

1–3 John

The names of the Johannine letters are taken from the author's name. There is a dispute among scholars about whether this is John the disciple of Jesus or another John. However, the language, themes, and style of these three letters parallel the gospel of John in many ways, which points clearly to the fact that these books were authored by John the disciple of Jesus.

The fact that many of the themes of the gospel of John are continued into these letters and are unpacked at a greater depth points to these letters being authored after the gospel of John. This would place their dates between 80 and 90 AD.

Setting

The Johannine letters were written during the first century of Christianity to refute false teachings about Christianity. The educated elite of the Greco-Roman world held to a dualistic view of existence known as Mystery religions. In the spiritual realm was the impersonal and unknowable god force viewed as a rational mind or thought. Separate from the god force was the material realm, which was not created by the god force nor connected to it. Therefore, the material realm was inferior to the spiritual realm.

Those holding to the Mystery religions believed that humans were higher beings who had become trapped in the material realm and thus were ignorant of their true nature and potential. The goal was to obtain secret, esoteric knowledge (mystical, hidden, contemplative) to free themselves from the prison of the material and ascend back into the god force. Thus, knowledge and education were salvific.

As these educated Greek men converted to Christianity, they brought many ideas from their Mystery religion into the church. They struggled to truly embrace the humanity, death, and resurrection of Jesus because of how they viewed the material realm as being inferior and a prison. They also believed that their knowledge elevated them to a higher status of salvation and that they could achieve perfection in this life. These beliefs would eventually develop into the Christian cult of Gnosticism. To them, Jesus is a spiritual being only, whose teachings free one from sin in this life and, ultimately, from the material realm in order to return to the Father in heaven.

It is not likely that John is talking about one group of well-organized false teachers but about many different false teachers who had certain characteristics in common. What complicates our discerning who they are is that we have only John's teachings on the matter—without the false teachers' teachings. This limitation is like listening to one side of a phone conversation and trying to figure out what the other person is saying.

For John, several major characteristics show the opponents to be false teachers.

First, they deny the apostolic authority and teaching of the disciples who walked with Jesus (1 Jn. 1:1-4; 4:6).

Second, concerning their beliefs about Christ, although they do not question His Godhood, they question His humanity (1 Jn. 1:1-4; 4:2-3; 2 Jn. 1:7). The opponents would not have a problem with Christ's claim as the Son of God; they would have a problem with *Jesus* being Christ the Son of God. For John, one must embrace Jesus Christ as the God-man (1 Jn. 1:3; 2:22-23; 3:8, 23; 4:2-3, 9, 15; 5:1, 10-12, 20; 2 Jn. 1:7).

Third, they treat sin lightly, either in that they believe they are without sin or in that their sin bears no guilt and is no big deal (1 Jn. 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6; 3:3-6, 7, 9; 5:18; 3 Jn. 1:11). They also downplay the death of Jesus on the cross—both because they deny His humanity and because they see no need for reconciliation for sins (1 Jn. 5:5-6).

Finally, and the worst part for John, is that they fail to show love and take care of their fellow brothers' needs (1 Jn. 2:9; 3:10, 11-12, 14-15, 17-18; 4:8, 20-21), loving the world more than they love the believers (1 Jn. 2:15-16; 4:1, 5; 2 Jn. 1:7). Thus the opponents hate the believers just like the world does.

These opponents are trying to deceive the believers and lead them away from the true Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 2:18, 22-23; 4:1-3, 6; 5:5-6, 10; 2 Jn. 1:7, 9). John writes to encourage the believers to live in accordance with the teachings and life of Jesus Christ and His apostles (1 Jn. 5:13).

Purpose

At this time, there were three main groups of people within the Christian church. First were the Jewish Christians, who came from a staunch monotheistic way of thinking. Though they had professed faith in Jesus as the Messiah, they still struggled with the divine nature of Jesus as the God-man. They also still felt loyal to Judaism and were under pressure from their non-Christian Jewish family and friends to maintain the Jewish customs and regulations of the Law. Second were the Hellenistic Christians, who came from a pagan background and continued to be influenced by pre-Gnostic dualistic ideas of salvation, in which “salvation” was liberation from the “bad” material realm into the “good” spiritual realm, where one would eventually become a divine spiritual being. Thus, they still struggled with the humanity of Jesus as the God-man. Third were those Christians whose views embraced fully both natures of Jesus as the God-man. These three groups found it increasingly difficult to coexist in a community of love and unity, as they were challenged by a high Christology of Jesus that was foreign to the cultures out of which they had come. In fact, some were already departing from the faith (1 John 2:18-19; 2 John 1:7; 3 John 1:9-10).

Additionally, false teachers had a strong presence and influence in the church and were promoting false ideas of the nature of Christ. There was a strong pressure for Christians in the church to go into spiritual idolatry, compromising the truth and behaving wrongly. The temptation was to forsake Jesus and return to the familiarity of what they had come from. This reality can be seen in John's letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2-3).

The primary purpose of the Johannine letters is to assure the believers that they do have the truth of who Yahweh is and that they can be sure of their salvation. The purpose statement is found in 1 Jn. 5:13: “I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” John is writing to believers to assure them that they do have eternal life, which is neither secretive nor earned.

For John, there are two basic components to assurance, both of which are emphasized repeatedly throughout the epistle. First is obedience to Yahweh (1 Jn. 3:33-24), which means believing in Jesus Christ as the God-man and showing love to the fellow believers. Second, Yahweh has given His Holy Spirit to the believers, which testifies to them that they belong to the Father (1 Jn. 4:13).

John is emphasizing obedience because false teachers have come into the community, teaching false doctrines about Yahweh and Jesus and living lives that are not glorifying to Yahweh since morality is not important to them. These teachers are opponents of Jesus Christ, and John says they do not really belong to the body (1 Jn. 2:18-19, 4:1).

The secondary purpose of the Johannine letters is to refute the teachings of the false teachers. John stresses that there are certain nonnegotiable, basic doctrines that must be held, real actions that must be manifested in genuine love, and attitudes of reverence toward Jesus Christ and obedience to Him that are required to have fellowship with Yahweh. Those who do not hold to these teachings are not truly a part of the covenant community of believers.

Themes

John uses the themes and devices of wisdom literature in order to communicate his ideas. Wisdom literature uses polar opposites (there is *only* right and wrong) with no allowances for gray area or anything between. One is either completely wicked *or* completely righteous—not a mixture of both. Psalm 1 is an example of this. The implication is that if anyone has ever taken wicked counsel, done a wicked thing, or made fun of righteous people, then there is *no* righteousness in them. In wisdom literature, if you do not meditate on Scriptures day and night and delight in the Word of Yahweh, then you are not righteous at all. Rather, you are wicked, and wicked people cannot stand with the righteous in heaven and therefore will perish. Though a part of us would relate to this, there is another part of us that would say there is righteousness in us, that we are not always wicked. Wisdom literature is not interested in the gray area of who you are but in the reality of who Yahweh is and what it truly means to be with Him. The narrative stories of Abraham, David, and others deal with the gray areas of being human and having a relationship with Yahweh. Wisdom literature reminds you to not take sin and obedience lightly in your life even though you are saved by grace. Narrative reminds you that even though you are so wicked and evil, there is the grace of Yahweh. Since John is combating the watering down of the gospel, sin, and the need for obedience, he employs wisdom literature to make his points.

Light and Darkness

In the Bible, light is used to symbolize the presence of Yahweh and His self-disclosure, purity, and holiness. Yahweh’s Word is light, and Jesus is the light of the world (Jn. 1:1-14). Darkness is used to symbolize evil, sin, and rebellion against Yahweh.

At the beginning of 1 John, John states that “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). Here the contrast is set up for the rest of the epistle—that light and darkness cannot coexist. The next verse states that one cannot say he belongs to Yahweh yet live in the darkness (1 Jn. 1:6), since these contradict each other. With the coming of the light, who is Jesus, 1 Jn. 2:8 says that the darkness is now passing away because the light is shining.

One either belongs to the light or belongs to the darkness and is judged accordingly by Yahweh, based on their claims about the Son and their actions of love. 1 Jn. 2:9-11 says that if one makes claims of belonging to Yahweh or says that he knows Him but does not live a life of action in the light, then he is a liar. Only those who walk in the light—not those who simply speak of the light—are truly of Yahweh. This carries the contrast of what one claims versus what one does.

The one who is truly in the light will not stumble (1 Jn. 2:10), whereas the one who is in the darkness is blinded by the darkness and sees and speaks lies (1 Jn. 2:11).

Love and Hate

If someone truly loves Yahweh, then he will obey Him (1 Jn. 2:3), and the love of Yahweh is perfected in him (1 Jn. 2:5). Loving Yahweh means obeying His commands, especially the command of loving others (1 Jn. 2:7-8). 1 Jn. 2:4 illustrates the opposite: The one who does not truly love Yahweh does not keep His commands.

1 Jn. 2:9-11 then develops the love/hate contrast. Those who claim to be “in the light” and yet hate their brother are liars and are still “in the darkness.” However, the one who loves his brother is walking in the light and has a right relationship with Yahweh.

Love and hate are not opposed to each other; rather, they are two different states. The one who loves the world will not have the love of the Father in him (1 Jn. 2:15). One cannot embrace both love for the world and love for the Father if he is seeking to be genuine.

1 Jn. 3:11-20 is an illustration of love and hate through the lives of Cain and Abel. 1 Jn. 3:14 draws two conclusions from this. First, we can conclude that love for one’s brother is *evidence* of eternal life (1 Jn. 2:3; Jn. 14:15, 21, 23). Second, we can conclude that those who do not love remain in death (1 Jn. 3:15). He then gives a positive example of how Christ loved us by laying down His life (1 Jn. 3:16), which demonstrated that He was of the light.

In 1 Jn. 4:7-12 and 4:16-5:3 John continues this theme of loving others as the evidence of true belief and knowing Yahweh.

Belief and Unbelief

In 1 Jn. 1:6-7 John employs three sets of images that demonstrate genuine belief: *claiming* to have fellowship with Yahweh, *living* by the truth, and *walking* in the light. Those who do not do *all* three are walking in the darkness and do not belong to Yahweh (1 Jn. 1:5).

1 Jn. 2:3-4 states that if one says he believes in Yahweh and knows Him but does not keep His commandments, then he is a liar and the truth is not in him (Jn. 14:23-24). This is demonstrated by the secessionists who made such claims but did not obey Yahweh, so they ended up departing, which showed that they did not walk in the light and never belonged (1 Jn. 2:19). However, the genuine believer is “righteous” (1 Jn. 3:7) and is “born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9) because he walks in the light.

The first use of the verb “believe” (*pisteuo*) is in 1 Jn. 3:23, which states that Yahweh’s command is to believe in Jesus and to love one another. Thus, one will know Yahweh and will be assured by the testimony of the Spirit (1 Jn. 3:24). The contrast is further developed in 1 Jn. 5:1, 5, 10, and 12.

With such false beliefs and lifestyles in the world, John calls the believer to test all spirits to see whether they are from Yahweh (1 Jn. 4:1). They are to test them with the same criteria that John uses (1 Jn. 2:3-4; 3:23) so that they will not be misled by the darkness.

Structure

Identifying the structure of 1 John is extremely difficult for most of the sentences in Greek have a very simple syntactical structure and there is a lack of connective conjunctions. Likewise, there is a lack of a discernable sequence of thought, where John seems to wander from idea to idea. Several scholars have noticed that there are similarities in the themes and thus structure of the gospel of John and 1 John.¹ Based on this observation, 1 John is divided into two major divisions: walking in the light (1 Jn. 1:1–2:29) and living as children of Yahweh (1 Jn. 3:1–5:21). Within these two major divisions are four basic conditions for true Christian living.² These are stated in the first division and then repeated in the second division, with one addition in the second division. In both of these divisions, John emphasizes how the false teachers do not measure up to any of these conditions.

2 John and 3 John repeat and continue developing all the ideas of 1 John, so these two letters should be seen as chapters 6 and 7 of 1 John.

Outline

- I. Walking in the Light with Yahweh (1 John 1:1–2:29)
 - A. Prologue: The Word of Life (1:1-4)
 - B. First Condition: Renounce Sin (1:5–2:2)
 - C. Second Condition: Be Obedient (2:3-11)
 - D. Third Condition: Reject Worldliness (2:12-17)
 - E. Fourth Condition: Keep the Faith (2:18-29)
- II. Living as Children of Yahweh (1 John 3:1–5:21)
 - A. First Condition: Renounce Sin (3:1-9)
 - B. Second Condition: Be Obedient (3:10-24)
 - C. Third Condition: Reject Worldliness (4:1-6)
 - D. Fourth Condition: Be Loving (4:7–5:4)
 - E. Fifth Condition: Keep the Faith (5:5-12)
 - F. Conclusion: Assurance of Eternal Life (5:13-21)
- III. Living in the Truth of Love (2 John 1:1-13)
- IV. A Call to Faithfulness in the Truth (3 John 1:1-15)

¹ See Raymond E. Brown. *The Epistles of John*, p. 124.

² See Stephen S. Smalley. *1, 2, 3 John*, pp. xxx-xxxi.

I. Walking in the Light with Yahweh (1 John 1:1–2:29)

In this first division, John establishes that Yahweh is light and that only those who are light can walk in the light and have fellowship with Him. John begins with a prologue (1 Jn. 1:1-4) and then gives four conditions that one must meet when claiming they are walking in the light with Yahweh. Those who truly walk in the light renounce sin (1 Jn. 1:5–2:2), are obedient (1 Jn. 2:3-11), reject worldliness (1 Jn. 2:12-17), and keep the faith (1 Jn. 2:18-29). Not only are these the marks of the true believer, but they also become the assurance of salvation.

John is refuting the false teachers, who believe and teach that one can walk in the light with Yahweh but not pursue these conditions. He then explains how one does become righteous so that they can be in the light and have fellowship with Yahweh. For John, the only answer is through the sacrifice and atoning blood of Jesus Christ as the God-man.

A. Prologue: The Word of Life (1:1-4)

In this first section of his letter, John opens by giving his credentials, justifying why the readers should listen to his testimony—rather than that of the false teachers—of who Jesus is. He and others, who can validate his testimony, were with Jesus, whereas the false teachers were not. John also begins by arguing that the spiritual, eternal Word, which is Yahweh, is the same Jesus who came in the flesh to minister to humanity. The false teachers would deny that the spiritual Word would actually become flesh.

1:1 John begins his letter by proclaiming that he has seen Jesus in the flesh, that he has heard, seen, looked at, and touched Jesus. John also includes others in his use of the pronoun “we”—he was not the only one to testify to the physicality of Jesus and His ministry. There is no doubt for John, the disciples, and others that Jesus came and that He was a real, physical man who ministered among them. Not only has John experienced Jesus in the flesh, but he was also there from the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry as well. John is probably picking up off his statement in Jn. 1:14—“the word became flesh”—rather than Jn. 1:1—“in the beginning was the word” (1 Jn. 2:7, 24; 3:11; Mk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:21-22).

This provides the context of John’s phrase “the Word of life.” Because of the qualifying word *life* that is used here, John is referring to Jesus’ earthly ministry, not to Jesus as the eternal, pre-existent-before-creation Word of Jn. 1:1. That John says he was there in the beginning and heard, saw, and touched the Word also clarifies that he is talking about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry on earth.

This phrase “concerning the Word of life” begins a parenthetical statement that gives more explanation to “the Word of life” that they have heard, seen, and touched.

“[1:1] This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the Word of life – [1:2] and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us).”

1:2 John continues to testify that the Word of life, which has walked among John and the others, is also the “eternal life” that has always been with the Father; this echoes Jn. 1:1. This is made clear by the word *revealed*. “The eternal Word” of Jn. 1:1 was revealed to the disciples as the earthly “Word of life” that they heard, saw, and touched.

In John’s gospel, he first emphasized Jesus as the eternal, spiritual Word (Jn. 1:1) and then discussed His incarnation³ (Jn. 1:14) as an introduction to the life of Jesus Christ. However, since the false teachers missed Jn. 1:14, John now first emphasizes the physicality of Jesus on earth and then connects Him to the same eternal, spiritual Word and creator of the universe. This is the first point that he wants his readers to accept and understand, because without this there is no death and resurrection for their sins.

1:3 John proclaims *this* Jesus Christ to them so that they may know Yahweh and have fellowship with Him and His Son (Jn. 17). The Greek word for “fellowship” used here has the idea of entering into a business partnership with another person. The two people are joined together into fellowship based on shared commitments and common, stated goals that bind them together. Thus, fellowship in the early Church was not hanging out together at a coffee shop but was based on coming together into partnership and accountability based on a common belief and commitment to Yahweh and each other. John and the disciples have fellowship with Yahweh because of their common belief in who Jesus Christ is and what He did on the cross. John then states that in order to have fellowship with Yahweh, you must share a common belief in certain things about who Jesus Christ is as Yahweh’s Son and what He did in His life and, ultimately, on the cross. It is, in the community, this shared belief and accountability to hold it that binds the believers together into fellowship. In contrast, the false teachers’ idea of fellowship with Yahweh is based on some personal, relative, and subjective esoteric experience they have had. With theirs, there is nothing objective to bring people into a true community.

The second half of 1:3, “and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ,” is a parenthetical clarification of the nature of the fellowship that John is talking about in verse 1:3a.

“ [1:3] What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ).”

Yahweh has made Himself known through His Son Jesus Christ, who revealed Himself to the apostles. Thus, they have fellowship with Yahweh because they have come to accept the truths taught to them by Jesus. By accepting their personal testimony of the manifestation of Yahweh in His Son, the believers are able to have fellowship with Yahweh, Jesus Christ, and other believers.

1:4 The result of having fellowship with Yahweh and Jesus is that our joy may be complete. True fellowship with the Father can only be experienced by believers who have a common belief in and relationship with Jesus Christ, not through some esoteric knowledge of the nature of the universe. Likewise, the false teachers are not interested in the fellowship and joy of their audience but rather in detaching themselves from creation, achieving enlightenment, and losing oneself in the universe. Though what the false teachers offer sounds good intellectually, what John offers through Jesus Christ is far more fulfilling and meaningful. Jesus did not come to bring us enlightenment and position but joy through a real relationship with Yahweh and other humans. Deep down, this is what humans crave more than anything else.

³ The incarnation of Jesus Christ refers to the fact that the spiritual Son of God became human on earth as both God and man. The eternal God of the universe became infleshed in the finite human body. This theological concept of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as equally God and human is unique and central to Christianity.

For John, Christianity is rooted in real historical events and truths about Jesus Christ's life, not in personal experiences. John proclaims that the eternal and spiritual Son of God was incarnated as a human and lived on earth. Christianity requires that the historical truths on which it is based be true, for if they are not, then Christianity will fall apart. If Jesus Christ never existed, died, or rose again, then there would be no Christianity (1 Cor. 15:1-19; Heb. 1:1). Yet this is not true with the other religions, which are based primarily on spiritual experiences. If you could prove that Buddha or Hare Krishna never existed and that they were a lie, this would make no difference to a Buddhist or a Hindu. There are those in Christianity who say you can interpret the Bible and the life of Jesus however you want as long as you are very spiritual and devoted about what you believe. Yet the world is full of people who are very devoted in what they believe but are still very wrong (Hitler, Stalin, David Koresh, etc.). John insists that Christianity is based on historical facts proclaimed by reliable witnesses.

Yet John also makes it clear that Christianity is not based just on doctrines but also on a very real and powerful spiritual experience. John reports the historical facts so that we may have a very personal, experiential, and relational fellowship with Yahweh. These truths are not proclaimed in order to create some theological system or institution but so that we may know Yahweh. We have fellowship with Yahweh and are partnered with Him because of shared values, worldview, goals, and truths—because we have had a real encounter with Jesus Christ the Son of God. This is the root of Christianity.⁴

It is this idea of fellowship that introduces the main idea of the discussion in 1 John 1–2, which becomes the foundation for everything else discussed in 1 John 3–5. How does one truly have fellowship with Yahweh? For John, it is through Jesus Christ as the God-man, who died for the sins of the world and was resurrected to give true life, fellowship, and joy.

⁴ See D. A. Carson. *1 John*.

B. First Condition: Renounce Sin (1:5–2:2)

In this section, John first establishes what it means that Yahweh is light—a point with which the false teachers would agree. Then he presents a series of three claims that the false teachers make and three counterclaims that he asserts as true about one’s relationship to Yahweh as light and one’s fellowship with Him. These three assertions of the false teachers are really just variations on the singular theme “sin does not affect me.” However, the precise form differs in each case, and John’s responses are also varied. The three claims begin with “if” (1 Jn. 1:6, 8, 10) and the three counterclaims begin with “but if” (1 Jn. 1:7, 9; 2:1).

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| 1:6 | If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. | 1:7 | But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. |
| 1:8 | If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us | 1:9 | But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. |
| 1:10 | If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word is not in us. | 2:1 | But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. |

For John, this is not a debate of philosophical views. What is at stake is whether we know Yahweh and can be reconciled to Him. So here John deals with the issue of sin: how it separates us from Yahweh and how it can be dealt with so that we can have fellowship with and experience Him. One of John’s concerns throughout his letter is showing that Christian belief and behavior belong inextricably together.

This first *if-then* claim sets up the idea of what it means to walk with Yahweh, while the second two develop the first condition: that those who walk in the light with Yahweh are those who renounce sin. The other conditions will be developed in the following sections.

1:5 The message is that God is light, and there is not one bit of darkness in Him or connected to Him, and darkness cannot come near Him. In Jn. 1:4 Jesus is also called light and is said to be God (Jn. 1:1-2), thus there is no darkness in Jesus either. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of the themes, Yahweh being described as light is a description of His character, as one who is pure, righteous, holy, and completely sinless. Darkness, which is any sin or sinful thing has no place in Yahweh and so is excluded from having fellowship with Him.

Here John makes it clear that Christianity is not like monism, like what the false teachers believe, where Yahweh is everything—good and evil, light and dark, that all things whether good or bad come from Yahweh. While there is evil in the world, John is not answering the philosophical questions of why there is evil and where it comes from. Instead he is interested in answering the question of how we gain fellowship with such a holy God when we are darkness and sinners—not how we explain evil, but how we stop being evil.⁵

⁵ See D. A. Carson. *1 John*.

1:6 The first false claim made by the false teachers is that one can live according to his own definition of morality and still have fellowship with Yahweh. For them, Yahweh is righteous and truth, but He is also separate from creation. Humanity can determine its own truth and path to Yahweh, for everything here in creation is relative and has no true meaning. Salvation is found through knowledge and philosophy, not through an absolute truth and morality or righteousness.

Their teaching is a contradiction, for if Yahweh is without sin and there is no darkness in Him, then someone cannot say that they have fellowship with Yahweh while living a life of darkness. If they try to maintain this fact, then they are a liar and make Him out to be one as well. This also violates the teachings of Jesus. The phrase “practicing the truth” (NET, NASB) or “live by the truth” (NIV, RSV) means living out the truth in a lifestyle obedient to Yahweh. The most important parallel is Jn. 3:20-21. The problem with the opponents is not in their boast of being enlightened but in their contradictory behavior. They say they follow the teachings of Yahweh and Jesus and that both are righteous, but then they do not live their lives according to this standard. Yet, they say it is all right because truth is relative. To know this God is then to be like Him. (Ps. 5; Isa. 59; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

This presents a problem for the believers, for all humans are sinners (Rom. 3:23) and are full of darkness, which means no one can have fellowship with Yahweh or Jesus Christ. Yet John says Christ came so that we could have fellowship with them (1 Jn. 1:3-4).

1:7 In fitting with wisdom literature, the contrast is between those who do not walk in the light and those who walk in the light without darkness in their lives. The result for those who walk in the light is that they will have true fellowship with Yahweh. The image of “walking” is derived from the First Testament (Gen. 5:22; 17:1; 1 Kgs. 2:4; 2 Kgs. 20:3).

But how does one walk in the light if all are sinners? It is through “the blood of Jesus His Son,” which cleanses us of our sin. These words that John has chosen are very incarnational: *Jesus*, the human; his *blood*, which is physical and points to a historical event; and *Son*, which links the physical to the spiritual God. John is not saying that Jesus’ blood is somehow magical but that it is a symbol for life that is violently and sacrificially ended.

This does not mean we are to be perfect like Yahweh; rather, we should live life seeking to do away with sin, and if we do sin, then we are quick to deal with it. This goes back to the word *blameless* used of Zechariah in Lk. 1:5 (Phil. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Thess. 3:13; Heb. 8:7) and the phrase “walked with God,” which described Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Job (Job 1:8). John’s following statement supports this.

The phrase “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” refers to sanctification because it follows the continuous action statement of “walking in the light” (Heb. 9:14; 10:2, 22). It is something we experience after already being in the light. We are only able to experience this while seeking fellowship with Yahweh.

“The author is not worried about the initial justification (salvation) of the people to whom he is writing. Rather he is reassuring them about forgiveness of sins committed *after* having become Christians.”⁶

1:8 The second false claim made by the false teachers is that they are not guilty of sin. The Greek phrase “say we do not have sin” is an expression limited to John’s writings (Jn. 9:41;

⁶ W. Hall Harris. *1, 2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis*, p. 64.

15:22, 24; 19:11; 1 Jn. 1:3, 6, 7; 2:28; 3:3, 15, 21; 4:16, 17; 5:12-13) and is difficult to translate. Though many English translations have something like “we have no sin” or are “without sin,” this does not seem to be the idea here, since John will make this point in the following verse (1 Jn. 1:10). John uses this phrase in his gospel to refer to someone doing something evil that then results in their being in a state of sin, for which they now bear the guilt of committing a sin. Here John is warning us that we cannot claim to be free from the guilt of that sin even after becoming a believer. It seems that the false teachers were claiming that things done by a believer after their conversion were not significant enough to be “sins” that would threaten their fellowship with Yahweh.

This is what many people believe—that they are not sinners but just make mistakes or do something wrong every once in a while. They would say it is nothing for which they have to feel guilty, which is merely a socially conditioned emotion. John counters that a person is deceiving himself and is a liar if he says he does not have to feel guilty for explaining darkness away while claiming to be in fellowship with the God of light. One cannot simply explain their sin and faults away and expect to have a healthy relationship with anyone, let alone a holy God.

1:9 The contrast is that all we must do is confess our sins, which allows us to be forgiven of our sins and to experience a cleansing of the unrighteous acts that have tainted us. This then allows us to maintain a relationship and intimacy with Jesus. One does not hide his sins in the darkness but confesses them and brings them out into the light to be exposed and cleansed.

Some people think Yahweh should forgive them because He is loving and is bound to forgive us. John says that this holy and righteous God forgives us of our sins because “He is faithful and just.” Yahweh’s righteousness demands that sin be punished, and He dealt with sin when Jesus Christ died on the cross for sin so that we would not have to. Once again, it is the real, historical Jesus, the God-man, and His work on the cross that allow us to have fellowship with Yahweh. Just as we came to Jesus the first time by confessing our sins and trusting in His sacrificial blood to cleanse us, so we must also do this daily for the sins we commit. Heady philosophical discussions about the nature of existence do not deal with sin.

1:10 The third false claim made by the false teachers is that they have become perfect and are incapable of committing sin. This is accomplished either because they have ascended above sin through their own works or—the idea that some Christians have—because Jesus’ death not only cleansed them of sin but made them perfect. This is easily refuted by the practicality of asking their spouse or family how perfect they are. The one who believes this claim is calling God a liar because Yahweh has made it very clear throughout the Bible that all humans are sinners (Rom. 3:23).

2:1-2 John begins the counterclaim with the parenthetical statement, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” John is not emphasizing that we are sinners in order to excuse our behavior or to rob us of any hope of changing but to encourage us to cling to Jesus as our advocate so we can experience Yahweh and have the incredible experience of having a relationship with Him. Our goal is to not sin so that we might then walk in the light and maintain fellowship with Yahweh. Since, however, this is impossible for us as sinners to do all the time, we have Jesus, who will plead our case before the Father because He has borne Yahweh’s wrath against sin for us. Just as the sacrificial and atoning blood of Jesus is the only way to *enter* into fellowship with Yahweh, it is also the only way to *stay* in fellowship with Him.

Our sins are taken away through the work of Jesus Christ, not by our own deeds. All our sins are taken care of, as well as all of those in the world. The amazing part of Jesus' death on the cross is that He took care of all sins, whether the person believes in Him or not. Jesus provided salvation that is sufficient for all, though it is effective only for those who trust in Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15, 19; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 22:17).

The “atoning sacrifice” (NET, NIV) or “propitiation” (NASB) or “expiation” (RSV) is a difficult and even controversial word. “Expiation,” “propitiation,” and “atonement” have all been suggested. Propitiation is when one does something to make Yahweh favorable toward them. The way this has been traditionally understood in the western church is that Yahweh was angry with us because of our sin. But Yahweh in His mercy sent His Son to die for us to make Yahweh favorable toward us. This was the dominant view in the church until the 1930s, when people began to say that this sounded a lot like paganism, wherein you are always trying to do something to earn the favor of the gods so that they would give you what you want, like healthy crops and children. So how can one say that the Son is trying to make Yahweh favorable when it was Yahweh's idea to send His Son? This led people to see Jesus' death as expiation, which is when Yahweh cancels the debt of sin because Jesus paid it. Still others responded by saying that the Bible does speak of the wrath of Yahweh on humanity for its sin.⁷

Perhaps the best way to understand this verse is that it is both propitiation and expiation. Because Yahweh is so holy and righteous, He hates sin, and His anger is against us for our rebellion—much like a parent's anger at a child for intentional disobedience (propitiation). However, Yahweh does not lose His temper; He is love and never stops loving us—like a parent's love for a child despite their disobedience—and cancels our debt of sin and forgives us (expiation). So He sent his Son to die for us to appease His wrath against the sin in the world and to cancel our debt so that we could be forgiven. In paganism, humans sacrificed in hopes of appeasing the gods; in Christianity, Yahweh Himself provides the sacrifice to pay the debt for sin in order to appease Himself so that we do not have to. Thus, in 1 John 2:2 Yahweh is both the subject *and* the object of propitiation. He is the one who is angry with us, and He is the one who loves us enough to send His Son as a sacrifice for us. His wrath is poured out on His Son for us.

“If the readers are to have fellowship with the Father and with the Son (v. 3), they must understand what makes this possible. They must know who God is in himself and, consequently, who they are in themselves as creatures of God. So the author first describes the moral character of God in terms of light (v. 5) and then goes on to deny three claims made by those who falsely boast of their knowledge and fellowship with God. The false positions are (1) moral behavior is a matter of indifference in one's relationship to God (v. 6); (2) immoral conduct does not issue in sin for one who knows God (v. 8); and (3) the knowledge of God removes sin as even a possibility in the life of the believer (v. 10). True 'tests' or evidence of fellowship with God or walking in the light are (1) fellowship with one another (v. 7), with subsequent cleansing by the blood of Christ; (2) confession of sin, (v. 9) which brings both forgiveness and cleansing; and (3) trusting that if we sin we have Jesus Christ as an advocate and sacrifice for our sins (2:2).”⁸

The death of Christ is necessary in order for a holy God to have fellowship with humanity. Since Yahweh is righteous and holy and humanity is not, something needed to be done so that

⁷ See D. A. Carson. *1 John*.

⁸ Glenn W. Barker. “1 John” in *Hebrews-Revelation*, Vol. 12 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 309.

humanity could have fellowship with Him. Since humans are sinners, there is nothing they will ever be able to do on their own to make themselves righteous and holy and become like Yahweh. Therefore, only Yahweh can step down into history and our lives and make us righteous and holy. Only through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus can our debt for sin be paid, and only through His blood can we be cleansed. This is why only He can plead our case when we sin and enable us to walk in the light.

C. Second Condition: Be Obedient (2:3-11)

In this section, John develops the second condition: that those who walk in the light with Yahweh are obedient to His commands. This section contains three claims of knowing Yahweh, expressed by the participle “the one who says” at the beginning of 1 John 2:4, 6, and 9. These participles reflect indirectly the claims of the opponents. Each claim is followed by the evidence that must be seen in the life of the person who is making the claim in order for the claim to be true. This section makes a distinction between those who make claims about knowing Yahweh and those who and truly know Yahweh.

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|------|-------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------|
| 2:4 | The one who says “I know Him,” | 2:5 | must be obedient. |
| 2:6a | The one who says he abides in Him | 2:6b | must live as Jesus did. |
| 2:9 | The one who says he is in the light | 2:10 | must love their brothers and sisters. |

2:3 In order for one to truly say they have come to know Yahweh, they must obey the commandments of Christ. It is not enough to say Jesus Christ was a great spiritual teacher and to quote him in your life. Nor can someone say he understands the deeper, esoteric meaning of Christ’s words if he does not live out the obvious truths of His teachings. Jesus made it clear that the only way you can know Yahweh is if you obey Him (Matt. 28; Jn. 14:15, 21-24).

2:4-5 One cannot say he knows Yahweh and then disobey everything Jesus Christ said they must do in order to have a relationship with Him. If one says this, then they do not really know Yahweh and the teachings of His Son, and thus they are a liar. If one is not obeying Jesus Christ’s teachings, then there is something wrong in their relationship with Yahweh. In contrast, for those who obey Jesus Christ’s words, the love of Yahweh is perfected in them as a result.

John is not saying that Yahweh demands perfection, for he has already made it clear that we are sinners. Nor is he saying that we can earn Yahweh’s love. Rather, we strive to obey Yahweh, and when we fail, we repent and confess our sins to Him because our relationship and need to obey Him is important to us. Even repenting of sins is obedience to Yahweh. To know Yahweh is to have a reciprocal relationship with Him (Jn. 14:15, 21-24). John is warning against the view that knowing Yahweh is a warm and fuzzy feeling, a sensation, or emotion-laden worship.

“John’s point was that our personal experiential knowledge of God will affect the way we live, and the way we live, obediently or disobediently, will reveal how well we really know God.”⁹

2:6 In the second claim, John moves deeper, from knowing Yahweh to actually residing in or remaining in Him, which communicates perseverance. Jesus Christ remained in the Father and demonstrated it by walking in obedience to the Father. Christ then commanded us, if we were to remain in Him and Yahweh, to walk in obedience to Him in the same way He did (Jn. 15:1-17). Thus, obedience is a continual thing in the life of the one who resides in Yahweh; it is a lifestyle.

2:7-8 John makes the point that obeying Yahweh is not a new command or idea because he probably was accused of changing from preaching grace to now emphasizing obedience. The old command that has been around since the beginning is to love Yahweh and one another (Deut. 6:4-6; Lev. 19:18). This is identified by the phrases “from the beginning” and “the word that you

⁹ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on 1 John*, p. 19.

already heard.” All the laws in the Mosaic Law could be summed up in these two commands, for when you obeyed the laws, you were loving Yahweh and loving others. However, in a way it is a new command because Jesus repeated it to them during His earthly ministry in the context of His death and resurrection. His death and resurrection allowed for the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers and give them the ability to fulfill this command in a more self-sacrificing way (Matt. 22:34-40; Jn. 13:34-35). It is also new with John because he is untwisting the interpretation of the command on the part of the false teachers who taught a false definition of love, which had more to do with everyone just getting along.

2:9-11 The third claim begins with the negative and states that if one is in the light of Yahweh (Jn. 1:5), then they must not hate their brother. The word *brother* does not mean a sibling but a fellow believer and can mean either a male or female believer. The phrases “in the light” and “still in the darkness” are an allusion to Jn. 3:17-21. According to John, a person either comes to the light or remains in the darkness; for John there are no alternatives.

The contradiction is that the false teachers say we can be in the light of Yahweh but that how we treat others does not matter, because knowledge is really the point. However, the First and Second Testament are very clear when they state that true sacrificial love is what is demanded of a believer (Jn. 4:7-21).

John declares that our being in the light, made possible through Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death, demands that we obey Him. For John, keeping Christ’s commandments is equal to the commandment to love one’s brother, which is what Christ did. Thus, the conditions for the truth of one’s claims, as shown above, are synonymous, which would make knowing Yahweh, remaining in Him, and living in the light synonymous. For John, there is no genuine faith without these claims and conditions in one’s life; Christ must be Lord of one’s life to authenticate salvation. This is the evidence of the grace of Yahweh accepted by faith worked out in the believer’s life.

D. Third Condition: Reject Worldliness (2:12-17)

In this section, John develops the third condition: that those who walk in the light with Yahweh reject worldliness. After the deep emphasis on correct beliefs and the need to obey Yahweh, John pauses briefly to encourage the believers that resisting the false teachings and enticements of the world is worth the sacrifice, hardship, and perseverance that obedience to Yahweh demands.

In 1 John the term “little children” refers to the whole group of recipients of the letter rather than a select group within it (1 Jn. 2:1, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). Thus, in 1 Jn. 2:12-14 there are not three distinct groups being addressed, but the whole group (“little children”), followed by two subgroups (“fathers” and “young people”). These two subgroups seem to be distinguished by age and spiritual maturity.

It seems that John also desires to unite the older and younger believers into one mindset of pursuing Jesus Christ and resisting the world. It could be that the older believers have grown tired in their perseverance in the truths that John has been emphasizing, while the younger believers are energetic and passionate but not as discerning when it comes to new teachings.

2:12-13 Addressing the whole group as children of Yahweh, John declares that what binds them all together is that their sins have been forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He encourages the fathers (older believers) to persevere in the knowledge of what they have known from the beginning. He encourages the young people that their true strength and victory are found in the truth that they have conquered the evil one through their faith in Jesus Christ—not in the new ideas that the world presents. John uses the phrase “the evil one” to refer to Satan (Jn. 17:15; 1 Jn. 2:14; 3:12; 5:18, 19).

2:14 John repeats his encouragement to the “children” with the addition of the phrase “word of God” in reference to the young people. This clarifies that their strength is in the truths found in the Word of Yahweh and not in the ideas of the world. John’s repetition of the three phrases in 1 Jn. 2:12-14 emphasizes how important these truths are for them and that they are the basis for what they believe.

2:15 John then reminds them that God is light, that there is no darkness in Him (1 Jn. 1:5), and that the world and any part of it are darkness (Jn. 1:1-14). Therefore, the believers should not love the world or anything in it, for if they do, then they do not belong to the Father. No one can walk in the light with God as their master and in the darkness with the world as their master at the same time (Matt. 6:24). The word “world” does not refer to the world in the sense of the planet and the people who live on it, rather the moral order, human beings in defiant rebellion against Yahweh, and the philosophies, ideas, and worldviews that are opposed to the truths of Yahweh found in the Bible.

2:16 John warns against pursuing the world and its ways because everything in the world will eventually pass away. Not only will Yahweh one day destroy the things of the world that do not conform to His image and will, but He will then redeem and renew the world into His own image. John lists three categories into which the things of the world fall: the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life.

The word “flesh” refers to all the human experiences and desires that are not conformed to the will of Yahweh. It describes “human nature incapable of attaining to God unless it is re-created by His Spirit.”¹⁰ It is seeking our own will and desires instead of that of Yahweh’s.

The phrase “the desire of the eyes” refers to the sinful cravings that are activated by what man sees, which leads to coveting them. It is about accruing material things for one’s own desires rather than to benefit others.

The phrase “the pride of life” refers to boasting about possessions, accomplishments, or status. This person places his confidence in those things to ensure his security and significance without the need for Yahweh.

2:17 Here John states that there are those who love the world and those who love the Father. Just as the things of the world will pass away, so will the one who loves the things of the world rather than Yahweh. Since the love of Yahweh is not in them, they will pass away along with the world, for only the Father is eternal. One must remain in the Father in order to not pass away.

There are differences between Yahweh loving the world in Jn. 3:16 (God so loved the world He gave His only unique Son) and here, where John commands us to not love the world. First Yahweh loves the world with the holy love of redemption, while we are not to love it with our selfish love of participation. Second Yahweh loves the world in order to save sinners, while we are not to love the world so as to share in their sin. Third Yahweh’s love for the world inspires all at Yahweh’s condescension, while our love for the world evokes disgust at our lust.¹¹

The point that John makes is that love for Yahweh and obedience to His will means that we are not to love the world and surrender to its way of think, desires, and pursuits. The one who truly has fellowship with Yahweh finds satisfaction and contentment in Him and thus does not need the things of the world.

¹⁰ R. Brown. *The Epistles of John*, p. 326.

¹¹ See D. A. Carson. *1 John*.

E. Fourth Condition: Keep the Faith (2:18-29)

In this section, John develops the fourth condition that those who walk in the light with Yahweh keep the faith. John now warns against those false teachers who come from the world's thinking and seek to lead the people of Yahweh out of the light and fellowship of Yahweh and into the darkness. The two categories here are those who are antichrist and those who follow Christ.

2:18 The “last hour” is the same as “the last days,” which refers to the time between Jesus Christ's first and second comings (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; Jn. 5:24-28, 6:39-40, 11:24). The “day of the Lord” is the tribulation and the second coming. John states that in the years before the second coming of Christ (“last hour”), more antichrists or false teachers will come than there were before his first coming. Thus it is more important than ever to know what it really means to know Yahweh, walk in the light, and be on our guard against those who teach a false message. An antichrist is one who stands in the place of Christ and His teachings and seeks to deceive people into following a false path (Mk. 13:22; 1 Jn. 2:26; 2 Jn. 1:7).

2:19 The “they” in this verse are the false teachers discussed in 1 John 1. John states that if they truly knew Yahweh and were in fellowship with Him and the other believers they would have not left the fellowship of the believers. That they were unable to love their brothers and sisters shows that they never truly belonged. Real Christians stick it out and persevere in the faith and fellowship with Yahweh (Matt. 13:1-23; Jn. 8; 14; Heb. 3:14; Jam. 1:2-8).

What is important to note is that the antichrists here are not global political figures but ones who were part of the church. The true danger is not some celebrity or politician that people label an antichrist but the teachers in the church who are known and respected, which makes it harder to discern their lies and confront them.

2:20-21 Unlike the antichrists, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and therefore have the truth of Jesus Christ's teachings and can discern the lies of the false teachers (Lk. 4:18; Jn. 6:69, 14:17, 15:26, 16:13; Acts 10:38; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21-22). He writes these words in order to assure us that we indeed do belong to the Father.

2:22-23 John states that the antichrist is, first, the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. For John this means Jesus as the God-man who died and rose again for the sins of the world. Anyone who teaches against Jesus being God, man, and savior is an antichrist. Second, the antichrist is the one who denies that God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son are the same and that the Father sent the Son; if you deny this Jesus Christ, then you are also denying the Father and do not belong to Yahweh.

2:24-26 John once again makes it clear that remaining in *this* Jesus Christ and these truths is necessary for eternal life. The marks of a true believer are embracing the truth of who Yahweh and His Son are and persevering in this truth intellectually and experientially (Jn. 15:10).

2:27 Those who hold to *this* teaching do not need any further secret teaching or understanding of the gospel message. The message is simple: The Father sent Jesus Christ the God-man to die for the sins of the world so that we could become the children of Yahweh, transformed into His image through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is His Word and Spirit that guide us, not the philosophies of the world. There are no “inside track” teachers, no mediators, so that they become as god to you. The time of the people being dependent on the tribal leaders for the truth of what they should believe is over, for Yahweh has given His Spirit to all to know the truth and Yahweh (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 1:1-4).

2:28-29 Here John refers to the believers as children to communicate both the fact that we have a new birth and that we belong to God the Father. In the ancient world, the son would always grow up and do whatever the father did. Consequently, John uses sonship language here to communicate the idea that if you are the child of Yahweh through the new birth in Jesus Christ, then you will start doing what the Father does because His Holy Spirit is in you. Those who have a new birth will grow up in Jesus Christ to be righteous like the Father through the transformation of the Holy Spirit. Thus when we are not acting like Him, there is something wrong with who we say we are. John wants you to understand that you are a new creature in a new birth because you have a new Father; therefore, you should function in this new birth in the Father.

The desire for righteousness and holiness is the mark of truly being born again. This does not mean we are free from temptation and sin, but rather that we understand sin better, so we are horrified and ashamed of it and thus determined to deal with it. This is why we feel more guilt than those in the world do.

Believers are to be discerning of the teachers and teachings that come into the Church. John has wrapped obedience, right doctrine, spiritual anointing, and love for the brothers all into one package and made them all dependent on each other.

II. Living as Children of Yahweh (1 John 3:1–5:21)

In this second division, John establishes that the believers are children of Yahweh by the fact that He died for them and adopted them. John develops the same four conditions as the previous division but adds, between the third and fourth conditions, another condition of the need for mutual love. John unpacks the idea that meeting these five conditions can be accomplished only by being fathered by Yahweh and receiving the Spirit through our trust in Jesus Christ as the God-man. And when these conditions begin to grow in our lives, this is a testament to our knowing and residing in Yahweh, because we have truly been fathered by Him and have been born again.

A. First Condition: Renounce Sin (3:1-9)

In this section, John first establishes what it means to be a child of Yahweh (1 Jn. 1–3). Then he develops the first condition: those who are children of Yahweh renounce sin. The world accuses us of not acting like Christ, and, in a way, they are right; a true child of Yahweh will act like his Father. In most of the religions in the world, there is no connection between moral ethics and religious commitment. It is because Christianity has done such a great job in making this connection that the secular world expects it from us.

3:1 1 Jn. 3:1-3 is a parenthetical statement that elaborates on what it means in 1 Jn. 2:29 to be fathered by Yahweh. Because we belong to the Father and not the world, we should be thinking and living so drastically differently from the world that it does not recognize us as being a part of the world—in the same way that it did not recognize Jesus (Jn. 1:1-14). This will lead it to either wanting what we have or hating us, as John will discuss later.

3:2-3 Though the Father demands obedience, John knows that we are not yet what we are intended to be. We are children of Yahweh and still have growing to do, so there will still be some inconsistencies in who we are as His children and what we do. But because we are His children, there should be growth and a desire to grow. We will finally be full-grown when Jesus Christ returns for us.¹² John does not expect perfection but a desire to know the Father and Jesus Christ and to obey and live life in the way Jesus Christ demonstrated and commanded us to do. It is this desire and hope of being like Jesus Christ and seeing Him one day that bring purification for our sins. Those who desire Him will seek to obey and will repent when they fail, which will make them more like Christ.

“The author wants his readers to know that approval by the world is to be feared, not desired. To be hated by the world may be unpleasant, but ultimately it should reassure the members of the community of the faith that they are loved by God, which is far more important than the world’s hatred.”¹³

3:4 The word “lawlessness” (*anosmia*) carries the connotation of wickedness (Matt. 7:23, 13:41, 24:2; 2 Thess. 2:7). It means the rejection of the law, a willful opposition to Yahweh, rather than just breaking His law. This is presented in stark contrast to “everyone who resides in Him” (1 Jn. 3:6). However, for John “lawlessness” is not a violation of the Mosaic Law, since he is writing to believers. The “law” for the author is the law of *love*, given by Jesus in Jn. 13:34-35 as the new commandment. The command to love one’s brother is a major theme of 1 John, and the lack of it

¹² See D. A. Carson. *1 John*.

¹³ Glenn W. Barker. “1 John” in *Hebrews-Revelation*. Vol. 12 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 330.

is the one specific sin mentioned in the entire letter and with which the opponents are charged (1 Jn. 3:17).

3:5 In the remaining verses John makes two points about what a life of obedience to Jesus Christ means (1 Jn. 3:5-10). First, the purpose of Christ’s coming was to oppose sin in every way. You demonstrate who your father is by the way that you live. The Bible makes it clear that we are all born spiritually dead in our sins and therefore belong to the devil, our father (Rom. 6). The Bible never talks about new birth in the devil, only in Jesus Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came in order to free us from slavery to sin; therefore, we should not re-enslave ourselves (Rom. 6). Since this is why the believer has come to Christ, it would be foolish and illogical for one to live in lawlessness.

3:6 The second point about what a life of obedience to Jesus Christ means is that the children of Yahweh do not sin (1 Jn. 3:6, 9). There are three views of what John means by “do not sin.”

The first is the superior believer view. The author is distinguishing between “ordinary” believers (1 Jn. 1:8-2:2), who can and do occasionally sin and need forgiveness, and “superior” believers (1 Jn. 3:6, 3:9), who really do live up to their position in Christ and do not sin. This is based on the assumption that 1 Jn. 3:6 and 3:9 do not really describe the “average” believer, rather the one who truly walks in close fellowship with Christ—since in Him there is no sin (1 Jn. 3:5), the believer is therefore without sin. However, this is not possible because it contradicts John’s statement in 1 Jn. 1:10-2:2. Likewise, the author uses the word “everyone” (1 Jn. 3:3, 4, 6, 9, 10) to refer to the two different kinds of people; there is no exception of a third category anywhere in his epistle.

The second is the habitual sin and lifestyle view. There is a distinction between individual acts of sin (which a believer may occasionally commit) and habitual sin as a lifestyle (a pursuit of sin that John says is not possible for the believer) that has been suggested on grammatical grounds by a number of interpreters. They argue for a distinction between the aorist past tense in 1 Jn. 2:1, referring to individual acts of sin, and the present tense in 1 Jn. 3:6 and 3:9, referring to a lifestyle of habitual sin. These verses would thus be stating that true believers will not pursue a lifestyle of habitual sin, even though they are still sinners and will still commit sins. However, it is questionable that John would rest a distinction so crucial to his argument on a variation in tenses (especially given his fondness for switching tenses for purely stylistic reasons).

The third is the fully transformed Children of Yahweh do not sin view. This is not an ontological statement—that believers cannot sin by nature—but describes what is theologically true of being a true child of Yahweh. True children of Yahweh do not sin because their Father does not sin. Though this is not true of us by nature because we are still sinners (1 Jn. 1:10-2:2). However, we have been declared to be righteous and without sin through the blood of Christ and are being transformed into that through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8: 1-4; 12:1-2). In the same way, a parent saying, “there is no lying in my house,” does not mean no one lies, rather what should be true of those who live in their house. Thus John uses wisdom literature to force us to live with the tension in our lives—that children of Yahweh do not sin, yet we do to make us struggle and persevere to become what we have been declared to be. The final resolution comes when Jesus Christ comes back, when, as children of Yahweh now fully transformed, we will not sin. The only way that this is possible is by walking in the light through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 1:5-7), evidenced by our obedience (1 Jn. 2:3-6). Therefore the true believer perseveres to become what they have been declared by Yahweh to be through Jesus Christ.

This is most likely the correct view and is similar to Jesus' statement in Matt. 5:20. The Pharisees were known for perfectly following the Law as far as the people were concerned, yet they were not transformed on the inside (Matt. 23:27). By calling people to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, Jesus makes the point that one must perfectly follow and obey the Law in order to enter the kingdom of Yahweh (Ps. 1; 1 Cor. 6:9). The only way that we can be righteous though is through our transformation by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:1-2) made possible by the blood of Christ (1 Jn. 1:7).

3:7-9 Once again John uses sonship language in order to contrast those who belong to Jesus and those who belong to the devil. This is determined by whether one lives righteously and loves others as Christ did and as the devil does not. People are revealed for their behavior and the desires and lifestyles they pursue. The one who pursues his own desires and sin is of the devil (Jn. 14:24), but the one who pursues righteousness and Yahweh's will belongs to Yahweh (Jn. 13:35 14:21, 23; 15:10, 14, 17; 17:21). Notice the continuous action verbs here are "practicing" (NET, NASB) and "continuing" (NIV).

B. Second Condition: Be Obedient (3:10-24)

In this section, John develops the second condition that those who are children of Yahweh are obedient. 1 Jn. 3:10-12 are transitional sentences between the theme of renouncing sin in the previous section (1 Jn. 3:1-9) and the theme of obedience in this current section (1 Jn. 3:10-24). John uses the phrases “children of the devil” (1 Jn. 3:10) and “who was of the evil one” (1 Jn. 3:12) as transitional phrases.

3:10 John makes the emphatic point that if we are truly the children of Yahweh then we must obey Yahweh and love one another because Yahweh our Father is love. True believers think and act like their Father. If we truly have been born again through the death and resurrection of Christ, then the Spirit of Yahweh is transforming us into the image of God. Though our sins are forgiven by Yahweh and we are declared to be righteous before Yahweh positionally, this fact does not in itself change us. It is only when this is united with our submission to the Holy Spirit does our transformation into what Yahweh has declared us to be begins to happen. This is why Biblical Christianity demands righteousness from those who belong to Yahweh; Yahweh’s declaration of justifications leads to sanctification. Therefore, we should be sinning less and less throughout our life, until our death or when Jesus Christ comes back and we truly are a child of Yahweh, ontologically by nature.

“The absence of righteous behavior in a life indicates the absence of intimacy with God. Likewise the absence of love for one’s Christian brother shows that the individual who does not love has little fellowship with God. Love is the most important particular manifestation of righteous behavior.”¹⁴

3:11-13 The heart of the gospel message is that we should love because we are the children of Yahweh who demonstrated love (1 Jn. 2:28-3:10). John uses Cain as an example of one who was not fathered by Yahweh and belonged to the devil because he had no love for his brother first in his heart and then in his actions by killing Abel. Though murder seems like an extreme example of not loving Cain’s lack of love began with jealousy of his brother who was righteous because he was fathered by Yahweh. Just as Abel was hated for demonstrating love, so will we in this world because those who remain in the darkness do not understand us (Jn. 15:18-21, 16:1-4).

3:14 The first assurance of our new birth is that we love and care about people in a way that we had never done before. Yes it is true that non-believers care for people but they are only interested in caring for another unless they are cared for as well. Though we will still love in selfish ways we will begin to selflessly love others more and more as we walk with Christ. Our ability to look at our life and see that we are selflessly loving people more and more can be assurance of our regeneration (Matt. 5). As true children of Yahweh we live with the tension of knowing that we are not what we ought to be but we know that we are not what we used to be. We should see obedience and love where there was none before.

3:15 John pushes the definition of murder further. Though most would not feel that they can relate to being a murder like Cain (1 Jn. 3:12), John makes us relate by connecting murder with hatred. The one who is guilty of hatred is also guilty of murder. If one nurtures hatred in their heart then eventually this will lead to actions. Eventually your words and actions will tear the other down and may then lead to taking their life. Everyone knows that what we say to people or

¹⁴ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on 1 John*, p. 41.

ignoring people can be more damaging to their sense of self-worth than taking their life. One cannot love another if they have hatred for that person.

3:16-17 John then pushes the definition of love further. Love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling for people or being nice to people but love is Christ's sacrifice of self-denial and self-sacrifice. True love is the willingness to sacrifice your body, mind, emotions, desires, time, and energy to benefit and build up another without any desire to get anything in return. We are called not to shut off our compassion to others if we have the means (Jn. 13:34; 15:12-13). John pushes the definition of love again from hatred to apathy for others or being too busy to show compassion or give help to another. This is the most basic way that people feel loved and so to deny them this is the same as murdering them because they will "die" of rejection, isolation, and loneliness.

"Most people associate Christianity with the command to love, and so they think that they know all about Christianity when they have understood its teaching in terms of their own concept of love. John found it necessary to explain clearly to his readers what he meant by love... Love means readiness to do anything for other people."¹⁵

3:18 Being in the truth means living a life of truth, not just in words but also in action, for this is how we truly love. For John the truth is the theological truths mentioned earlier of Jesus as the God-man (1 Jn. 1:1-4) who died for humanity (1 Jn. 1:5-2:2) and therefore the believer should respond in obedience and love (1 Jn. 2:3-11). By doing these righteous deeds, and demonstrating love for one another, we assure ourselves that we belong to the truth, because the outward action reflects the inward reality of our relationship with Yahweh. Conduct is proof of paternity.

3:19-20 The second assurance of new birth is our prayer life. The "by this" (1 Jn. 3:19) refers to the truth that John referred to in 1 Jn. 3:11-18. Our tangible acts of love should comfort and assure us of our relationship with Yahweh when our conscience condemns us for not fully being who we ought to be in Christ. Our prayer life of coming before Yahweh and talking with Him and desiring to know Him assures us that we belong to Yahweh. We know that even though we are not perfect that Yahweh will accept and forgive us even if our own consciences are guilty. Because Yahweh knows all things He will not show partiality but will be more objective in judgment than our own conscience. He will be merciful to those who (as believers) have loved their fellow Christians, but He will be severe toward those (the opponents) who have failed to love their fellow believers (Matt. 25:31-46).

3:21-22 If our conscience is clear (1 Jn. 3:21) and we are keeping Yahweh's commandments (1 Jn. 3:22b), then our will and Yahweh's will coincide, and thus we may reasonably expect to receive the answers to our requests (1 Jn. 5:14-1). However, if there is the sin of disobedience or hatred then our relationship with Yahweh will be hindered. Try to pray when there is a secret sin it will not happen. Either prayer will drive you away from sin or sin will drive you from prayer.

3:23-24 John then reminds us that true love (1 Jn. 3:11-18) and knowing Yahweh (1 Jn. 3:19-122) are found in the theological truths mentioned at the beginning of the letter that the true believer trust in Jesus Christ as the God-man (1 Jn. 1:1-4) and loves one another as Christ did (1 Jn. 2:3-11). Notice that these two criteria are mentioned in conjunction to each other not that the second can follow at a later time. As a result we will reside in Him and He will reside in us and through the indwelling of the Spirit we may have assurance that we have eternal life.

¹⁵ I. Howard Marshall. *The Epistles of John*, p. 192.

C. Third Condition: Reject Worldliness (4:1-6)

In this section, John develops the third condition that those who are children of Yahweh reject worldliness. John introduced the idea of the Spirit at the end of the previous section (1 Jn. 3:24) and how His residing in us is a testimony to knowing Yahweh. He uses this idea to transition into the topic of spirits and how to test whether they are from Yahweh. Today *spiritual* is such a buzzword and a feel-good idea. Everyone wants to be spiritual, and everyone is following a spiritual (spirit) idea. It is easy to confuse the transcendental and lofty with what is spiritual. Spirituality is something vague, having some feeling of the transcendental. For John, however, the spiritual realm is full of deceiving spirits, and there is only one true Spirit rooted in the concrete and objective Word of Yahweh.

4:1 Here John links spirits and human prophets together. John warns that just as the physical realm is a dangerous place with ill-intentioned people, so the spiritual realm is a dangerous place with ill-intentioned spirits. His mention of false prophets should make us recall the tests of the First Testament of whether a prophet proclaims Yahweh as the only God (Deut. 13:1-3) and speaks accurately regarding His will (Deut. 18:22). John most likely has in mind the first test of whether someone proclaims Yahweh and His Son (1 Jn. 4:2).

4:2-3 The first test is that every spirit or prophet must proclaim that Jesus Christ came “in the flesh.” These three words are very intentional and precise. The Gnostics said that Jesus was a human who had the Christ/divine/spirit come upon him at his baptism and then left him right before his crucifixion. For the Gnostic Christ has no flesh. John puts the two together into one name—Jesus (human) Christ (Spirit)—and says that they are the same person from birth to death and through ascension. And just in case it was not clear, he adds that the one being with two names came in the flesh. Anyone who denies this is an antichrist. Even though *the* antichrist has not come into the world, the spirit, ideas, and mission of what is an antichrist is here.

Even today many false teachers divorce Jesus from Christ. Jesus is seen as a great teacher who achieved Christ-consciousness through esoteric knowledge. *Christ-consciousness* is often used to refer to a person’s realization and attainment that he or she is god. When the believers form their statement of faith, they must be specific and in agreement with the Word of Yahweh to leave no doubt as to what false teachings are when they come into the community of believers.

4:4 We have gained victory over the false spirits, no matter how powerful and influential they may seem, because we possess the Holy Spirit, who is greater than that which is in the world. It is up to us to not place our lives and thinking in the hands of one who is the enemy and who has already been conquered.

4:5 Just as John had warned the reader to not love the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17), he now states that these false teachers represent the world and are the ones who lead the world astray with their ideas. The false teachers and those who follow them will pass away with the world (1 Jn. 2:17).

“The term ‘world’ (*kosmos*) is probably to be understood in two ways: as a system of thought antithetical to Christian belief and as a description of those members of the community who were led astray by false teachers. That some members of the community were easily persuaded to forsake the truth of the gospel should not bewilder the faithful.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Glenn W. Barker. “1 John” in *Hebrews-Revelation*, Vol. 12 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 341.

4:6 The second test is in whether or not one holds to the teachings of the apostles. The “us” reflects back on the “we” in 1 Jn. 1:1-4, which refers to the apostles who have heard, seen, and touched the incarnate Jesus. Here, 1 Jn. 3:6 says that one listens to their teachings, which not only means hearing but obeying. According to the context, the teachings are to love Yahweh and love others.

John sounds as if he’s saying that if you agree with him then you are right, which might sound very arrogant. He does *not* say, however, that no matter what he preaches to you, if you do not believe it then you are damned. What he is saying is that all beliefs must match up with the apostolic teaching. These teachings are rooted in the First Testament, fulfilled and taught by Christ, and given to a community of apostles (Gal. 1). There have been so many people who have believed the same thing about Yahweh and the messiah throughout history. One can recognize an apostolic mind by poring over and devouring the Word of Yahweh. Truly spiritually minded people love to meditate on and grow in the Word (1 Jn. 17:17). The false teachers are always throwing out the testimony of the community and the Word of Yahweh and pointing to their own esoteric, subjective, and unverifiable ideas.¹⁷

This generation does not want a God to whom we are reconciled but rather a God who is a powerful genie. The idea is that they pay homage to him, but at the end of the day they still hold to their freedom in their own personal spirituality and that God serves them. They do not want to know the right thing to believe; they want to know if it is practical, if it will make them feel good, and if it will give them a spiritual experience. However, at the end of the day, if you do not have people who understand the truth and the truthfulness of the truth, you will never establish solid Christian businesses, churches, and countries because their beliefs will always be shifting under them. John is not concerned with just the righteous lifestyle of the believer; he also wants them to be aware of whom they are following. He wants them to test leaders and make sure that they are teaching Christ correctly and living a righteous life so that their lives may be rooted in a trustworthy and solid foundation.¹⁸

¹⁷ See D. A. Carson. *1 John*.

¹⁸ See D. A. Carson. *1 John*.

D. Fourth Condition: Be Loving (4:7–5:4)

In this section, John develops the fourth condition: those who are children of Yahweh are loving towards others. This is a new condition, not repeated from the first division. John uses the phrase “knows God” (1 Jn. 4:6-7) to transition from the previous section to this one and continues to develop the idea of love that he began in 1 Jn. 3:11-24. After establishing that God is love, John now defines what love is and how it operates, according to the character of Yahweh.

4:7-8 The first point John makes is that if we are born again in Yahweh, becoming His children and thus knowing Yahweh, then His love must be in us because Yahweh is love. John is not making an ontological statement that Yahweh literally is love. The point is that without Yahweh there is no love, and Yahweh, as a God of justice, righteousness, light, and truth, cannot be anything other than love. Yahweh is not part love, part wrath, part justice but is all of these things at once. Though we do not love in the same way Yahweh does, the incentive is to pursue the love of Yahweh so that it will become a reality lived out in our life.

4:9-10 The second point John makes is that the ultimate definition of what love is and the way Yahweh revealed His love in our lives is the sacrifice of His son on the cross for all humanity. Yahweh’s justice and holiness demand that we be damned, but because of His character of love He died for us. This is why truth is so important. Though we move further away from Him, it was Yahweh who took the initiative to pursue us—not because we were lovable but because He is love. Therefore, love is defined as pursuing and sacrificing for those who are unlovable.

In light of this definition of love, 1 Jn. 4:7-5:4a might read as follows:

“Dear friends, let us *lay down our lives for* one another, because *self-sacrifice* comes from God, and everyone who *does not demand his rights* has been fathered by God and knows God. Whoever does not *lay down his life but clings to his rights* does not know God, because God is *the very definition of self-sacrifice*. By this the *self-sacrifice* of God is revealed in us: that God sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is *self-sacrifice*: not that we *died for* God, but that he *died for* us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so *laid down his life for* us, we also ought to *lay down our lives for* one another. No one has ever seen God. If we *surrender our rights for the sake of* one another, God resides in us, and His *sacrifice* is made complete in us. By this we know that we reside in Him and He in us: in that He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

If anyone confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God resides in him and he in God. And we have come to know and trust the *sacrifice* God has *made for* us. God is *self-sacrifice*, and the one who resides in *self-sacrifice by surrendering his rights and even his very life* resides in God, and God in him. By this *the lifestyle of laying down our lives for one another* is made complete with us so that we may have confidence on the day of judgment, because just as Jesus is, so also we are in this world. There is no fear in *dying to yourself*. But perfect *self-sacrifice* drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears punishment has not been made complete in *self-sacrifice*. We *lay down our lives and surrender our rights for others* because He first *laid down his life and surrendered his rights for us*.

If anyone says, ‘*I would die for God,*’ yet *would not give up anything* for his fellow Christian, he is a liar. Because the one who does not *lay down his life* for his fellow Christian, whom he has seen, cannot *lay down his life for God*, whom he has not seen. And the commandment we have from Him is this: Whoever *sacrifices everything for God* must also *sacrifice everything for his fellow Christian*.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been fathered by God, and everyone who *is willing to lay down his life for the Father is willing to lay down his life for the child* fathered by him. By this we know that we *are willing to lay to lay our lives down for the children of God: whenever we lay our lives down for God and obey His commandments* For this is the *self-sacrifice of God: that we keep His commandments*. And his commandments do not weigh us down, because everyone who has been fathered by God conquers the world.”

4:11-12 The third point John makes is that Yahweh modeled love, so we must love. The fact that Yahweh first loved us becomes the incentive for us to pursue love. Yahweh is making us pure, and we will one day be pure, so we must pursue purity and love. Yahweh’s love comes to the completeness of its function when we love. Yahweh did not love the believers simply to shower them with love but to redeem us into loving creatures. We demonstrate the character of Yahweh when we love; that is how others see Yahweh. We should be able to say, “Watch me, for my life has changed.”

“God’s love for us is perfected only when it is reproduced in us or (as it may mean) ‘among us’ in Christian fellowship.”¹⁹

“The love of God displayed in His people is the strongest apologetic that God has in the world.”²⁰

4:13-16 Here John links love and spirit/truth together. (Spirit has already been linked to the truth criteria—1 Jn. 4:1-6.) John moved from the truth of who Jesus is as the God-man (1 Jn. 1:1-4) who died for our sins (1 Jn. 1:5-2:2) to recognizing that who Jesus is, is a function of Yahweh having sent him out of love. We know that we belong to and know Yahweh because we have confessed and placed our trust in these truths given to us through the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:15) and have responded by living in love (1 Jn. 4:16).

4:17-18 Here John links love and confidence in belonging to Yahweh. Yahweh’s love is complete in us as we love more and more, which shows that we have been saved and have changed, which give us confidence on the day of judgment. John is not telling us not to fear Yahweh, for the fear of Yahweh is a good thing (Prov. 1:7; Ecc. 12:13-14). The context is that we do not have to fear condemnation for our sin on the day of judgment because we belong to Yahweh and His Son, who paid for our sins on the cross. Punishment on the day of judgment is reserved only for the one who does not know Yahweh, and so they fear that day.

4:19-21 Here John links love and Christian conduct. When one realizes that loving his brother involves obeying the command to “love one another” (Jn. 13:34, 15:12, 17), it becomes evident that 1 Jn. 4:20 is really addressing the improper attempt to separate one’s love for Yahweh and obedience to Yahweh’s commands. Like John, Jesus also related keeping his commandments and remaining in his love as being one and the same (Jn. 15:9-10).

¹⁹ John R. W. Stott. *The Epistles of John*, p. 164.

²⁰ F. F. Bruce. *The Epistles of John*, p. 109.

5:1-4 Here John links love, faith, obedience, truth in Jesus Christ, knowledge, and the new birth. The criteria for true spirituality are all of these things. John first dealt with them systematically, one by one throughout his letter, and now he crams them all together. John knows that people can mishandle the truth in a heartless way or can be so compassionate that the truth is lost. One can be moral and upright and disciplined but still never acknowledge sin. For John, all these ideas *together* are elementary Christianity. It is all or nothing. That is what is meant when we say that Jesus is Lord. The desire and effort to hold all of this in tension and live it out in actions is assurance that one knows and belongs to Yahweh and His Son.

“It is easy to have a kind of love to God which does not recognize the obligation to love one another. Such love for God falls short of being real love for Him, since it fails to obey His commandments.”²¹

“It is easy to test our love for God. How committed are we to being completely obedient to His will? That is the measure of our love.”²²

The believers are to love others because Yahweh is love and we belong to Him. This has been the message of Yahweh all throughout the First Testament (Deut. 6:4-9; Lev. 19:18) and in the Second Testament (Matt. 22:37-40). If this is who Yahweh is, having demonstrated love through the sending of His Son to atone for our sins, then this is a necessary part of our life as we reflect Him in obedient love as His children.

²¹ I. Howard Marshall. *The Epistles of John*, p. 226.

²² Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on 1 John*, p. 52.

E. Fifth Condition: Keep the Faith (5:5-12)

In this section, John develops the fifth condition that those who are children of Yahweh keep the faith. At the end of the previous section (1 Jn. 5:4), John introduced the idea that those who are fathered by Yahweh conquer the world. He uses this idea to transition into the topic of Jesus as the God-man conquering sin and death through the water and the blood.

John ends his letter with three critical elements of the faith: the correct object of faith (Jesus the Son of God, 1 Jn. 5:4b-12), the assurance of faith (1 Jn. 5:13), and the results of faith (1 Jn. 5:14-17). This section discusses the first of the three.

5:4-5 The first critical element of faith is that Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. It is our knowing that Jesus Christ is the God-man who died and conquered death that gives us confidence that we do not have to fear the world because He has already conquered it on our behalf. Jesus Christ has done all the work; we need only to trust in Him and live for Him. Once again, for John, faith begins with believing the right truths about Yahweh. Faith today is seen as a *private* belief about what is truth, which has no right to define truth in the public arena. For John, the truths in which people place their faith must be both a private and public truth if they are to make any real difference in their life. People cannot experience the conquering power of Jesus Christ if He is true for them only in their private sphere of life.

5:6 The truth about Jesus that must be embraced is that He came by both the water and the blood. “Water and blood” refer to the baptism and death of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The argument is interested in who Jesus is. The false teachers believed that Christ came upon Jesus *at* his baptism and left *at* his death. John, however, claims that Jesus was the Christ before and *through* His baptism and remained the Christ *through* His death and on. The only way that Jesus Christ could truly conquer death and then the world was if He was the God-man all throughout his life on earth and all the way through His resurrection.

The water and blood may also be an allusion to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross when the blood and water came out of His side, symbolizing that His death had provided atonement of sins and the Holy Spirit for all humanity (Jn. 19:34).

“Water in the Gospel of John is consistently used as a symbol for the Holy Spirit (John. 7:38-39). What the opponents were probably saying is that Jesus saved us by bringing the Holy Spirit. What the author of 1 John is saying is that Jesus saved us by dying on the cross. For John the *water and the blood* refers to the outpouring of blood and water that came forth from Jesus’ side after he died on the cross (John 19:34). Jesus’ sacrificial death was a necessary and vital part of his saving work and could not be dispensed with (as the opponents were apparently claiming).”²³

The reference to the Spirit goes back to when John the Baptizer pointed to the Spirit’s (dove) testimony (Jn. 1:29-34) about Jesus. This testimony shows that Yahweh was the One who brought all these things to pass.

5:7-8 There are some who do not believe that these verses belong here since they do not appear in the most reliable early manuscripts. However, these verses do tie together the three testimonies mentioned.

²³ W. Hall Harris. *1, 2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis*, p. 211.

“1 Jn. 5:7-8 is “found only in eight late MSS, four of which have the words in a marginal note. Most of these MSS (2318, 221, and [with minor variations] 61, 88, 429, 629, 636, and 918) originate from the 16th century; the earliest MS, codex 221 (10th century) includes the reading in a marginal note, added sometime after the original composition. Thus, there is no sure evidence of this reading in any Greek MS until the 1500’s.”²⁴

5:9-10 These three testimonies are incredibly significant because they come from Yahweh, and His testimony is greater than that of men (false teachers). 1 Jn. 5:10 should be seen as a parenthetical statement to 1 Jn. 5:9, expounding on what is “the testimony.” The statement “we have taken these three into ourselves” does not mean that the Holy Spirit talks to people and confirms that they have salvation, for there are many spirits that could be talking to you and telling you that you are saved. Rather, this means that one knows that he has salvation because he has accepted these testimonies as truth and lives his life based on them. To deny the testimony of Yahweh as truth is to call Him a liar.

“The writer, then, cannot allow that one can profess belief in God, as did his opponents, and yet reject God’s testimony to His own Son. Such rejection cannot be excused on the basis of ignorance. The evidence is too clear and weighty. Rather, it is the deliberate unbelief, the character of which in the end impugns the very being and character of God. If Jesus is not God’s own Son in the flesh, then God is no longer the truth. He is a liar.”²⁵

5:11-12 The message is that Yahweh has given eternal life through Jesus Christ the Son of God and Him alone. The one who receives and builds his life on this truth receives the Son and has eternal life, and the one who rejects this truth does not have the Son or eternal life.

This is why everything that John has been saying all along is so important; Jesus as a sacrifice is radically different in our lives than Jesus as a giver of knowledge. If you do not get right who Jesus the God-man and Son of God is, then you cannot make sense of the cross. If His death was not a sacrifice but an accident, then everything in Christianity dissolves. This event in space and time is not a private truth but affects and shapes all of time and humanity.

²⁴ W. Hall Harris. *1, 2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis*, p. 214.

²⁵ Glenn W. Barker. “1 John” in *Hebrews-Revelation*, Vol. 12 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 352.

F. Conclusion: Assurance of Eternal Life (5:13-21)

John introduced the idea of assurance of eternal life at the end of the previous section (1 Jn. 5:12). In this final section, He uses this idea to transition into the topic of how we know we have assurance of eternal life. This section discusses the last two critical elements of faith: the assurance of faith (1 Jn. 5:13) and the results of faith (1 Jn. 5:14-17).

5:13 The second critical element of faith for believers who accept the testimony of Yahweh is that they can be assured that they belong to Him and have eternal life. The first question asks how believers know that they have assurance. Luther taught that assurance is a function of faith. If you really have faith and trust in Yahweh to save you, then your very faith becomes your assurance. The Puritans pondered how you can know your faith is really genuine. They said that you can know your faith is genuine because you have been changed and there are now works and fruits that follow. There is also the Spirit that speaks to you and testifies to this genuineness.

The next question asks why a person needs assurance. The reason for this question is that there is doubt. What are the causes of doubt? If you have lost sight of the cross, then you go back to the foundational truths of who Jesus is as the God-man and that He atoned for your sins on the cross through His death and resurrection. If there is a sin in your life, then feeling shame, guilt, and conviction is a testament to your salvation. However, a true believer will never feel assurance until he deals with the sin in his life (1 Jn. 2:3, 26-27; 3:10, 18-19; 4:13).

The believer always lives with the tension expressed by John Newton, hymn-writer of “Amazing Grace”: “I am not what I ought to be...I am not what I hope to be. But still, I am not what I used to be. And by the grace of Yahweh, I am what I am.” Feeling this tension is also a testament to one’s assurance.

5:14-15 The third critical element of faith for believers who accept the testimony of Yahweh is that they can expect results in their lives. The first result is that the believer has confidence that when they request things of Yahweh according to His will, then He will hear them, and that when He hears them, He will respond as well. Praying according to Yahweh’s will means that that we join Yahweh in what He wants to accomplish through the redemption of creation and humanity (Matt. 6:9-13).

5:16-17 John does not specifically state that we should pray for the end of sin in others’ lives and their forgiveness. However, there is a sin that leads to death that we should not pray for. One view regarding this enigmatic sin is that it is a sin that leads to premature physical death, which a believer can experience if they keep committing this sin. Although there are mentions of this elsewhere in the Second Testament (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 5:5, 11:29-30), it is not clear anywhere in the context that physical death is what John has in mind. In Rev. 3:1 death is seen as spiritual and shows that John may have this in mind. Likewise, there is no mention of what these sins are, so how would one know how to pray? Given the context, the end of 1 Jn. 5:16 should be seen as somewhat of a parenthetical statement. Those who have committed this sin are the opponents, whom John has called unbelievers repeatedly (1 Jn. 2:19, 3:14-15, 3:17). The opponents claimed to be believers but departed into the world (1 Jn. 4:1, 5), which is darkness and death (Jn. 3:19-20, 1 Jn. 3:14b). Their sin is the refusal to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Jn. 20:31; 1 Jn. 5:12) and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:30-32), a sin that cannot be forgiven because it denies the only means of forgiveness there is. It is clear that when John talks about life in this letter he is referring to eternal life, so death would clearly be eternal as well. Notice in the Farewell Discourse (Jn. 13-17), when Jesus prayed for the disciples and the future believers, He

excluded the world (Jn. 17:9). It is possible to know the full revelation and gospel of Yahweh revealed through His Son but to then reject it and become hardened and so to never come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (Heb. 6:1-8). For believers, it is important to know that all unrighteousness is sin even though they are saved but that this sort of sin will not result in death because they have placed their trust in Jesus Christ who atoned for their sin (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 1:5-2:2).

5:18 John just said previously that believers do sin (1 Jn. 5:16), so when he says here that the believers do *not* sin, he must be referring to the sin leading to death committed by the opponents, which is the rejection of Jesus Christ as the God-man. The significance is that genuine believers cannot commit this sin because “God protects the one He has fathered and the evil one cannot touch him.” This provides great assurance for the believer who loves Yahweh and others.

5:19-20 The second result of faith is the certainties that believers have through Jesus Christ. (1) We know that we belong to Yahweh because of who He is and what He has done for us and in us. (2) Even though the world belongs to the evil one, he cannot touch us. Even though Christ has won a major victory through the cross, the evil one is still ruler of this world; we need not worry, however, for we belong to Yahweh and are protected by Him (1 Jn. 5:4b-5, 18). (3) We know that the Son of God has come and that He is not a myth or story. (4) We know that the Son of God lives in us and has given us insights to know Yahweh. (5) We know that we are in a relationship with Yahweh and His Son who makes this possible. (6) We know that Jesus Christ is the true God and brings true eternal life.

5:21 The third result of faith is the perseverance of the believers in Jesus Christ. John ends the letter with this odd statement that at first reading seems out of place. John knows that his readers—Gentiles being brought out of that life and Jews who feared exile—did not want to be associated with idols. He uses that abhorrence of idolatry to drive home the point of what denying the truth of Jesus Christ as the God-man and Son of God really is. Any vision of Yahweh short of the vision of the God who has disclosed Himself through His prophets and ultimately His Son (Heb. 1:1-4) is idolatry. You can talk about Yahweh, Jesus, and spirituality all you want, but if you do not accept Yahweh’s image revealed through His Son, then you are an idolater. False views and teachings of Jesus Christ are idolatry, so in some way the whole letter has been a warning against idolatry and an exhortation to stay true to the one true God.

“False teaching is ultimately ‘apostasy from the true faith.’ To follow after it is to become nothing better than an idol worshiper, especially if it is a matter of the truth of one’s conception of God. The author is blunt. The false teachers propose not the worship of the true God, made known in his Son Jesus, but a false god—an idol they have invented.”²⁶

²⁶ Glenn W. Barker. “1 John.” In *Hebrews-Revelation*. Vol. 12 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 357.

III. Living in the Truth of Love (2 John 1:1-13)

By the time of 2 John, the false teachers seem to have become more influential, and the church has fragmented even more. John writes a second letter reinforcing the ideas he developed in his first letter. The four conditions for walking the light, which he developed in 1 John, are echoed in 2 John: renunciation of sin (2 Jn. 1:10-11), obedience to the love command (2 Jn. 1:5-6), rejection of worldliness (2 Jn. 1:7), and the maintaining of one's faith (2 Jn. 1:1-2, 4, 9). Only in 2 Jn. 1:10-11 is a new theme introduced of not allowing the false teachers to enter the congregation of believers.

John begins his letter by introducing the topic of truth and love (2 Jn. 1:3), which leads to him talking about the spiritual life characterizing the local community as he develops the concepts of truth and love (2 Jn. 1:4-6). Then he describes the spiritual dangers that surround the community and pose a threat from the outside as well as internally (2 Jn. 1:7-11). There is a contrast between truth and error, love and hate, and the church and the world, which he dealt with at greater length in 1 John.

1:1-2 The “lady” (“elect lady” NET) to whom the letter is addressed has no definite article, which means no specific woman is in mind and it is, rather, a metaphor for the congregation. This is evident in that, first, the language of 2 Jn. 1:1-3, 13 is more appropriate for a church. Second, there is an interchange between the singular (John) and the plural (the lady) that points to the elect lady as the congregation (2 Jn. 1:2, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13). Third, the way the new command is addressed to the lady in 2 Jn. 1:5, as it was introduced to the congregation in 1 Jn. 2:7, suggests a congregation is in mind.²⁷

The individual members of the church would then be her children. Elsewhere the Greek word *tekna* (“children”) is used to describe all the members of the church. This term is used four times in 1 John, where the theme is living as Yahweh’s offspring (1 Jn. 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2; see also 2 Jn. 1:4, 13; 3 Jn. 1:4). Paul’s use of *uios* (“sons”) is a parallel (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:5).

John declares to them that he loves them. The “I” is emphatic (see also 3 Jn. 1:1), for John from the very outset is placing himself over and against the heretics, who have no love for the believers or for the truth (2 Jn. 1:10-11; 3 Jn. 1:4). The phrase “and not only I, but also all who know the truth” communicates that John is not alone in his love for them. All other believers, who know the truth of who Yahweh is as revealed in His Son Jesus and have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, also love them. They are able to have mutual love for each other because they have and are in the truth of Yahweh (1 Jn. 2). Truth is the motivation as well as the context for all Christian love.²⁸

There is a deeper significance for the phrase “the truth.” For John, truth is what is ultimately real, found in Yahweh Himself, as revealed in Jesus, and is expressed in the Christian gospel of Yahweh’s redemption of humanity (1 Jn. 1:8; 2:21; 3:19). So here, John is saying that he loves his readers in accordance with the truth of the Christian gospel in which mutual love is an obligation (1 Jn. 3:11; 2 Jn. 1:6) and is demonstrated in the love of Yahweh as portrayed in the

²⁷ See A. E. Brooke. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, pp. 167-169.

²⁸ See Stephen S. Smalley. *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 307.

life and sacrifice of Jesus. (Jn. 13:34; 1 Jn. 4:7-21).²⁹ This phrase comes very close to Paul’s use of “in Christ” (Eph. 1:1; Phil. 4:1-2).

Believers love one another not merely because the revealed truth of Yahweh includes the divine command to love one another (1 Jn.2:7-8; 3:11). They love one another also because of the truth (Jesus) that “remains” (Jn. 15:1-17) in the believer and provides the inward compulsion and motivation to actively love others. Thus, love is not just an idea but is lived out actively in the intimate and ongoing relationship with Yahweh and others (2 Jn. 1:4, 7, 10-11).

The phrases describing truth as “in us” and “with us” are synonymous. The word “forever” (2 Jn. 1:2) is the same word used of the Spirit-Paraclete in Jn. 14:16. The truth lives in us and is with us forever, for the truth is the Spirit of Yahweh, who is eternal.

1:3 Grace is the undeserved love of Yahweh shown to His creation (Ps. 84:11; 1 Cor. 15:10). Mercy is similar in meaning but includes the idea of Yahweh’s faithfulness to the covenant relationship with His people, as He chooses to forgive them in the midst of their covenant unfaithfulness (Deut. 7:9; Lk. 1:5). Peace is a Jewish concept communicating the idea of wholistic well-being (Isa. 26:3; Jn. 14:27). For John, this is not a wish but is a promise found in Yahweh and made possible through Jesus. The title “the Father’s Son” is unique, for John usually refers to Jesus as “Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:12, 20). “The Father’s Son” emphasizes the special relationship of Jesus to the Father and not only to the believer.

Yahweh’s blessing of grace, mercy, and peace is closely associated with a life of truth and love, for Yahweh’s grace is manifested through His self-disclosure in the person, life, and sacrifice of Jesus, who is truth and love in their fullest expression (1 Jn. 4:9-10). It is also manifested in the faith rooted in truth and mutual love of the believers (1 Jn. 4:15-17; 5:13; 2 Jn. 1:4-6; 3 Jn. 1:3-4). Truth and love belong together in the Christian faith and experience (1 Jn. 2:21, 5) because the church is called to love others in truth and also hold to the truth in love.³⁰

1:4 John now comes to the heart of his letter, where he will unpack the idea that truth and love should characterize the true believer. John is overjoyed that there are still some who are rooted in the truth and love, since the false teachers have become more influential and are actually leaving the church since his last letter. The phrase “living in the truth” is literally “walking in the truth,” paralleling 1 John (1 Jn. 1:7). Here, John is describing habitual commitment, which is seen in the fact that “walking” is a present participle, communicating continuous ongoing action (1 Kgs. 2:4; 2 Kgs. 20:3). The motivation for this is that Yahweh commanded us to believe in Jesus and love one another (1 Jn. 3:23).

1:5 The paradox that the old command of love is also new (1 Jn. 2:7-8) is not repeated in this present verse. Here, John acknowledges that the command to love goes back to creation and the Mosaic Covenant. John asks rather than commands them to love one another. He could have commanded them to love, but he knows that the obligation to love ultimately comes from the command of Jesus and is the natural outcome of one who is in the truth, providing evidence for divine parentage (1 Jn. 3:23-24).

1:6 Though he doesn’t give it as a command, John does see this as a command, as he repeats the idea twice in this verse. Love is not simply an emotion but is the active, obedient response of the

²⁹ See I. Howard Marshall. *The Epistles of John*, pp. 61-62; Stephen S. Smalley. *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 307.

³⁰ See John R. W. Stott. *The Epistles of John*, p. 205.

believer, thus it can be a command. Love must be expressed in obedience, for without it there is no real faith or genuine love (1 Jn. 2:3-5; 3:1:10-18, 23; 5:2-3). The whole of life is to be regulated by obedience to the love command. The thought of correct belief in Jesus cannot be detached from the exhortation to right behavior.

1:7 John’s attention moves now from the existence of true belief within the Johannine community, which gives him great joy (2 Jn. 1:4), to the dangers presented to the community through the false teachings of deceivers who have “defected into the world.”

The reason John has emphasized his above points is because the denial of the truth of Jesus and the absence of love are characteristic of the false teachers, whose spiritual regeneration is in question (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:7, 8; 5:1). The main thing that distinguishes them as not being in the truth is their denial of Jesus having come in the flesh, referring to His taking on a human body. The core of Jesus’ nature is in being the God-man. To deny any aspect of this is to reject the truth of Yahweh, which is found in His Son.

Departure from this truth results in a failure to love. If correct belief is corrupted by incorrect belief, then a lack of mutual love as well as of truth will follow. They have refused to obey the fundamental commands of truth and love. This can be seen in the fact that they have left the community of believers and gone out into the world.

The term “world” here has basically a neutral meaning—primarily the habitation of humanity and the material sphere of life. But there is a slight negative connotation since they have left the community of the believers who are in the “world” of truth to enter the “world” of error, which is not a part of the community of believers.³¹

Their denial of the truth of who Jesus is and their deceiving of others with false doctrine shows that they are antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18-19). The word “antichrist” means a person who is in radical opposition to Jesus in the form of the dissemination of false Christology.

1:8 John’s warning to the true believers is twofold. He does not want them to lose what they had worked for, and he desires that they may receive their reward in full. What they have worked for is their growth in the knowledge of the truth of Yahweh and their relationship of love with Yahweh and the believers. To follow the false teachers and walk away from this is to lose the only true and authentic community they have ever and could ever be a part of. To lose hold of faith in Jesus would be to reduce the Christian life, and life itself, to frustration. To remain in the eternal Christ (Jn. 15:1-18) is to receive eternal life, for he is the only source of eternal life; therefore, it is only through Him that one can receive the reward of true life.

1:9 The two halves of this verse, including a negative and positive statement, are based on 1 Jn. 2:23-24. The warning to the one who “runs ahead” or “goes on ahead” refers to the false teachers’ beliefs that superior esoteric knowledge is what allows one to advance beyond the ordinary Christian individual and gain greater access to the God mind. John warns that this is not the true truth of Christ and that those who adopt this path with not truly connect with Yahweh or walk with Him. In contrast, the one who remains faithful to the teachings of Christ, aligning with the revelation of Yahweh in the First Testament, is connected in communal fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is not just about knowing deep things about the universe but about knowing intimately the Creator and His children.

³¹ See Stephen S. Smalley. *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 316.

Although John is focused on right beliefs, he is also mindful that a lack of true faith in Jesus can be associated with a lack of love (1 Jn. 2:3-11; 3:10-24; 4:7-5:4). Jesus’ teachings here include a reference to the moral requirements of love that Jesus taught (Jn. 13:34) as well as to the need for right belief about Him and a genuine faith in Him.³²

1:10-11 John then commands that if anyone is not aligned with this truth and teaching, then they are not to be welcomed into your house. The word “house” most likely refers to the house that the believers meet in for church. John is not forbidding private and personal hospitality, rather an official welcome or acceptance into the congregation that would provide a widespread opportunity for the false teachers to spread their false teachings. Jesus himself engaged in private and personal fellowship with the Pharisees (false teachers) and sinners (those living outside the light of Yahweh) to bring them into His fellowship of truth and love. Yet He publicly denied the false teachings of the Pharisees and warned His flock to stay away from them (Matt. 23). The believers are not to allow the false teachers to strengthen their influence on the congregation, for love and truth go together. Those who invite these antichrists into the fellowship of believers share in their, literally, “evil” deeds. Those who allow these false teachers to influence people to adopt false beliefs and walk away from the truth and love of Jesus are under the judgment of Yahweh.

1:12-13 Why is John’s letter to the church so brief if he had so much more to write to them? The only possibility given in the text is that he preferred to talk to them face to face and thought that he would soon be visiting them. Perhaps he had seen that mere words on paper were not enough, despite his previous letter, and knew that his visit was necessary and preferable. The phrase “so that our joy may be complete” also points to the fact that he was desiring and looking forward to being with them in person.

Just as the “elect lady” in 2 Jn. 1:1 refers to their congregation and her “children” refers to the individual members of the community, so here the “elect sister” refers to another congregation John is currently a part of, and her “children” are the individual members of that congregation.

³² See Glenn W. Barker. “1 John,” p. 365; Stephen S. Smalley. *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 320.

IV. A Call to Faithfulness in the Truth (3 John 1:1-15)

By the time of 3 John, the situation in the church has become starker with not only the influence of the false teachers but also one who desired control over the people of the church. It seems that John’s previous appeals to the churches were unsuccessful, as the situation out of which 3 John was written signals a major disintegration within the Johannine circle.

John first addresses Gaius and commends him for his righteousness and hospitality toward the brothers and sisters in the faith (3 Jn. 1:1-8). Then he addresses the evil actions of Diotrephes, who desires to seize control of the church (3 Jn. 1:9-10). He closes with a plea for the congregation to imitate good and commends the righteousness of Demetrius (3 Jn. 1:11-15).

1:1 John directed this letter towards Gaius, which is the only time John addressed a letter to an individual. The name “Gaius” was a common Roman name (meaning “rejoicing”), suggesting he was a former pagan who had converted to Christianity. Most likely this Gaius is not one of the other Gaiuses mentioned in the Second Testament (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:1; Acts 19:29; 20:4).

John states that he loves Gaius in the truth. *Truth* should be interpreted in the context of John’s previous letters, where it is adhering to the truth of who Yahweh is as revealed in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. This means Gaius holds to the orthodox truth of the gospel, and therefore he and John can have true, loving fellowship with each other in Christ.

1:2-4 John prayed that Gaius would enjoy good health, which refers to both physical and spiritual health. The word “soul” here (*psuchē*) is used ten times in the Gospel of John and two times in 1 John and refers to the whole “life” of a person. It can also refer to the emotions that one experiences in life (Jn. 10:24; 12:27). John affirms that Gaius is well off spiritually, and he prays that Gaius’s physical health would match his spiritual health. John is aware of Gaius’s spiritual health, seen in the fact that other believers whom John respects have told John about Gaius’s commitment to the gospel truth and that he walks in the light (1 Jn. 1). The greatest joy for John is when his children continue to walk in the light, holding to the truth of who Jesus is. Paul uses *tekna* (“children”) to refer to those whom he had led to Christ (1 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 4:19; Phil. 2:22).

1:5-8 John commends Gaius for being faithful in serving his fellow brothers and sisters even though he did not know them personally. Most likely these brothers and sisters were missionaries whom Gaius had welcomed and had helped on numerous occasions. His love for them was so great that they told others in many other churches about his generosity.

John then asks Gaius to send the missionaries on their way in a manner that “honors God”—literally “worthy of God”—meaning worthy from God’s perspective. The reason Gaius was to send them on their way in a manner that was worthy of God is not linked to their testimony of Gaius’s love (1 Jn. 1:6a) but to the spiritual character of their witness for Jesus (3 Jn. 1:7-8).³³ They went out in the “Name” of Jesus to testify His gospel. Unlike Gaius, they received no help from the pagans. As John has been arguing throughout his letters, when people are not in the truth, then there is no true sacrificial love for others. Most of the love we see in our own culture is merely the residue of the influence the Gospel once had in our country. As the truth of the gospel fades in the culture, so does people’s sacrificial love for others. John then encourages the

³³ See Stephen Smalley. *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 336.

believers to continue to show hospitality to those who share the gospel so that we may work together for the truth (1 Cor. 9:14).

1:9-10 In contrast to Gaius, John now discusses Diotrephes, who, because he loves to be first, is hindering John's communication with the church and his plans to visit the church. It is not completely clear who Diotrephes was, the specifics of John's issues with him, or the nature of the conflict between John and Diotrephes. The name Diotrephes means "God-nurturing," which could mean he was a Jew who had become a Christian. Most likely, Diotrephes has taken the leadership in the church since he "loves to be first" and has the power to hinder John's efforts. He has the audacity to oppose the authority of John as chosen by Jesus to head the churches. At this point in history, all the other disciples have been martyred, and so the churches are moving into a different era of who has authority and how to do leadership within the churches. Diotrephes is intentionally spreading lies about John and others and refuses to show hospitality to other believers. Is it that he does not show hospitality to all believers or just the ones he knows support John? Either way, it is clear he is creating divisions in the church. He is living neither in the truth nor in love, which are the essentials to the faith, according to John (1 Jn. 1:6; 2:4; 3:11; 2 Jn. 1:6). Most likely he is not one of the false teachers; otherwise, John would have specifically pointed this out since the topic of the false teachers has been a major topic in his letters. With Diotrephes, it seems to be more about his pride and his desire for power and control, and John is a threat to this. This is just another problem John is facing in the churches.

1:11 John now moves back to the theme of 1 Jn. 1:5-8—that of living righteously as the children of Yahweh. After discussing Diotrephes, John reminds his congregation to not imitate what is evil, which is an absence of truth and love. True children of Yahweh do what is good (Jn. 8:47; 1 Jn. 2:16; 3:1-10; 4:2-7; 5:19), and those who do not do good are not known or seen by Yahweh. Once again, John makes the point that your fruit reveals your true paternity.

1:12 John then points to Demetrius, another righteous member of the congregation, as an example of one who is of Yahweh and is imitating what is good. The name Demetrius means "belonging to Demeter," who was the Greek goddess of fruit and crops. This means Demetrius also was a pagan who had converted to Christianity. Demetrius's character has been spoken of by everyone in the church and those who are with John. Spoken well of "by the truth itself" could refer to his character and actions being consistent with the truth of Yahweh. Perhaps by discussing Diotrephes and Demetrius, John was enlisting the support of Gaius in joining Demetrius in opposing Diotrephes.

1:13-15 Once again, John states that there is so much more he would like to write but wants to say to them in person (2 Jn. 1:12). John closes with a pronouncement of peace on the congregation with the hope to see them in person soon.

This letter shows examples of real people who were walking in the light of truth and love and their need to stand against those who oppose the light through either their false teachings or their desire for control.

Conclusion

John's main emphasis in these letters is that a true child of Yahweh walks in the light of truth and love. The truth is belief in Jesus as the God-man and as the Son of God who died and rose again in order to redeem humanity back to Yahweh. The fact that Jesus is one with the Father as the Son of God and one with us as humans is what allows us to have fellowship with Yahweh. We are, therefore, to be obedient to the commands of Yahweh: to love Yahweh and love others. Only those who are in the truth can truly love sacrificially as Jesus modeled.

Anyone who denies this truth and encourages others to do so is an antichrist who does not live in truth and love and so belongs to the devil. Therefore, true children of Yahweh live like Yahweh in truth in love. You can know one's paternity by what they believe and how they act.

In the midst of a sinful and evil world and false teachers in the church, it is adherence to this truth and walking in the light that assures one of salvation. Though no one can do this perfectly, the one who truly belongs to Yahweh is the one who clings to Jesus as their advocate and confesses their sin in order to maintain fellowship with Yahweh and with Jesus His Son.

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