotrephes and others like him to embrace authentic believers who are carrying the truth from the apostle John to them. The context of Cain and Abel is key to interpreting this passage too. It then becomes the job of each individual Christian to use the wisdom he acquires from the Bible to decide just how much charity he exercises towards others, both Christians and non-Christians.

⁵⁸ τεκνία τ, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ ἢ μὴδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ – The false teachers with their Cain spirituality are big talkers about being loving according to the Mosaic Covenant, but they are not being genuinely such towards people of authentic belief who are seeking God’s mercy through Jesus as the Messiah. They are talk but no actions.

“Action and truth” is an hendiadys where the two things are being used to express one idea—that truth and loving actions are so intimately connected to one another that you cannot have one, e.g., belief in truth, without the other, e.g., loving actions towards the brothers who come from John to present the truth of the apostolic message. A person cannot say that he is loving and then not consistently act in a loving way. These are mutually exclusive.

We notice that John uses the expression to “love in action and truth,” so that he probably means “by means of action and truth.” The previous datives λόγῳ ‘μηδὲ τῇ’ γλώσσει probably have the same meaning of “by means of thought or speech.”

⁵⁹ ‘Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ’ ἡγνώσμεθα ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμέν. καὶ ἐμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ ῥησίσμεν ἡτὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν – Here John is referring to a basic principle of sinful humans, and he is doing so in the specific context of this letter where he is addressing the problem of the influence that the false teachers are having on his readers. Some of them are doubting their salvation because the false teachers are so strong in their criticism of them for believing that Jesus is the Messiah and minimizing the importance of the Mosaic Covenant. John is saying that the self-knowledge of the authenticity of one’s faith comes through the quality of one’s attitude towards the things that make for existence in the present realm in relationship to one’s *fellow believers* who are in need. Thus, there is probably a double effect going on within John’s readers. They are doubting their salvation because of the intense pressure of the false teachers who are criticizing them for actually believing the truth. And they are doubting it because they are not responding compassionately to the needs of their fellow genuine believers.

This is the second criterion for knowing who are authentic followers of Jesus—they guard Jesus’ teachings, instructions, and commandments (vs. 22,23), including the teaching that Jesus is the Messiah AND that they act charitably towards other Christians. John is saying that by performing these biblical requirements, they (and John and we) can know that they are coming from a place of truth (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας), i.e., where the truth about God and Jesus from the Bible is that which is at the core of their decision-making process.

⁶⁰ ὅτι ἐὰν τὴν καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα – Thus, John is saying that, if “our” (his and his readers’) inner subjective feelings tell “us” that we are not of the truth, because others are saying that we are not right with God by not focusing on the Mosaic Covenant and by loving believers in Jesus as the Messiah, trying to shame and condemn us into questioning our salvation so that we feel insecure (thinking of this from John’s point of view), the solution is to go back to the basics—that God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness towards us as believers are greater than anyone’s criticism of us as believers and even greater than any lapse in our thinking that Jesus is the Messiah AND than our lack of charitableness towards Christians that might occur because we are being faked out by false teaching. So this would apply in the midst of any false teaching and pressure from others that Christians might encounter down through history.

John is also saying that God knows what is really going in “our” hearts and remains committed to us while “we” sort out the issue of exactly what is the truth and genuinely pursue it and moral obedience to God via Jesus’ instructions. This is not unlike the feeling we get around certain Christians, i.e., that we are not quite performing up to the standard that they hold to, and, therefore, are less Christian than they are, leading us even to question the authenticity of our Christianity while they subtly or not so subtly encourage us to leave those who are simple and non-religious believers in Jesus as the Messiah.

“we know” is assumed from v. 19, continuing the idea that John and his readers know the truth—in this case, the fact that God is more merciful than their self-condemning feelings, and He sees into the depth of their beings that their fundamental desire is for His mercy and eternal life, thereby resulting in God’s mercy winning out over their self-condemnation. Probably, the Judaistic teachers are working hard at making these authentic believers feel bad before God because they are not as moral as they are, leading to the authentic believers’ actually being that much more aware of their sinfulness and questioning the authenticity of their obedience to God.

John’s readers are having thoughts and doubts about whether they really have the truth of God, because the false teachers are saying that it is necessary not to be a disciple of Jesus but of Moses only in order to receive God’s blessings. John is saying the opposite. God’s voice of the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah is more powerful than the voice of the false teachers.

For us, persistently reading and studying the Bible and comparing our condemning thoughts with the message of God is vital to ensuring ourselves that we have and believe the truth. God’s voice is more powerful than the punitive and critical ones in our heads that we more than likely grew up with because of the limitations of our parents and then become heightened by the strong pressure of religious, ritualistic people who lack an understanding of the simplicity of Christianity.

An important conclusion that we can draw from these verses is that it is only natural that on occasion Christians question the authenticity of their faith and have to work through the foundational truths of the Bible and the gospel to assure themselves that they are on the right track to gain God’s blessings to Abraham of participating in the “great nation” of the Israel and of participating in eternal life.

⁶¹ ῥαγαπητοί, ἐὰν ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν μὴ καταγινώσκῃ, παρηρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν – Two options – 1) John is referring to having worked through doubt that comes from instances such as being pressured by the false teachers and then arriving at the point of having confidence that one is a genuine believer; 2) He is referring to those other times when we are not doubting our faith and have an accurate and confident sense of the genuineness of our faith—but certainly without being presumptuous or arrogant about it.

If #1 is correct, when we take the above step and as a result grasp the fact of God’s greatness, mercy, and omniscience,

while constantly acknowledging our sinfulness as part of authentic belief, which then leads to confidence in God's presence, especially at the judgment, that He will grant us mercy through Jesus as our Advocate (cf. 1 John 2:1;4:17). If #2 is correct, then all Christians just naturally alternate between doubting their faith and being confident about it. My guess is #2 is probably correct here.

⁶² καὶ ὃ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν, λαμβάνομεν ἅπ' αὐτοῦ, ὅτι τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν – In the context of this letter, that which we request from God would be eternal life and mercy at the final judgment. And it is exactly this which God will grant us. Therefore, we stand to receive that which we request. John is not referring to just anything that we might ask from God, e.g., more money, a new job, physical health, etc. In the context, it is His blessing of eternal life. And we ask not because we are disciples of Moses in line with Diotrephes' and the false teachers' teaching, but because we are disciples of Jesus our Advocate in line with John's and the other apostles' teachings.

Because "we" embrace God's instructions, His Torah, i.e., believing in Jesus as the Messiah and loving His people, as the most important ideas that a human being can embrace and that are that by which we can bring joy to God (cf. 1 John 2:3; 4:23), we know that we will receive that for which we ask—eternal life. The implication is that, when we become Christians, pleasing God first and foremost is our desire, not pleasing people. And we please God by practicing, i.e., making the choice to do, that which He has instructed us as sinful human beings through the apostles. Again, the two things we are required to practice and do are believing that Jesus is the Messiah and being supportive and caring towards our fellow Christians who are believers in Jesus—as John will say in the next verse.

⁶³ καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ῥιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν ἡμῖν – Here for the first time in the letter John puts the two instructions/commandments from God together—to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and to love other authentic believers in Jesus as the Messiah.

John is speaking of God the Father's teaching that came through the Son, Jesus (cf. 1:1).

Jesus' name is his role and function as the Son of God, Messiah, and all the other titles. John is saying that we embrace all that it means for Jesus to have the title "Son," i.e., that he is the final Davidic king, ruler of the eternal Kingdom of God, and intervener at the final judgment—prophet, king, priest, and judge/ruler. And we embrace God's teaching just as the Son, Jesus, gave it to us—that we believe in him as the Messiah and love God's people, believing Jews and Gentile, who have this authentic belief. This is the gospel stated in the simplest of terms—believe in the Messiah and love those who also believe. And, as the apostle Paul says, loving one's fellow Christian is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses (cf. [Romans 13:8](#) Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.)

⁶⁴ καὶ ὁ τηρῶν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ῥμῖν ἔδωκεν¹ – Here John states the general principle that the person who embraces Jesus' teaching to the effect that he is the Messiah as the most important information for all human beings (especially sinful human beings, which we all are!) is also the one who continues in the group of people who are committed to him. At the same time, Jesus remains committed to this person to the effect that he is on his side and will be his helper and advocate before God who will grant him eternal mercy and life at the final judgment.

John is also stating that, by virtue of this truth of Jesus as Messiah and Advocate, he and the other *apostles* know that Jesus is committed to them by having taught them all his instructions and by having promised to bring it to their attention through the work of the Holy Spirit which he promised "us," the apostles. Compare the language of the Upper Room Discourse in John 14:16-31 and also 1 John 4:1, and then placing this in the context of refuting the false teachers such as Diotrephes. The Holy Spirit was vital to the apostles' confidence and courage to call to mind and proclaim the truth of the gospel in the hostile environment in which they found themselves. Just as Jesus had been their *parakletos* who encouraged the apostles and continually reminded them of what he was teaching, so was the Spirit of God after Jesus' left them and ascended from the earth. The Spirit continued to remind them of what Jesus had taught them. Thus, John refers to God's activity and faithfulness to His promise through Jesus to make the apostles his sole, authoritative spokesmen (cf. John 14:16-31; 17:13-21). John is combatting the assertion from the Judaistic false teachers like Diotrephes that he is not an authority on Jesus and that they are (cf. 4:1). It would seem, too, that John is saying that it is a miracle that the apostles continue not only to remember and understand all the theology which Jesus taught them, but also to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah in a hostile world and cosmos, just as much as it is a miracle that his readers would continue to believe this message in the same hostile world and cosmos. Thus, all that is true and right and ultimately leads to eternal Life for sinners is of God's doing, i.e., the Spirit's doing, not man's.

⁶⁵ Ἀγαπητοί, μὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα εἰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν, ὅτι πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον – Here "spirit" refers to both the inner spiritual purposes, i.e., the inwardness and desires towards either goodness or evil, of the people who are speaking and the message that they are presenting. John is saying that it is possible to test what is really going on in someone who claims to be presenting you with truth.

On the one hand, if their message is strictly about the Mosaic Covenant while rejecting and ignoring Jesus as the Messiah, then their message indicates that they are false prophets/teachers. And the fact is that many false prophets/teachers have gone out into the world, which John has mentioned already in 1 John 2:18,19 – [2:18](#) "Children, it is the last hour, and just as you heard that opposition to the Messiah is coming, even now many opponents of the Messiah have become apparent, from which we know that it is the last hour. [2:19](#) They went out from us, but they were

not of us. For if they were of us, they would have remained with us. But, so that they could become known, because not everyone is of us.” These false prophets and teachers have started within the Christian community and then left it with their error and proclaimed it in the world, the *cosmos*, which of course is going to be receptive to error and not to the truth of the gospel.

On the other hand, if and only if the prophets/teachers affirm that Jesus is the Messiah and all that this means, i.e., that authentic Christians are morally obligated to care for and support (“love”) their fellow Christians, then they are pursuing the one true, biblical truth.

It is therefore necessary to be careful, because there are many false teachers and false claims of truth out there in the world, even false teachers who have gone out from the apostolic community and are even claiming to have known Jesus and are promoting the Bible, the Mosaic Covenant. But then they have changed the biblical message to one that denies that Jesus is the Messiah and that claims that the Mosaic Covenant (religious rituals and a system that comprises Christianity in our day) is that which is central to a sinner’s relationship with God.

⁶⁶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ· πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἔληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν – One can tell a person’s inwardness as to whether or not God has reoriented the person towards the biblical truth, i.e., he has “the spirit of God,” by his confessing that the very human being Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and all that this means for the sake of eternal life. It means accepting that he was a mere man who was executed by the Jewish authorities on the cross (and then was raised from the dead). The false teachers are probably thinking that the Messiah is going to be more than a man (a theophany similar to what Hebrews states?). But what about his being a descendant of David according to the Davidic Covenant? In addition, he certainly will not be considered a criminal by the Jewish leadership and put to death by them. Plus, he will uphold and promote the Mosaic Covenant as the very center of anyone’s (whether a Jew’s or a Gentile’s) relationship with God.

Cf. 2 John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the one who opposes the Messiah.

Most commentators take this verse as evidence of John’s writing both for the preexistence of the Son of God and Messiah and against a Gnostic approach to Christianity that believed that Jesus was a mere ghost and did not possess physical, human flesh. However, John the Baptist is spoken of as having been sent by God and coming from God, and he was merely human (John 1:6,7). Also, the entire context of this letter makes it clear that the issue is complete rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, not a partial rejection of such while accepting all that is true about Jesus except his physicality. Therefore, John uses this clause to emphasize that the Messiah, the final Davidic king, has appeared “in the flesh,” and that Jesus is he. God has brought into existence the human being who is central to His story and is the very icon of God.

⁶⁷ καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν· καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου ὃ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστίν ἥδη – John finishes his thought here about what characterizes a teacher of truth vs. of error with respect specifically to Jesus as the Messiah. Every person with an inwardness (his fundamental desires, perceptions, and inclinations) that does not result in his embracing the truth that Jesus is the Messiah promised by God through the OT is not following God. By implication, this person is following the father of lies, Satan, who has injected a current of unbelief and opposition into the stream of human cultures throughout the whole world during all of human history. In John’s and his readers’ circumstances this is being evidenced by the Judaistic teachers like Diotrephes who have rejected Jesus and his believers and instead are promoting only the Mosaic Covenant and its followers.

John also mentions that this spirit of opposition to the Messiah “is coming” (ἔρχεται), and he must be referring to the time just before Jesus’ return when the hostility in the Middle East and the rest of the world will reach its apex and manifest itself through the Man of Lawlessness and his anti-Semitic and anti-Christians actions which will include his invasion of the land of Israel to subjugate the Jews and even destroy them.

⁶⁸ ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστε, τέκνια, καὶ νενικήκατε αὐτούς, ὅτι μείζων ἐστίν ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ – John is saying that the origin of his readers’ as authentic believers is God, just as the origin of Jesus’ role as the Messiah is from God (cf. v. 2).

Therefore, John’s readers have acquired the knowledge, inwardness, desires, commitments, and inclinations from God to combat and defeat the assertions and pressures of any false teacher, the “one who is in the world,” in order that they obtain eternal life. The implication here is that fighting ideas for the sake of the truth is not just an intellectual exercise. It takes courage, fortitude, and divine strength, because false ideas usually come from people who are so insecure and hostile to the biblical truth that they cannot tolerate disagreement and will use intimidation and even violence to squash those who disagree with them.

In addition, John is implying that false ideas and those who promote them will not endure in the world. Eventually Jesus will return, and the promotion of false ideas and the *open* hostility to the truth will cease. There will still be unbelievers in the world during the millennial kingdom, but they will have to keep their opposition to Jesus and God to themselves.

Thus, God’s anointing (cf. 1 John 2:20 and 4:13) of a changed inwardness and resultant belief in Jesus as the Messiah is greater in both strength and endurance than the influence of the false teachers (compare the language of the Upper Room Discourse in John 14). It truly is God, the transcendent Creator, who is at work in the believers according to His eternal plans and purposes to make sure they persevere in their faith and obtain eternal life, while it is only Satan, a created being and therefore much, much weaker than God, who is at work in the false teachers.

Cf. 1 John 2:16 because all that is in the world—the strong desire of the flesh, the strong desire of the eyes, and the self-flattering claims of existence—is not from the Father but is from the world (οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἐστίν).

Cf. 1 John 2:13b – I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the evil one.

Cf. 1 John 2:14c – I am writing to you, young men, because you are strong, and the message of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one.

⁶⁹ αὐτοὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου εἰσίν, διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκούει – John is saying that the origin of the false teachers’ as false teachers is the present realm with the devil, Satan, as the one whom they are following as he injects his lies and deceptions into the present culture—even worldwide. They have only the mindset and strength of the present realm to propagate their lies. We notice again that John includes teachers of his current day Judaism in the “world.” Basically any set of lies that are attempts to explain the nature of reality come “from the world” (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου), even if they are supposedly derived from the Bible. Why not use the source of truth and twist it to produce lies. Thus, these false ideas that people claim are biblical get lifted right out of the world’s inner belly of hostility and opposition to God, and the people who propagate them are perfectly willing to use violence to silence dissenters. A great example was John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland in the 1500s and burning Michael Servetus as the stake for his different view of the trinity.

The “spirit” of the present realm, i.e., what people really want, is either only the stuff of this life or their own concoction of the means to acquire the blessings of God while they are at their core in both their flesh and their hearts opposed to God. Thus, those who are of this inwardness and mindset affirm each other in their rebellion against God and sometimes even fight against one another, for example when unbelievers promote anti-Semitism of all Jews.

⁷⁰ ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν ὁ γινώσκων τὸν θεὸν ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὅς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν. ἔκ τούτου γινώσκωμεν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης – In the light of John’s referring to the false teachers and the world’s listening to them, I think it makes the most sense that John is saying that “we” apostles, not “we” Christians, are coming from a place where we have been commissioned by God through Jesus to proclaim the message of the NT gospel with the same authority and accuracy as Jesus (cf. John 12-17). The question in this letter is whether the Christian communities who have contacted John should embrace his teaching or that of the “other” teachers? And John’s unequivocal answer is that those who really “know God” will listen to and embrace the apostles’ message, not that of the false teachers.

Thus, one of the tests of authentic belief is whether or not a person is willing to listen to the apostles and learn their message about Jesus as the Messiah as opposed to listening to the people who are entrenched in the present realm and its rebellion against God, which would include teachers of an erroneous Judaism that emphasizes the Mosaic Covenant above Jesus as the Messiah and the institution of the church in our day with its obsession with tradition and traditional teachings as opposed to doing the hard work of truly learning the Bible.

Therefore, the person who is willing to come from a place that matches intellectually and morally the apostles is truly “from God” like the apostles. But this is not easy with the plethora of voices out there in every sector of our culture and within Christianity that screams for attention and demands to be recognized as speaking the only “TRUTH!”

Consequently, John here is providing a litmus test of authentic belief vs. entrenchment in the present realm. People who consider only the apostolic, i.e., biblical, authors to be authoritative are being led by the Spirit of God since He is the same “spirit” that leads the apostles. This is the person who “knows God” and as a result “listens to” the apostles and is of “the spirit of truth.”

People who consider others (even themselves) to be authoritative, e.g., Jewish adherents of solely the Mosaic Covenant while denying that Jesus is the Messiah, Darwinian evolutionists, and Christian traditionalists who adhere more to historical creeds and the man-made religion of their traditions than to the actual truth of the biblical message, are being led by the influences of the present realm. This is the person “who is not from God” and does “not listen” to the apostles. They are buying into the lies of Satan and are of “the spirit of error.”

God is definitely at work in those who embrace the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah, but He is not in those who reject this message and instead follow the lies of their societal or religious culture.

⁷¹ Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους· ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται, καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν – There are two options for how to understand what John is saying here – 1) Because love is “from God” and God has loved His enemies by Jesus’ reconciling them to Him, authentic followers of God should love their enemies (“one another”) as they love their fellow Christians; 2) Because love is “from God” and God has gone so far as to love His enemies, surely those who claim to love God must love their fellow Christians.

I used to think that #1 is correct, but the word for “one another,” ἀλλήλους, leads me think that #2 makes more sense and that John is emphasizing again (!) the vital nature of being genuine worshipers of God—loving God’s people who have the same belief in Jesus as the Messiah who died for our sins.

John is saying that genuine and biblical love for other Christians is both a miracle of God and a response to one’s understanding about God and His love. Indeed, true love can and will by necessity occur only if God has inwardly worked in a sinful human being. In addition, it is a cognitive response to a person’s understanding about God. And the Christian is willing to extend God’s love to his fellow believers (and, I guess, by extrapolation even to his enemies since God has loved His enemies!), in spite of how much work it takes to love even Christians.

By loving other sinners who believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christian demonstrates that God has given birth to him as His child and that this child knows his parent, God. Children naturally imitate their parents. Christians should

“naturally” imitate their most important “parent,” God. Thus, once Christians grasp the significance of Jesus’ existence, role, and destiny, it is only natural that they will care for one another and encourage each other to persevere in their faith in Jesus and wait for his return which will bring about the eternal Kingdom of God. This will show that their love is “from God” because they are “born from God” and “know God.” In other words, this is the true God and not the God of Diotrophes and the false teachers. They are loving some other God because they have rejected His Son, Jesus the Messiah.

⁷² ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν – It is only natural that false Christians not properly love true believers in Jesus, because genuine love requires both an inward miracle of God and a proper understanding of God and Jesus. The false teachers are not reflecting God’s love because they do not know or understand that God has loved them by sending Jesus to die for them—as John will highlight in vs. 9 & 10. This kind of sacrificial love is the greatest of all love and should be recognized by all sinners. How unfortunate that it is not and people are unwilling to embrace not only the correct message of Jesus’ death but also a proper grasp of the depth of their sin.

⁷³ ἐν τούτῳ ἐφανερώθη ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι’ αὐτοῦ – Here John highlights God immense and prominent love for us sinners. Jesus is the unique Son because he, as a human being created by God and therefore “sent” by him (cf. John 1:6,4:34), is the final Davidic king who will realize all that this role involves, especially the responsibility of ruling over the eternal Kingdom of God and being an advocate as high priest and offering at the final judgment for believers.

God never intended for the Mosaic Covenant to produce Life, i.e., eternal life, for sinners, which is what He intended for Jesus to do through his death and resurrection. Indeed, this is how God has demonstrated His love for sinners, not by giving them a religious system that includes the sacrifices of animals, but by giving them a unique human being who offers himself through death on a cross to highlight what all sinful human beings deserve and to allow himself to qualify as their king and high priest so that they may obtain forgiveness and eternal life from Him.

In other words, John expresses God’s purpose in bringing about this project of creating the eternal realm with Jesus’ ruling over it, granting eternal life to sinners by means of his advocacy at the final judgment. Thus, God has demonstrated His love for sinners not by giving them the Mosaic Covenant and its religious system that includes animal sacrifices, but by giving them Jesus as a propitiatory offering and the sole means by which they can obtain eternal life and mercy. See the next verse.

⁷⁴ ἐν τούτῳ ἐστίν ἡ ἀγάπη, οὐχ ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήκαμεν τὸν θεὸν ἀλλ’ ὅτι αὐτὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἱλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν – Probably, the false teachers are saying that they are earning God’s salvation by their loving Him through their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, which is the greatest love in the world. Instead, John is pointing out that the greatest love in the world is God’s love for sinners through Jesus’ offering himself on the cross and not through human beings’ offering bulls and goats according to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. John and his readers now recognize this so that they *respond* supernaturally and miraculously to God’s love in the picture of Jesus on the cross with both love for God and love for other Christians without any thought that their choices or actions have any meritorious qualities to them.

Thus, we learn another basic element of unbelief and the mindset of the present realm, that they focus on what man does for God and not what God does for man. Also, see the note at 1:7 regarding the important biblical notion of combining the role of king and priest in the Son of God and Messiah, a notion that the Jews reject with respect to Jesus. Cf. Matthew 5:44-47; Romans 3:21-26; 4:25; 5:6-10; and Hebrews.

In other words, only Jesus delights God so that He will listen to him as our advocate and grant us mercy and eternal life. On our own, we do not delight God, not even when we appeal to him from our changed inwardness. It takes Jesus to delight God enough to provide us with eternal salvation. Paul is saying the same thing in Romans 5:4ff.

This is the second time that John has mentioned Jesus’ propitiatory role (cf. 1 John 2:1ff.)

⁷⁵ Ἀγαπητοί, εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν – This verse is not that much different from 4:7. Since love is “from God” in the manner in which God has loved sinful human beings, i.e., by sending Jesus as a propitiatory offering (in contrast to the erroneous Judaism of Diotrophes which is looking at only the Mosaic Covenant and its required animal sacrifices), then it stands to reason that Christians are morally obligated to love one another sacrificially as those for whom Jesus’ offering will become effective through his advocacy at the final judgment.

Thus, after one recognizes the fundamental issue of God’s love for sinners through Jesus’ sacrificial death and that sinners’ love for each other is a miracle of God’s grace, a person also recognizes that it is a moral obligation of sinners to pursue loving other sinners of a common belief in Jesus as the Messiah. In this way, the transcendent and existential levels of reality mesh with one another. God’s independent love for sinners motivates believing sinners to love one another (ἀλλήλους – see the next verse).

⁷⁶ θεὸν οὐδεὶς πώποτε τεθέαται. ἐὰν ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν μένει καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ ἔν ἡμῖν τετελειωμένη ἐστίν – Three options for what John means in this verse—

1) Are the false teachers claiming some kind of special revelation of God to them, as though they had “seen” God (cf. John 1:18)?

2) Or, are they claiming some kind of authority based upon Moses’ experience with God, that he had “seen” God and they are following him?

3) Or, is John merely highlighting the value of God’s people loving others by pointing out that, while no one has seen the transcendent Creator, everyone can see His reflections within the created reality, i.e., first through his sending Jesus

as a propitiatory offering for sinners and second through His people who genuinely love others by being born from God and by responding to their truthful understanding of Him?

It seems to make the most sense that this last idea is what John means. Thus, John continues his line of thinking from just before this verse.

John is saying that clear evidence of the miraculous effect of having heard God's message, embracing it, and experiencing God's eternal commitment through the inward work of His Spirit is loving one's fellow believers in Jesus as the crucified Son of God and propitiatory offering to God. By this we allow our fellow Christians and others to "see" God by demonstrating His love to them, something which Diotrephes and his followers are NOT doing.

By the way, if Jesus is the co-eternal 2nd person of the Trinity, how is it possible for John to write that no one has ever seen God?

⁷⁷ Ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ ῥέδωκεν ἡμῖν – Is John switching here to referring to the apostles or is he continuing to refer to Christians in general? If the former, then this verse goes with the ones which follow. If the latter, it goes with the preceding verses. I think that it makes more sense to place this verse with the ones which follow it so that John is referring to himself and his fellow apostles. They were commissioned by Jesus to be his authoritative spokesmen during the Upper Room discourse of John 12-16, especially chapter 14 where Jesus promises them another *paracletos*, the Holy Spirit, someone who will come alongside them and remind them of the truth which he has been teaching them.

Cf. 1 John 3:24, "Now he who guards his teachings remains in him and he in him. Indeed, by this we know that he remains in us, by virtue of the Spirit that He gave to us."

John became convinced that God is working in the apostles in a special way by making them His authoritative spokesmen, thus giving everyone else a basis on which to hear the message of Jesus as the Messiah from them and to believe this message for the sake of their own eternal salvation. This is a similar point to Paul's in Romans 7-8, that a sinner changed by the Spirit of God is able to obtain God's mercy vs. a sinner who looks only to the written commandments of the Mosaic Covenant and his self-produced obedience to them for his making himself worthy of God's mercy. Also, in Romans 5:1-11 Paul explicitly identifies God's love towards sinners as Jesus' death for them and God's Spirit being poured out in their hearts which results in their belief and its perseverance which leads to hope and confidently waiting for eternal salvation from God. This happened especially for the apostles to make them Jesus' first and authoritative spokesmen.

We notice that John says that God has given to the apostles "from" His Spirit, which is to say that from God has come all that the apostles need to be apostles—the truth from Jesus' own lips and the persuasion, confidence, and clarity of mind to present it to others, including to these readers whom John is encouraging to stick with the truth!

⁷⁸ καὶ ἡμεῖς ῥησάμεθα καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν ὅτι ὁ πατήρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτήρα τοῦ κόσμου – Now John goes on, speaking of himself and his fellow apostles and not to Christians in general. Because of the Spirit's work within the apostles as their *paracletos* and their personal experience with Jesus who performed miracles, proclaimed himself as the Messiah, died and was raised from the dead, and appeared to John and the other apostles, he can testify to the truth that Jesus is the Savior and Liberator of the world from their sin. The apostles which include John were eyewitnesses of Jesus' words and actions whereby God confirmed him as the long-expected Messiah and Son of God, i.e., God's proxy as the king of Israel in the world. And the apostles also witnessed that Jesus is the "Savior of the world" when he died on the cross and was raised from the dead. This further demonstrated that God had "sent the Son," Jesus, for this specific purpose. The "world" refers to all human beings, but the Bible is clear that only those whom God has predestined and chosen will take advantage of Jesus' role and believe in him authentically.

By inference, the one who hears the apostles and their message and who continues to believe Jesus' teaching that God is love and that He has loved us through Jesus' death is believing God correctly. This would be in contrast to the false teachers who deny that Jesus' death was an act of love on God's and his part to qualify for his role as Savior.

Therefore, the false teachers do not have eternal life.

⁷⁹ ὅς ἐάν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ θεῷ – Then John once again mentions the key element of authentic Christianity and the beneficial effect that the apostolic message should have on sinners. The person who has truly embraced this message that Jesus is the "Son of God," the final Davidic king who also is the crucified Messiah, will also receive eternal life, unlike Diotrephes in 3 John and those influenced by Judaistic teachers to abandon the notion that the Messiah of David suffered in order to qualify as such. In addition, we can derive from the OT's understanding of the phrase "Son of God" as the earthly king who is the proxy of God the fact that John is not claiming that a bona fide Christian must believe that Jesus is the co-eternal 2nd person of Trinity. Instead, he must recognize that Jesus is that human being within God's story who is the icon of God as well as king and priest of Israel and all other sinners who embrace him as such.

When a sinner genuinely embraces Jesus as the Son of God, it also demonstrates that "God remains in him and he remains in God." To "remain" in this condition is not achieved through practicing the religious requirements of the Mosaic Covenant but through believing in Jesus properly and caring for others who believe in him by encouraging them to hold on to the truth of God until they die or Jesus returns.

⁸⁰ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ ῥησάμεθα τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν. Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει, καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ ὁμείνει – In the first part of this verse, John states that the apostles have embraced the fact that God's love resides within them through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised them. In spite of all the pressure which they have experienced to abandon the gospel and to return to the

safety of the erroneous Mosaic Covenant Judaism, the apostles have stayed true to the truth.

In the second part of the verse, John makes the categorical statement that God is love in and of Himself, which by inference has manifested love by Jesus' death for sinners and by the presence of the Holy Spirit in all believers. Therefore, the person who remains committed to acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah and the Spirit within him and to loving God and His people is the person in whom God obviously abides and remains with His presence and towards whom God remains committed to grant eternal life (as John will go on to say in the next verse).

⁸¹ ἐν τούτῳ τετελείωται ἡ ἀγάπη μεθ' ἡμῶν, ἵνα παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως ὅτι καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν, καὶ ἡμεῖς ἔσμεν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ – By virtue of recognizing God's love, especially through Jesus' willingness to die on the cross and the inward work of the Holy Spirit that orients a sinner and moves him to embrace the truth of Jesus, all Christians can know that God's love has achieved its intended purpose.

Thus John is speaking of Christians in general with the 1st person plural. As a result, when we Christians stand before God at the judgment (when Jesus returns and we are either resurrected from the dead or lifted off the earth—cf. 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4), we can have the confidence that Jesus will step forward (so to speak) and appeal to the Father for mercy on our behalf (cf. 1 John 2:1ff.; 3:19-23). It is only by this method, and not by bringing meritorious offerings and sacrifices to God via the Mosaic Covenant, that a person can receive God's eternal mercy (cf. Hebrews).

John goes on to say that we Christians are like Jesus. But in what way does this make sense? We certainly are not morally perfect. So John cannot mean this. We are not immortal. So he cannot mean this either. He must mean that, just as Jesus has been and certainly still is single-mindedly committed to God's project of goodness, truth, and bringing about the eternal Kingdom of God, so also all Christians remain committed to it too while they are in the present realm (and by extrapolation, into the eternal realm also). But of course for Jesus, he has been committed not only at the level of his heart commitments but also at the level of the defining essence of his moral nature, i.e., he has always been morally perfect. We, on the other hand, are committed in our hearts by the inward change of the Holy Spirit while we still remain sinful at the level of our defining moral essence, i.e., our "flesh" as Paul calls it, and we therefore are disobedient at times. Nevertheless, because of God's love faithfully working within us, authentic believers are inwardly committed to the same values of goodness, mercy, and eternal Life as Jesus.

⁸² φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ, ἀλλ' ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον, ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ – Is John speaking of fear that comes from a poor understanding of God and Jesus in the midst of authentic belief (as would possibly be the case for his readers) or of fear that comes from complete unbelief and abject rebellion against God (as would be the case for the Diotrefes and the false teachers)?

If the former, then he is urging his readers to grasp the significance of Jesus' death and their belief in him as THE profound demonstration of God's love towards them that saves them from eternal condemnation and any fear they may have of such. In other words, this is a good fear that merely needs a proper understanding of God and comes to recognize fully that all punishment by God is eliminated through Jesus' role and sacrifice.

If the latter, then he is indicting the false teachers for not only being wrong, but also being in rebellion against God because they sinfully want to hold on to their despairing fear (cf. Soren Kierkegaard's "being in despair" in his book *The Sickness Unto Death*). In this case, the non-believing Jew or person who has been influenced by the Jews and who misunderstands the Mosaic Covenant both operates on the basis of fear of punishment and yet is trying to assuage this fear by performing the Mosaic Covenant and making himself worthy of God's forgiveness, while also attempting to push John's readers back into the same mentality and emotional state, thereby missing the point of God's love and grace that provide salvation at the judgment through Jesus' intervention and, therefore, confidence and freedom from fear of punishment now for the true believers. Thus, the non-believer has not reached the point of being "in God's love" by embracing His love through Jesus.

The latter probably makes more sense in this context, and the implied question which John is asking his readers is, "Do you want to go back to a place of fear by making your eternal salvation dependent on your supposed meritorious, outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant?" There is nothing but insecurity in such a stance, whereas a firm grasp on God's gracious mercy that by His own sovereignty will result in deliverance from eternal condemnation and that cannot in any way be earned from God is the most secure place a sinful human being can be.

⁸³ ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν (αὐτόν – TR), ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς – This statement either ends the previous section or begins the next.

It seems better to be a conclusion, that when a person grasps God's initiating in His life through Jesus' death and the inward work of the Spirit and just how loving God has been in this way, it follows theologically, biblically, and logically that he will love both God and his fellow believers.

If the αὐτόν is not there, then John is making a general statement to the effect that Christians are loving both God and people. God loves them. Therefore, they love God and their fellow believers. Why do they do all this? Because God initiated in their (and our) lives as sinners and chose to love them (and us)—in spite of their/our deserving His wrath, condemnation, and destruction. Thus, they/we imitate God's love for them/us by loving God and other people of authentic belief.

If the TR is correct, then authentic believers in Jesus as Messiah and Savior fulfill the greatest commandment of the Old Testament to love God with all one's heart, etc. (Deut. 6:5), because God's love of sending his Son and causing them to believe in him as Savior also results in their loving God.

The TR may be the correct reading because of the next verse where John speaks of loving God and the necessity to love one's "brother" in order to demonstrate his love for God.

⁸⁴ ἄν τις εἴπῃ ὅτι ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῇ, ψεύστης ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ὃν ἑώρακεν, τὸν θεὸν ὃν οὐχ ἑώρακεν· τοῦ δύναται ἀγαπᾶν – Now John moves towards the end of his letter by restating his main points and summarizing.

The "brother" is the one who believes Jesus is the Messiah and, therefore, has eternal life. In this case, "his brother" is only in theory, because, by rejecting the truth, the false teacher is outside the family of God and not loving the true brother.

John is saying that talk of loving the invisible God is cheap in comparison to loving one's visible brother. This is the situation for the false teachers. They say they love God by following the Mosaic Covenant, but by ostracizing those who believe in the apostolic message, they are demonstrating a hatred for God. Therefore, they are lying.

Again, just because people read and study the Bible and even communicate it to others as teachers does not mean that they actually believe the Bible the way that God intends people to believe it. They are using it merely to appear religious in the midst of their unbelief and hostility towards God.

⁸⁵ καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ – The teaching from God via Jesus is that those who love God love those who love God as specifically marked by their belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

The obvious inference is that those who reject the ones who believe in Jesus as the Messiah do not love God.

⁸⁶ Πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννήσαντα ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ – God through the inward work of His Spirit causes a sinner's commitments to change such that he believes the truth of the role of Jesus as God's Anointed king and priest for sinners which in turn leads to a sinner's loving God who performs this same inward action to others so that the sinner loves them too. This is authentic Christianity—believing that Jesus is the Messiah and anointed king of Israel and loving and caring for others who believe the same by encouraging them in their faith and to wait for the Kingdom of God to enter when Jesus returns.

Again, John is talking about Jesus as the Davidic king and propitiatory offering and priest, not as the co-eternal 2nd person of the Trinity.

⁸⁷ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅταν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπῶμεν καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ ποιῶμεν – I think that the ἐν τούτῳ is referring to what follows, "whenever we love God and practice his teachings." Therefore, John is saying that by specifically obeying the teaching of God that has come through Jesus, it will naturally result in our loving God's children, who are authentic believers in Jesus as the crucified Messiah (as John mentioned in the previous verse). To obey God's teaching is to love God and God's children. To love God's children is to obey God's teachings. These go hand in glove and constitute authentic Christianity.

⁸⁸ αὕτη γάρ ἐστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, καὶ αἱ ἐντολαὶ αὐτοῦ βαρεῖαι οὐκ εἰσίν – God's love for human beings that he performs by the supernatural work of changing their hearts results in their keeping and guarding for themselves the truth of Jesus as the Messiah and of loving believers in Jesus as the Messiah. By saying that God's teachings are not difficult to keep, John must mean that they are not impossible because God continues working miraculously and supernaturally in Christians to ensure they choose to love their fellow Christians. We all know how difficult it actually can be to love one another even as fellow believers, but John goes on to be explicit in the next verse that God births His children who believe in Jesus as the Messiah and who love and care for one another.

⁸⁹ ὅτι πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον· καὶ αὕτη ἐστίν ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον, ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν – John finishes the previous sentence by offering the reason why God's teachings and instructions are not difficult to keep—because God has birthed His children by changing their inwardness through the Holy Spirit so that with their biblical belief they can reject the lies and false teaching of unbelievers in the world.

Therefore, everyone who has had the miraculous work of God change him inwardly so that he is open and desirous of keeping and guarding God's instructions has the wherewithal to combat the false ideas of the people who continue to rebel against God and the pressures to join them in their rebellion. God has provided not only an inward change but also truth to beat back the seductive lies, errors, and hostility towards God. I do not save myself. God saves me.

Ultimately, as John has been explaining, it is God who conquers us by changing our hearts and causing us to have genuine belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, he can say that our belief is a kind of victory over the rebellion of the present realm because it demonstrates that God is committed to our final and eternal salvation from his condemnation.

It is also the case that belief in Jesus as the Messiah in the midst of pursuing obeying all of God's moral commandments, particularly His commandment to love other bona fide Christians, is what demonstrates the genuineness of a person's keeping God's commandments. In other words, belief in Jesus as the crucified, resurrected, ascended, and returning Messiah is the core element of a true guardian of God's commandments.

⁹⁰ Τίς 'δέ ἐστιν' ὁ νικῶν τὸν κόσμον εἰ μὴ ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ – Here, John spells out even more explicitly just what is the content of a genuine believer's belief, that it is belief in Jesus as the Son of God, i.e., as the final, Davidic king who offered himself in order to appeal to God for our mercy.

Once more, John is not talking about Jesus as the co-eternal 2nd person of the Trinity, because John is not a trinitarian.

⁹¹ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι· καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι ὁ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια – At least two options for the

“water” and the “blood”—1) Jesus’ own baptism when the Spirit of God descended on him in John 1 and John the Baptist recognized him because God had alerted him to this fact along with Jesus’ death on the cross, or 2) Jesus’ preaching baptism and his disciples’ performing it for people in John 3:22ff and along with Jesus’ death on the cross. If #1, Jesus’ existence as a human being involved not only water baptism by John who was preaching repentance for sins, thereby permitting the morally perfect Jesus to affirm John’s preaching, but it also involved death by execution as an offering to God, so that both attested to his doing what was necessary in order to qualify to be the Son of God and our advocate at the judgment, i.e., Jesus’ affirming the idea that human beings are sinful and need God’s mercy, which is granted them by His grace only, and Jesus’ outwardly demonstrating his commitment to be people’s high priest and advocate before God by willingly suffering execution on the cross. This is in contrast to those like Diotrefes, who probably believes that the Messiah is only a king and not additionally an offering to God and a priest at the judgment. Thus, John is stating categorically that Jesus cannot be the Messiah by virtue of water baptism alone (probably Diotrefes’ belief). He must also have died in order to qualify as the one who can intercede on behalf of sinners. If #2, then Jesus affirmed John the Baptist’s teaching of the repentance towards God of water baptism and then went beyond that to fulfill his role as the Messiah by dying on the cross in order to qualify to be the advocate of sinners before God.

It seems to me that #1 is more coherent with John’s purpose in this letter to affirm Jesus as the Messiah in the face of the opposition of people such as Diotrefes and the false teachers who must be rejecting Jesus because of his crucifixion. The Messiah surely would not be executed by the cruel, Roman instrument of the cross by his own people, especially the Sanhedrin of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem? But, John is saying that indeed he was, and the apostles saw all the evidence to this effect—the miracles, Jesus’ death and his resurrection.

John is also saying that the Holy Spirit, i.e., the work of the transcendent Creator within the creation, attests to Jesus’ identity as the Messiah by virtue of such things as Jesus’ miracles, the dove descending on Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; cf. John 1:32-34), and the three recorded times of the audible voice from heaven affirming Jesus’ as the Son of God (baptism—Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; transfiguration—Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; Jesus’ prayer—John 12:28).

Compare Jesus’ statements in the Upper Room Discourse about the Spirit as he encourages his apostles to fulfill their role as his authoritative spokesmen, e.g., John 14:16,17, “**I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper [Teacher/Persuader], that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.**”

⁹² ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ὃ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν – The combination of the Spirit, Jesus’ baptism by John, and Jesus’ death (that was followed by his resurrection) verifies that Jesus is the final, Davidic king and high priest at the judgment. He is the Christ, the Messiah—in contrast to the belief of the false, Judaistic teachers (and any other religious teachers in the world).

⁹³ εἰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαμβάνομεν, ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ μείζων ἐστίν· ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι μεμαρτύρηκεν περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ – Human beings naturally believe other human beings (cf. Reid’s principles of veracity and credulity, *Inquiry and Essays*, pg. 95). Should it not be all that much more natural to believe God, the transcendent Creator of all reality? Of course, even when the biblical answer is that it requires the supernatural work of God to cause a sinful human being to embrace and believe what is natural about God. Nevertheless, this belief is still as rational as believing a human being when he says something as simple and obviously true as 1+1=2, thus bearing witness to this truth as he should bear witness to the truth of Jesus as the baptized, crucified, and resurrected Messiah whom God confirmed through the audible statements of His Spirit within the creation.

Thus, God’s primary message to human beings, the message that they should believe above and beyond any other message, is that Jesus as the Son of God through the Davidic Covenant is the King of the eternal Kingdom of God. And God has born witness to this message through the audible declarations of the Spirit, Jesus’ water baptism, and the cross—as we find all mentioned in the gospel accounts.

⁹⁴ ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ, ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐπίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ θεὸς περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ – John states categorically that to reject all the evidence of the audible statements of the Spirit, the baptism of Jesus, and the crucifixion (and resurrection) of Jesus is to call God a liar because of God’s having specifically produced these to affirm Jesus as the Messiah. In contrast, the sinner who has looked at this rational evidence and come to the rational conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah so as to believe in him for eternal life and salvation has embraced the testimony which God has set forth in regard to Jesus.

⁹⁵ καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία καὶ αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν – John goes on to say that the effect of the testimony which God has set forth with respect to Jesus is the Messiah is that “this life is in his Son,” i.e., in Jesus and not in Moses and the Mosaic Covenant.

Thus, sinners gain life forever and in the Kingdom of God, even the restored Kingdom of Israel, through Jesus and not through the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Acts 1:6ff.). In other words, eternal life is obtained through Jesus’ advocacy at the judgment, not through the Levitical priesthood’s advocacy or by simply living like a Jew according to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. 1 John 2:1,2 and Hebrews).

⁹⁶ ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν· ὁ μὴ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει – Again, John makes a categorical statement about Jesus and sinners. Once a person has been confronted with the message of Jesus as the Davidic, eternal King, acceptance of him as such for oneself is the litmus test as to whether or not a person will live in the eternal

Kingdom of God with Jesus. Of course, John is warning his readers who might be tempted to be influenced by Diotrephes and those like him.

⁹⁷ ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, ἵνα εἰδῆτε ὅτι ζῶν ἔχετε αἰώνιον, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ – In this verse John provides the reason for his writing this letter (“these things” – ταῦτα) to its recipients.

Diotrephes and the false teachers claim that John is not an apostle of Jesus, that they know Jesus and what he taught, and that he is not the Son of God and Messiah. In the light of their erroneous message, John has written this letter to those who first heard the gospel from him or from another apostle such as Paul or from reliable apostolic co-workers to say that what they heard was correct, that Jesus is the crucified Messiah who will intercede with God on their behalf because of their belief so that they obtain eternal salvation and life from God. Very straightforward.

We notice that John does not address in this letter the issue that Jesus is the co-eternal 2nd person of the Trinity, because this is not what he believes Son of God means. Instead, he understands as an apostle that Jesus is the one human being who fulfills the role (this is his “name”) of propitiatory offering as the one and only advocate before God for sinners in order to obtain eternal life for them.

⁹⁸ καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία ἣν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτόν, ὅτι ἑάν τι αἰτώμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ἀκούει ἡμῶν – John is not suggesting that God has given us a blank check so that we can ask for literally anything and He will provide us with it. Instead, he is saying that God listens to His children who have genuine faith and who want Him to remain faithful to them and cause them to persevere in their faith and grow in their knowledge and understanding of Him and their desire to do what is good and right in their lives—all for the sake of obtaining eternal life.

In other words, authentic Christians understand reality well enough that they know what God’s “will” (τὸ θέλημα) is—that they believe in Jesus as the Messiah and genuinely care for all others who believe likewise. Therefore, if they pray for this for themselves, which is in line with how their lives are progressing according to the sovereign will and grace of God, then they can know that God will do just exactly this.

John had already mentioned “asking” God for persevering belief and eternal life back in 3:22—

1 John 3:22 Indeed, that for which we ask, we are receiving from (ἀπὸ) Him, because we keep His teachings (τὰς ἐντολάς) and we practice the things that are pleasing to Him.

⁹⁹ καὶ ἐάν οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀκούει ἡμῶν ὁ ἐὰν αἰτώμεθα, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἔχομεν τὰ αἰτήματα ἃ ᾔτηκαμεν ἅπ’ αὐτοῦ – Of course God listens to the requests from bona fide believers in Jesus that come from their hearts which fundamentally desire eternal salvation and life as a result of their genuine belief in Jesus and love for all others who believe the same way. Therefore, we know that God will grant the perseverance of belief and love to those who request these of Him.

¹⁰⁰ ἐάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον. ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ – Here, John assumes of course that his readers are still sinners and will sin even though they are authentic believers in Jesus as their Messiah and advocate. His readers are (hopefully) those whose sin will not “end” in “death,” i.e., in eternal condemnation and destruction, while the false teachers (assuming that are completely in rebellion against God) do sin so that their sin ends in death, in eternal destruction.

John is saying, therefore, that if a Christian, who has truly grasped the gospel of the apostolic message and what John has written, sees a “brother,” a fellow Christian, who is being influenced by the false teachers and leaning towards abandoning the gospel, he should pray that God will wake up the brother to his error and move him away from the lies and deception that ultimately come from Satan, so that the brother recaptures the gospel in his mind and heart and will eventually acquire eternal “Life.”

As I said, this temporary wayward brother will obtain eternal life just like any genuine Christian. On the other hand, if the “brother” really is not a Christian and lacks the inwardness to become committed to the truth, then God may not answer the true Christian’s prayer and direct the other one to believe the truth. Indeed, if the Christian is fairly certain that the “brother” lacks authentic belief because he seems fully committed to lies, such as the lies of Diotrephes and the false teachers, then he does not have to ask that God grant this perseverance of faith and then eternal life. In this case, the other “brother” is sinning with abject unbelief and may end up receiving eternal death and destruction if he never authentically repents of his being a sinner.

For God has made vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy (within the nation of Israel and within the entire world that includes Gentiles—cf. Romans 9), and we need to allow for the fact even within our Christian communities probably both exist. The vessels of wrath are therefore attracted to Christianity for social, religious, or artistic reasons, while vessels of mercy are attracted to Christianity for the right reason of fleeing from the wrath of God and obtaining His eternal mercy and life. In other words, we should still pray for the person who rejects Jesus as the Messiah, but there is no guarantee that God will grant our request and save this person. God will respond affirmatively and save only those whom He has predestined and chosen.

¹⁰¹ πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁμαρτία ἐστίν, καὶ ἔστιν ἁμαρτία ἣ οὐ πρὸς θάνατον – Even Christians are still sinners and still sin during their lives. Therefore, their sin is definitely unrighteousness like that of unbelievers’. And the opposite is true, that the Christian’s unrighteousness is definitely sin like that of unbelievers’. But their sin does not result in eternal condemnation, because it is that which a believer performs. His sin is occurring in the midst of a changed heart that fundamentally wants God’s eternal mercy. And God is faithful to cause his faith and desire to do goodness persevere. Nothing will derail God from causing those who are vessels of mercy from reaching the goal which He has for them—life in the eternal Kingdom of God.

¹⁰² οἶδαμεν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει, ἀλλ' ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς οὐχ ἄπτεται αὐτοῦ – John says first in this verse that the authentic Christian, the “one who has been born from God,” does not pursue sin during the remaining of his existence in the present realm, because this means that God has changed him inwardly and caused his fundamental desires to become different. John goes not say that the one who also was born from God, Jesus, will hold on to the true believer at the judgment and not let him become condemned and destroyed by God. And as a result, “the evil one,” Satan, will not ever touch this person in such a way that he abandons the truth of the gospel and commits himself to lies such as the erroneous Judaism of Diotrophes and the others.

In other words, the apostles and those who embrace the apostolic message of Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah know that the true believer is changed inwardly by God so that his fundamental desire is no longer to rebel against God. Consequently, he does not pursue or tolerate sin in his life and, certainly, will not utterly reject Jesus as the Messiah and ostracize true Christians as Diotrophes and the false teachers are doing.

In addition, Jesus, the one who himself was “born of God” through His creating activity in Mary, will hold on to each and every authentic Christian when he returns and all former believers, alive and dead, will be gathered to him. As a result, Satan will not be able to touch the believer by preventing him from obtaining eternal life. The entire process where God the Father and Jesus the Son act together so that they are always in sync within one another will mean that all genuine believers will acquire what God has predestined and chosen for them from before He brought the creation into existence, eternal life.

Jesus says the same thing in **John 6:37** “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. **38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. **39** This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. **40** For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

¹⁰³ οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται – John concludes the letter by once again claiming that he and the other apostles are those who truly know who Jesus was and what he taught, so that they, and not Diotrophes and the others, have grasped the apostolic message which he is proclaiming. Therefore, they understand that they are believers by virtue of what God has done within them. Likewise, the apostles understand what is the spiritual and moral condition of the rest of humanity, i.e., those outside the true community of believers, that they lie and recline at the table so to speak of the evil one, of Satan. This means that the rest of the world is made up of sinful human beings who are constantly buying in to the lies of Satan and following his leadership instead of God’s through Jesus.

In accordance with Satan’s involvement in deceiving Eve into disobeying God by eating of the tree of life and of the knowledge of good and evil, everyone since then has followed in her footsteps and begun their existence as human beings as rebels against God and unbelievers. And they have continued in this spiritual and moral condition if God never changes them inwardly and circumcises their hearts while they exist in the present realm. Therefore, they will be accused by Satan himself at the final judgment and will incur God’s eternal condemnation.

In John’s day, those involved in paganism and erroneous Judaism in the Roman Empire were under the influence of Satan. Today, Satan has his followers in other religions and erroneous Christianity, the latter in which people reject Jesus as the Messiah from a heart of unbelief, even while claiming to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. They lack a heart of genuine belief and repentance.

¹⁰⁴ ὁἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἦκει καὶ ῥέδωκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν, ἵνα ῥγινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν ὁ, καὶ ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ, ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ὁ ζῶν αἰώνιος – John is probably still speaking of himself and the other apostles, and he is declaring unequivocally that they are absolutely certain that the Messiah, the Son of God and God’s proxy within the creation, has appeared and that he is Jesus, the man who died on the cross, etc., etc. He has said so in the first four verses of chapter 1.

John is also saying that “we,” the true apostles and not Diotrophes, reside intellectually and spiritually in the truth of who God is and what He is about through the Son, Jesus. This is the “truth,” and God has given this truth of Jesus’ as the Messiah to the apostles so that they are absolutely convinced of it and grasp it intellectually as well as any human being can.

This also means that the apostles are “in the truth” and “in His Son, Jesus the Messiah.” They are so closely associated with Jesus because of their inner commitment to him as the Messiah and all that this means that their spiritual and moral location is within the circle of Jesus’ genuine followers who will acquire eternal life through his

Two options for the last sentence, “This is the true God and eternal Life” – 1) Jesus is the very embodiment of God and God’s proxy, as well as the means to eternal Life, or 2) The God whom John has been describing, i.e., it is His Son Jesus who is the Messiah, is the one true God so that believing Him and in His Son Jesus as the Messiah is what results in eternal Life, not putting the Mosaic Covenant only at the center of one’s relationship with God, rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, and trying to make oneself worthy of eternal life.

It is obviously tempting to go with #1, but the whole letter and just the immediate context and syntax leads me to interpret it as #2. To state it simply and clearly, this God, not the God of Diotrophes and the false teachers, is the one true God so that the apostolic message which John knows and proclaims is the means to obtaining eternal life. And the last verse that follows is coherent with this, that John urges his readers to eschew the false teaching they have heard, i.e., to avoid the “idolatry” that is the erroneous Judaism of John’s day.

¹⁰⁵ Τεκνία, φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων – John is warning his readers against believing in a false God and Messiah that does not correspond accurately to the Bible, even while claiming to obey God and to be waiting for the Messiah by following the Mosaic Covenant—as Diotrephes and the other false teachers are doing. Therefore, this is also a warning against believing in a false Jesus, i.e., perhaps saying that he was only a rabbi. Today, this would be a warning against believing in a false Jesus and distortion of the biblical message, even while claiming to believe in Jesus and to think that one is obeying God by doing all the things that he sees other Christians do—going to church, going to Bible studies, singing songs to Jesus, praying to God and especially Jesus, etc. They have become what Søren Kierkegaard calls “objective thinkers” instead of “subjective thinkers.” They have not embraced that which is the most beneficial information for them as sinful human beings, because they are more interested in being affirmed as spiritual and religious “Christians” by their peers and by themselves.

Any idea about God that rejects the truth which He has clearly revealed in the Bible so that a false God becomes the object of worship which is not the one true God and His Messiah and Spirit is an “idol” (εἶδωλον) even if people use the same terminology from the Bible that authentic Christians are using.