

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE OF I JOHN

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Who Wrote I John?

The letter we commonly know as "I John" does not reveal the name of its author. Like the epistle to the Hebrews, there will always be some speculation as to the human hand God employed to write the inspired words contained in this epistle.

There is, however, evidence outside the epistle itself that may help us identify the author of this epistle. Two ancient writers who quoted from this epistle referred to it as an "epistle of John." The first to identify John with this epistle was Papias Hierapolis in the middle of the second century. We also have the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons who lived from about 130 - 200 A.D., who clearly believed the writer of I John to be the John who was an apostle of the Lord, and the author of the gospel of John. From these (and other) early traditions, this epistle has come to be known as the first epistle of John.

Besides these early references, there are yet other reasons to credit the apostle John as the author of this epistle. When close comparisons are made between the actual text of the gospel of John and the epistle of I John many similarities can be seen. The author of each work seems to focus upon the contrasts between the spiritual and physical realms. In the first chapters of both we find light and darkness clearly compared, as well as truth and lies, love and hate, and life and death. For those who are learned in the study of the original Greek language, many other similarities in vocabulary can also be seen.

When Was I John Written?

Determining the date in which I John was written depends (in part) upon the above assumptions concerning the authorship of I John. Generally, the Gospel of John is believed to have been written some time between 85 and 90 A.D. Based upon these dates, some conservative scholars conclude that I John was written very soon after, that is about 90 A.D. According to what seems to be reliable traditions, all three epistles of John were written from the city of Ephesus.

What Was The Purpose Of I John?

The purpose for this letter being written must be derived from the very content of the letter. This we will endeavor to determine as we study its message verse by verse. However, it may be helpful to note that one of the main purposes of this letter was to counter some early forms of "gnosticism." This philosophy was apparently being proclaimed by some who once had been a part of the church, and had now withdrawn from the body. The term "gnosticism" comes from the Greek word that means, "to know." The problem of Gnosticism was their seeing themselves as intellectuals who possessed a superior knowledge of God. Due to their "superior" understanding they saw a clear distinction between the pure spiritual realm and the evil material realm. It is for

these reasons that John begins his dissertation on the fallacies of such thinking, and the importance of truly "knowing" what God wants us to know. It is perhaps for these reasons that the word "know" in its various forms is found some 40 times in this very brief letter.

With these thoughts in mind, let us begin our verse-by-verse study of I John. The text will be printed in bold print, and will be taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Chapter 1

:1 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life" To the student of the Bible I John begins with such familiar words of assurance. A brief look at the gospel of John 1:1 will show us where we have heard such words before. That which was "from the beginning" was he who was seen, touched, and heard by John's generation. He was from the beginning and in the beginning; He was and remains as the Word of God and the Word of life.

:2 "the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us" The writer of this epistle (whom we will conclude to be the apostle of John in this commentary), clearly identifies himself as an eyewitness of that "eternal life" that had been with the Father from the beginning, who was manifested (shown) to both himself and others. His reasons for going to such lengths will be made clear as we study further.

:3 "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." As we at last reach the end of the first sentence, we can begin to comment upon the message that is being sent to Christians of all generations. John first of all is basing his letter upon the very foundations of Christian faith, that the one who was seen and heard was indeed He who was with the Father from the beginning. You will notice that those today that seek to pervert the gospel begin here, with the personage of Jesus. Our faith is built upon His Divinity. One of John's purposes in writing this letter was to build faith, and thus to build the fellowship of which he was so happily a part. Increasing the fellowship involves both the adding to the church in numbers and in spirit. Both advances are on his mind as he continues.

:4 "And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." It quickly becomes clear that this letter was written primarily to those who have heard the gospel and had already been reaping the benefits of the good news. John's words now seek to heighten that joy by shoring up his readers' faith in the fundamentals. This is not to say that all to whom he addresses his thoughts were in a saved condition, for as we proceed we will find many of the errors John confronts are coming from those who had fallen so far from the truth as to no longer have His word in them.

:5 "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." John is now drawing upon his privilege

of having been a personal eyewitness of Jesus, thus what he is now declaring carries the authority of Jesus Himself. Authority is a critical issue in the scriptures. On several occasions we see apostles pointing out their right to speak with authority the words given to them (see I Corinthians 9:1-2 / Galatians 1:6-24). Authority was even a matter Jesus saw as being important to make clear to His hearers (Matthew 28:18-20 / Matthew 16:18-19).

John's point is that the "authorized" teaching of Jesus is that "God is light," and that in Him there is no darkness whatsoever. We must make sure to understand the intended meaning of this statement. John is speaking of the nature of God Himself. If God is light, then there can be no darkness in Him.

:6 "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." Once we understand the true nature of God, we will then have a grasp of what a relationship with God requires. One cannot have a relationship with "light" and walk in "darkness." The two ideas are mutually exclusive. One who claims such a relationship with God while walking in darkness is simply lying! John's bluntness is needed when dealing with such double-talk. The Gnostics were (and are) very gifted at using confused terminology. It was apparently the belief of some that one could have a "spiritual" relationship with God despite the fact that their sinful flesh was continually following the evil ways of the flesh. That which made such possible (in their minds) was their belief that the flesh and the spirit were disconnected from one another, and therefore one had no bearing upon the other. John cuts through this theological mess by saying that those who say such things "lie and do not practice the truth."

: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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." In contrast to such muddled thinking as mentioned in the previous verse, John now proposes the truth of the matter. If we choose to walk in the light instead of the dark, we will not only have the relationship with God, but we will also find cleansing for our sins! Keep in mind that one cannot walk in the light until he first steps into the light, and that the Bible clearly states how one must enter into the light (see John 8:12 / Romans 6:2-7 / Galatians 3:27). Yet this verse takes this concept one step further. To continue to walk in the light is to bring about the fruits of Christianity we so diligently seek. Those who take their daily "walk" as a way of life will also find a great "fringe benefit." Those who practice such spiritual exercise will find themselves also having a "ready-made" fellowship with all others who have done the same!

:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." As simple and as straightforward as these verses have been, it is surprising to find so many today who have built completely false doctrines from them. John is by no means indicating that those who walk in the light have somehow reached the point of sinlessness. Perhaps if we had only verses 5 - 6 we would come away with such a concept, but John now makes clear that the "Christian walk" is a way of life that continues daily in the light. Yet there still remains the potential for sin and the need to recognize it as it appears. The question may then be asked, "How can one walk in the light, and yet have sins to confess?" Is not John making the point that the sins are not the

walk, but the exceptions to that walk? Simply observing mankind reveals to us that there is quite a difference between those who walk in sin and those who walk in light. Even dedicated Christians cannot honestly say they have no sin. Such statements are self-deceiving, and simply rob us of the opportunity to do something about our sins.

:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Once one becomes aware of his sins, his immediate response should be to confess them. One's reluctance to do so may further enlarge the sin, or allow it to become more firmly entrenched into one's character. "Confession" is not only "good for the soul," it is absolutely necessary for the soul to remain healthy in God's sight. Those walking in the light are no strangers to confession. Christians see confession as a welcome relief to the burden of sins, that threaten to turn our daily walk into a nightmare!

:10 "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." The message of verse 8 is now more emphatically stated. To those who refuse to confess and recognize themselves as being guilty of sin, they are in essence "calling" God a liar. John has now taken us full circle. From the glorious thought that God is light, to the uncomfortable idea that those who think they are somehow "the light" themselves are actually calling their Creator a liar. It's a connection we just don't like to make, but when man begins to think of himself as something different than what he truly is, He is flying in the face of the truth that God has told him. We either accept the truth as received from God, or we live a lie believing the God of truth to have lied to us.

To sum up, let us keep in mind these facts for future reference as we proceed in our study of I John. These things must be known about God's people:

1. They cannot *walk* in darkness and be His people.
2. They must *walk* in the *light*.
3. Those who walk in the light will also have fellowship with *all others* who do the same.
4. Those who walk in the light and confess their sins will have *cleansing* from sin.
5. Those who walk in the light are *still capable* of sinning.
6. Those who walk in the light must *confess their sins* to remain in the light.

Chapter 2

:1 "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." As we enter chapter 2 we become more aware of a "two-sided" principle that will run the length of John's letter. Let's make sure we can see that paradox.

John is writing to encourage and to teach Christians that they may not sin, yet he is also teaching that when Christians do sin, they have a Mediator who will plead their case. His purpose is not to encourage sin, nor to say that sin is the nature of Christians, yet it is an ever-present reality that human beings do sin! A proper understanding of this letter will help us to develop a "balanced approach" to the subject of human weakness.

On one hand, man must not become so lenient toward sin that he "walks" continually in it. Yet on the other hand man must not take such a severe view of his failures that he sees himself as being unforgivable. Perhaps it was this "severe" view of sin that led some to conclude that they were no longer capable of sinning. If one wants salvation and yet believes that sin cannot truly be forgiven, such thinking would lead one to believe that his only hope for salvation would be to live the sinless life.

It is helpful at this point to be reminded of the uniqueness of Jesus, for only He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15)." In Hebrews 7:26 we learn that Jesus was "separate from sinners," and in Galatians 2:21 we find that if man had been able to live up to the requirements of God's law, Christ's death for man's sins would have been "in vain" or useless.

What we are reviewing is the fact that the good news is truly good news. To those who actually think that salvation can be found in living the sinless life we must ask, why then did Jesus die upon the cross?

:2 "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." Here we encounter the term "propitiation," one of the more challenging words found in the Bible. The English word "propitiation" as found in the King James Version and the New KJV was derived from a Latin word meaning, "that which is provided to bring about pity or mercy." The Revised Standard Version (RSV) translates the Greek word "hilasterion" (Strong's #2434) into the English word "expiation." Seeing that neither of these translations used words that are commonly understood in modern English, we may understand why the New International Version translated it "atoning sacrifice." The English word "atone" is perhaps a bit easier for us to understand. By combining the words "at-one" we have the root concept of "at-one-ment." Clearly the result of Jesus dying upon the cross was to make man "at-one" with God, however in this verse a little more is being said. Jesus is the "propitiation" for our sins, in the sense that He provided what was necessary to satisfy the demands of man's sin. The translators of the RSV did not use the word "propitiation" for they saw it's use as conveying the idea that God needed to be "satisfied" in the same sense the Greeks and pagans attempted to "satisfy" their gods with offerings. Yet we must see that although God is unlike all other "gods," it is against His nature to condone or to allow sin to go unpunished. Jesus thus became the offering for our sins, that the nature of God would not be violated, and that man would have a concept of the cost of sin.

:3 "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." Staying with the basics, John again makes a very blunt and simple statement. The way to be certain that we know God is to check our obedience. This may seem so basic as to be unnecessary to even mention, but to some of the Gnostics who believed one could be pure on the inside and evil on the outside such points must be made. When the spirit of man is in fellowship with God, the body will respond with obedience.

:4 "He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." There is no soft and easy way to express this next thought. The Gnostics were lying to themselves and to others. Lest we make the mistake of placing these errors only in the past, let us remember that one who has "outgrown" the

wisdom of God and has reached a "higher plane," where he no longer needs to be concerned about obedience, is in the same category as those to whom John wrote.

:5 "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him." Those who follow God's word in their lives (and not just in their minds) are those who reap the benefit of having God's love bring about internal changes that mature the soul. The expression "is perfected" speaks of the completion of the soul that God brings about. "Nobody's perfect" we often say today, meaning that no one is without flaw. This, according to the Bible, is true. Yet the Bible uses the words "perfect" and "perfection" somewhat differently than the way they are commonly used in modern English. The idea of being made complete or mature is the thought in this verse.

The assurance we have in knowing we are "in Him" comes from one's obedience. We may say this however with caution, for the Bible records those who had some "works" and were still outside (Mark 7:6 / Matthew 7:22-23 / Romans 10:2-3 / Acts 5:1-10). Of course it can be said that in each of these references their works were incomplete, insincere, or obviously faulty, but the point is that one can have many or perhaps most of the outward signs of being a Christian, and still be masquerading as "an angel of Light." The key, we will find as we study this epistle, is to find in ourselves a mature level of obedience in both the flesh and mind. The obedience that John now speaks of demands no less.

:6 "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." It may seem as though this verse is a repeat of previous thoughts, but the emphasis here is on the pronouns. The English translators have helped us by capitalizing both "Him" and "He," to assist the reader in seeing that the "walk" we are to develop is to retrace the footsteps that Jesus left upon this earth. Having four accounts of His walk, (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), gives us not only more information, but emphasizes the important position the actual life of Jesus must occupy in our minds and lives.

:7 "Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning." This verse begins a new thought, yet is in keeping with the introduction of verse 3. We are still on the subject of knowing those that know Jesus.

John introduces this further "evidence" of those who know Jesus as an "old" commandment. It is so old it had been revealed to man from the beginning. I see no reason not to take this literally, that man has known this commandment from the beginning. The commandment to be discussed was known to Adam and Eve, and to all those of us that have followed!

:8 "Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining." Now it's getting a little confusing! We were prepared to learn about the *old* commandment which had been from the beginning, now the reader is told he is about to receive a *new* commandment. Which is it, old or new? Apparently it is both. It is both ancient, but yet given new "life" in the ministry of Jesus Christ. One may also say it has

been commanded from the beginning, yet never perfectly exemplified until Jesus "lived" it in the flesh. Let's read on to find what "it" is.

:9 "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now."

At last we find this "old-but-new" commandment to simply be *brotherly love*. This we already might have guessed, for the gospel of John speaks in very similar terms concerning it (John 13:34-35). There, in Jesus' own words, He informs His disciples that the earmark of being His disciple would be having this form of love present and visible in their lives. The world has no problem with wanting sexual and physical "love," nor does it lack "love" for that which pleases it in return. Yet true brotherly love is so deficient that the world (as well as the church) has grown sickly and weak due to its absence.

In I John this subject is first approached from a very negative direction. Rather than brotherly love being the sign of a disciple, we find the lack of love for a brother as being one sign that one is in darkness. One way to know we are in Him, is to know how people behave who are not in Him. We have learned that one cannot *walk* in darkness and still be in Him. Now we will learn about one of the "activities" that takes place in that darkness.

:10 "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him."

To walk in the light is to do that which takes place in the light. Loving your brother is one of those virtues of a light-filled life. He who loves his brother removes any cause for stumbling. We must understand that it is both the one who loves and the one who is loved who have stumbling blocks removed by this outpouring of love. To hold a grudge against a brother may cause either the one holding the grudge or the one he refuses to forgive to stumble. As too often is the case, both may fall due to the lack of brotherly love.

:11 "But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

The reader should certainly know by now that hating one's brother places one in darkness, no matter how "religious" one feels himself to be. Is it necessary for us to mention that our "brother" is not restricted to flesh and blood, or even to our local congregation? As the expert in the law once asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor," so must we answer. Your neighbor, as well as your "brother," is your fellowman. Some would like to restrict the definition of "brother" to only those who behave as we think they should, but giving it such a definition is to make this section of I John to have little relevance to our daily lives.

In addition, this verse is also teaching that hating a brother brings about a chronic case of spiritual blindness upon the one doing the hating. Not only is he "blind" to the value of the soul of the one he hates, but he also loses sight of his own direction in life. Hate has a way of consuming the mind and soul, displacing all else that once mattered. People who have "wandered" about most of their lives may often be suffering from a severe case of hatred, perhaps springing from their childhood and extending on to all others who have crossed their path. But regardless of its origin, the key is that "God is Light," and being in Him brings one out of the darkness and hate that takes human beings

down a dead-end alley of spiritual death and despair. If such is your condition, you are studying the book that provides the answers. Let's read on.

:12 "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." Verses 12 - 14 make up a distinct section of this chapter that differs from the rest of the book. It is as though John takes a break from the deep and sometimes negative subjects he has to deal with in this letter, and here interjects a poetic paragraph of endearment to those loyal brethren who would be reading his words.

In this section John addresses three groups of people. Little children, fathers, and young men, are each addressed twice. Being in poetic form, we may assume that John is speaking of these groups in a figurative sense, that is, "little children" being those young in the faith. Even those "young in the faith" have their sins forgiven through His name.

:13 "I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father." We may take this to refer to literal "fathers" only, but to be in keeping with our interpretation of verse 12, John here speaks of those mature in the faith, and also perhaps those who have led others to Christ. To be mature in the faith is to truly *know* God. This entire letter is dedicated to such "knowing."

To the young men, those young in the faith yet having been tested by trials, John writes words of encouragement, for they had succeeded thus far in overcoming the wicked one. The "little children" are in this verse mentioned as also knowing the Father.

:14 "I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one." This verse is, in part, a repetition of what has already been written in this "poem." Just as in modern songs and hymns, the repetition serves to emphasize the overall point of the poem or lyrics.

:15 "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Definitions are here in order. "Loving the world" must here be seen in its extreme sense, that is, loving the world to the point that spiritual matters must take second place to this world. "World" must also be defined as that which is exclusively of this earth, that which is organized under the power of evil. These things we will find clearly defined in the next verse.

It should be clarified at this point, however, that it is one thing to not love the world, but it is yet another thought entirely to hate the life that God has given us on this planet. True Christianity has never espoused a life-denying philosophy that is so common to other world "religions." Even though some monastics have interpreted it as such, this is not the meaning of this or any other Bible passage.

Note that the term "world" is sometimes used in a different way in the Bible. For example in John 3:16 we find the expression "God so loved the world..." The Bible student certainly can see from the context that in such a passage the term "world" refers to the people of the world that Jesus died to save, and not their evil society.

:16 "For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world." "That which is of the world" has now been clearly defined. It is not the people of this world, but rather their code of behavior. Listed are "the big 3" root motivations for nearly all sin found taking place upon the earth. All the sins of this world would fill a book, (or the average movie being released these days), but the basic causes behind them can be boiled down to a few human desires.

"The lust of the flesh" can simply be defined as the evil desires of the flesh. This we must make clear; God created us body and soul, and when He created us He gave us certain desires and needs. It is not our desires of the flesh that are sinful, but it is rather those desires taken to evil extremes, or taken outside of God's limitations, that become sin. It is one thing to desire to provide for one's family, it is another thing to kill another human being to do so. There is nothing evil about the natural desires of the body to eat, to drink, to reproduce, or even to excel. Yet mankind (with the "assistance" of Satan) from the very beginning quickly found ways to pervert these desires. This is John's point; that the lusts that come from within the flesh itself are one of the three ways man is drawn into a "love-grasp" with the world.

"The lust of the eyes" refers to a little different angle in which sin enters one's life. There are some desires that are kindled not from within, but rather through sight alone. Madison Avenue has made its permanent mark on mankind due to this very fact. Some individuals freely admit that just seeing a certain behavior or act pictured in billboards, movies, or magazines often leads them into engaging in those acts. The eyes seem to have a direct link with one's imagination, and thus may trigger emotions and desires that one's will may otherwise find controllable. It was perhaps David's view of Bathsheba that brought about his doing that which he would not have even considered otherwise (II Samuel 11:2).

"The pride of life" is yet another way in which man is enticed to sin. It is an undeniable fact that man is capable of having a proud heart. It appears that when God gave man the ability to choose right from wrong, such a freedom also opened the way for Satan to tempt man to see himself separate and apart from God. This is the basis of pride; not in feeling good about one's self, but in seeing one's self as being exalted above others and above God, or without the need for God. Giving man the freedom of choice allowed man the freedom to see himself as a "god." For this we cannot blame God, but simply blame Satan and ourselves for being so foolish to misuse such a sacred trust. It is interesting to note that in the Garden of Eden Satan used all three "angles". Eve saw that the fruit was good for food, (lust of flesh), that it was pleasant to the eyes, (lust of the eyes), and that it was desirable to make one wise, (the pride of life). Satan's temptation had been, "if you eat of it...you will be like God..." (Genesis 3:1-6).

:17 "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." People do not knowingly deposit their life savings in a failing bank! The key to this letter is the word "know." If we know the world (and its ways) is failing and is due to pass away, why invest in it? If we love God we can and we will abide forever.

:18 "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour." John now returns to his basic theme and that is how to know the difference between true Christianity and false Christianity, both in ourselves and in others. Up to this point we have been given spiritual "tests" that focus upon social and moral behavior. Now we are made to look at the doctrines and beliefs of those who claim Christianity.

The term "the Antichrist" is one that has stirred the imaginations of Bible students for generations. John refers to the coming of the Antichrist as a known fact to his 1st century readers. The term "antichrist" (believe it or not) is found only in the epistles of John. The concept of the antichrist, however, is found in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians (2:1-12). Jesus Himself also warned of opposition arising in the form of "false christs" (Matthew 24:24). There is some question as to whether the article "the" should stand before "antichrist" in this text, which would have some bearing upon the meaning. Yet with or without the definite article we can interpret this verse in the following manner; "We have all heard of the idea of there being an (or the) antichrist to come, now I want you to know that there are already many antichrists among us."

It is still necessary, however, to answer the question, "Was there one specific "man" whom the apostles warned of that truly did come to vex the church during the first century, or are we yet to anticipate his coming?" This basic question has been debated for centuries, with each generation producing its "candidates for antichrist" with renewed predictions of "the end of time" thrown in for good measure. Due to such failures of past generations to conclusively identify "the Antichrist," one would be wise to be skeptical of any effort to name him. Rather than being occupied with when or where "**the Antichrist**" may appear, it would be much more beneficial for Christians of each generation to realize that many "antichrists" have already come, and that they will keep on coming until the true Christ returns! This verse clearly states that many antichrists had already come at the time of the writing of this epistle. It is safe to say that antichrists have been upon this earth for 2,000 years. Wherever there is a positive, there is a negative. With the establishment of the church came the establishment of the "false church," complete with "false christs." This we must remember.

This verse also speaks of the "last hour," another favorite subject of speculation. We must be reminded that Jesus Himself said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only (Matthew 24:36)." John is not here giving a method of "fixing" the time of Christ's return. If we were to take John's statement to mean the literal "last hour" before the end of time, then we would have to conclude that John was mistaken. The world has continued on for many "hours" since the first century, thus the "last hour" must be taken figuratively to refer to the "last days" (or the Christian age) in which both we and the first century church lived (see Hebrews 1:2 / Acts 2:17).

"19 "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us." We now have identified some of the many "antichrists" that had already come in the 1st century. It appears that these "anti-christs" had at one time been with the faithful brethren. As to whether they were anything more than Christians in name only, we can clearly say that they were not. John explains that

their "leaving" was evidence that they had never been an actual part of the church in the beginning.

This brings up an interesting question. When one falls away or digresses from the truth, does that indicate that the individual was never truly converted? In this instance John says such to be the case, but we would be mistaken to say that everyone who falls away was never a sincere convert to the cause of Christ. The Lord must often see those who walk away from Christianity due to a lack of inner conversion in the first place, but we must not rule out the possibility of a true Christian falling away and leaving the fellowship (see Galatians 5:4 / James 5:19 / II Peter 2:20). The Bible warns sincere Christians of the dangers of "falling away," and even the apostle Paul spoke of the possibility of he himself being "disqualified" if he did not discipline his own body and bring it into subjection (I Corinthians 9:27). Yes, sincere Christians can fall, and some do. However, the possibility exists that many "Christians" who fall away may have never been fully converted. Often church leaders may find themselves trying to enforce the commands of God onto unrepentant hearts. Those who are not converted to Christ will at some point balk at any suggestion that requires their "will" being nailed to the cross. It is here that we must consider the possibility that the local church of Christ is not always all those listed on the membership role, but that in many congregations the true church is made up of a smaller list of those God sees as being truly of His church. For each generation of the church, time will tell how many (in Paul's words) are truly "of us."

:20 "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things." To those faithful and devoted to the truth, John now places them in clear contrast to those who know not the truth yet claimed to have it all! Those who had left were "anti-Christ," and those who remained faithful had proved themselves to be anointed by the Spirit of Christ. John now encourages those loyal to the truth to take comfort in their "knowing" and their "anointing."

More is said about this subject in verse 27, but it should be clear that John does not see the brethren as having "all knowledge" in general. They knew "all things" that were needed for their souls' salvation; of this we can be certain. Not even the prophets of old could claim "all knowledge" (I Peter 1:10-12). Yet in a sense, those who are Christians in these "last days" (see comments on verse 18) have the special privilege of knowing "all things," both those leading up to the cross, and the establishment of the church through the grace of God.

:21 "I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth." John reassures his readers that the purpose for his letter to them is not due to their ignorance, but in an effort to keep their "ranks" pure, and to assist them in seeing the clear distinction between themselves and those who claim to know so much as Christians. Certainly most Gnostics who might see or read his letter would find no use for it, for by their own definition they already knew it all!

:22 "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son." Here we have it, the primary test to determine those who are in Christ and those who are not. Perhaps we were expecting something more, perhaps a list of 20 questions concerning doctrinal positions on current issues, but John

only gives us one. While we must not overlook the other "tests" and proofs found in this powerful letter, John gives this basic question to those claiming to be Christians. This may remind us of the manner in which Jesus sometimes answered a complicated question with only one simple counter question. Do you believe Jesus to be the Christ? Do you believe Jesus was and is the anointed One? Do you believe Jesus to be the One the world awaited to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah?

:23 "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also." Those who deny the Son by denying Him to be the Christ, must see themselves as also denying the Father. This the Gnostics would not like to hear, for they prided themselves on being in a special relationship with Him. Yet now John informs the brethren that those who reject the Lordship of Jesus are also rejecting God. Beginning with the Pharisees of Jesus' day we can see this error demonstrated even while Jesus was still on earth.

It appears that the expectation of the Messiah (the Christ) was accepted by all levels of Jewish society (Matthew 2:4). Yet when Jesus questioned the Pharisees as to who the "Christ" was, the fact that they were unable to answer clearly exposes a vast doctrinal difference between the actual teachings of Christ, and the Pharisees' view of the "Messiah" prophesied in the Old Testament (Matthew 22:41-46). The concept of "the Christ" was not new to the Jewish nation, but the concept of the Christ being the "Son of God" (that is "God in the flesh") was not a comfortable idea to the average Jew of Jesus' day. It appears that the Jewish people as a whole had misinterpreted the Old Testament prophecies in this key area regarding the true nature of the Messiah, seeing any belief in the divinity of the Messiah as being a rejection of basic doctrine, that is "the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Mark 12: 29). Understanding this difference makes Peter's confession even more significant, for in so saying the fisherman was going far beyond even the scholars of his day in declaring the true nature of the Christ, and identifying Him as Jesus who was among them. Such a confession only a few (if any) at the time would have affirmed publicly and was indeed the rock that the church must be built upon (Matthew 16: 13-18).

It is a testimony to the wisdom of these verses to see how many false teachings and cult religions in existence today are founded on the basis of an "altered Jesus." Some go to great lengths to say that He was everything except the Son of God, and it is exactly upon that point that Christianity either stands or falls.

:24 "Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father." The key word in this verse is "abide." To "abide" means to "remain." This also carries with it the idea of steadfastness and consistency. As Jesus so clearly demonstrated in His parable of the sower, it is not enough to hear the word, understand it, or to even "grow" with it (Luke 8:4-15). It is rather those who keep the word and bear fruit with patience that will have the joy of abiding in the Son and in the Father.

:25 "And this is the promise that He has promised us - eternal life." To those who have the determination to remain in Him, resisting the winds of deception that tempt us to deny the Lordship and Divinity of Jesus, eternal life is the reward as promised. If we find

this promise hard to believe, it may very well be that we have not accepted Jesus as the Christ. Seeing Him as all the Bible shows Him to be eliminates any further difficulties of faith. Our faith truly stands or falls upon our ability to accept the divinity of Christ.

:26 "These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you."

In a very personal note John explains his motivation for what he has written. He has written primarily in response to those who are attempting to deceive or lead astray the faithful. Although we will find the letter as a whole to be very positive and upbeat, one of the basic reasons for it being written was to counteract the deceptions being put forth by those who thought they "knew" both God and Jesus, but in reality knew neither!

:27 "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." Doctrinally this verse poses some difficult challenges to sort out.

First, some interpret this verse to be speaking only to first century Christians who had been blessed with the spiritual gift of inspiration and knowledge, like that of the apostle John himself and other Biblical writers (II Timothy 3:16 / II Peter 1:20-21 / I Corinthians 14:37). It is an unfounded assumption to think that all the brethren to whom John wrote had such gifts. If all of John's readers possessed the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, could not they themselves have received directly these words from God?

We must remember that verses such as Jude :3 And II Peter 1:3 indicate that all that was needed for life and godliness had been delivered, and that God's revelation to man has been completed during the time of the apostles. Hebrews 2:3-4 also speaks of the salvation that was first spoken by the Lord and then confirmed (past tense) by those who heard Him. With these thoughts in mind it does not follow that John, most likely the last apostle alive at this time, would be writing to a large number of Christians who still had the same gift as he did. If such was the case, why did the Bible end with the writings of John, and why did he even need to write to them?

Obviously we have posed some difficult questions, but I find it much more reasonable to interpret this verse in such a way as to speak to Christians of all generations. While it is true that current events prompted the writing of it, the message of this letter is for all time. With this in mind John can be seen as speaking to all Christians who are blessed at the point of baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). To have the gift of the Holy Spirit is to have the blessings of His presence dwelling within us (Romans 8:9-11). This is not to say that Christians "know it all" or ever outgrow the need to be taught. Yet the impact of this verse is that with what God has given us, we do not need those who do not submit to His word and who do not have His Spirit abiding in them to teach us! True Christians have available to them the means to determine what is true and what is false. This is ours through His inspired Word, and through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

:28 "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." "Abiding" in Him is again emphasized.

Then, as well as now, the frustration of seeing souls "coming and going" is ever present for those who truly seek to enlarge the borders of God's kingdom.

Inconsistency is one of the greatest enemies of the church. Just as one family member begins to take interest in Christianity, another may grow lax and thus pull the other back into apathy. Just as the church is ready to break into new territory, one or two families may grow discontent and withdraw their support of the church. John seeks to educate the brethren so that they need never experience such defeat.

If we look ahead we must see that those who do not abide (remain, stay faithful) in Him will someday face the unbearable shame at His coming of saying, "Yes, I knew You, but I willingly and knowingly turned away from you for the passing pleasures of this world." Remember the man who appeared at the wedding feast without a wedding garment? When questioned He found himself speechless, with no excuse as to his failure to prepare for the feast. The command to "bind him hand and foot" and to "cast him into outer darkness" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" gives us just a hint of the terrors and the terrible loss facing those who fail to abide in His love.

:29 "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." A basic fact of society is that a child demonstrates some of the characteristics of his parents. Seeing that the Father is righteous (that is "righteousness" is His nature) we can conclude that those who are actually His "offsprings" will behave in a righteous manner, resembling the Father to whom they are born. In this way John teaches that man's "righteousness" is not that which causes the new birth, but rather "righteousness" is the direct result of the new birth (see Titus 3:5 / Ephesians 2:8-10 / Romans 10:1-4). Certainly God's word teaches the conditions of response we must obey in order to enjoy the blessings of salvation, but if thereafter the practice of righteousness is absent from one's life, the need to re-evaluate one's conversion is needed. One who is truly born of God will *practice* righteousness, and not simply know righteousness in theory only.

Chapter 3

:1 "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." John victoriously asserts the love of the Father toward all those who have the privilege of being called children of God. The devotional quality of this verse gives us a little insight past the very "blunt and business-like" tone of much of John's writing thus far in the epistle. John here allows us to see the joy within his heart due to being a part of the special few who knew the love of God. His knowledge of God's love put him, as well as Christians today, in a special minority group that is not understood by the world. Little wonder, however, for the world did not know our Lord either. Jesus in His earthly ministry had spoken concerning this, and the record of His words has prepared Christians through the ages for the harsh reality of this fact (John 15:18-19).

:2 "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." John's admission of not knowing "what we shall be" sheds light on the fact that even as an apostle and inspired writer of God's word, he too had questions to which God had not revealed the answers (see comments on I John 2:27). Even God's inspired apostles were not all knowing! There were and are many facts that God has not

seen necessary for man to know or to speak about (Deuteronomy 29:29 / II Corinthians 12:1-4 / I Corinthians 13:8 / Revelation 10:4). It appears that John is here stating that he is somewhat "in the dark" as to the exact nature or form of man in our eternal home with God. Remembering that one of the major themes of this book is determining those things we can "know," John now tells us that there is one thing he doesn't know the details of, yet he continues by reaffirming those facts that had been revealed. First, when Jesus is revealed, we will be like Him, and we shall see Him as He is. This is a clear and definite fact. Although God may not have given John the words to describe "what we shall be," the important thing is that we shall be like our Lord in the hereafter, and that we shall have the unthinkable privilege of seeing Him as He is!

Can we conclude that John was unaware of revelations previously received by Paul and other Biblical writers? We should not jump to such a conclusion. Although Paul does indeed speak at length in I Corinthians 15 concerning the "change" that will take place at the resurrection, note that even then Paul does not attempt to describe the "form" of that incorruptible body that faithful Christians shall inherit at the last trumpet. The Bible teaches that we shall become immortal, incorruptible, in His likeness and image, fit for eternal life. John simply refuses to speculate and to go beyond what God has revealed to man.

:3 "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

Having confidence in our future condition produces "hope" in the fullest sense of the word. In Hebrews 10:23 we find "hope" to be associated with the One who's promise is faithful. "Hope," in the Bible, is the opposite of "wavering." In the modern usage of the word, "hope" often means an idle, even unfounded wish. Such a definition is far from the meaning of "hope" as found in this verse. John is saying that those who have confident hope while being "in Him" (Christ) will purify themselves to be in the likeness of His purity. This verse is a parallel verse to I John 2:29. Our right relationship to Christ will produce behavior that is in keeping with Jesus. Hope in Him is a strong motivation for moral purity.

Many (both past and present) have attempted to use fear to produce purity. Others have attempted to use self-inflicted suffering and deprivation to produce purity. Needless fear and suffering do not, however, produce purity (I John 4:18). The human spirit practices righteousness and finds purity when in a right relationship with our Creator. Being in that right relationship with God gives us hope, and all the motivation we need to continue to be pure. Accepting Jesus as Lord of our lives begins a cycle that can only lead upward if we continue to abide in Him by faith. If we attempt, however, to be pure without Him, or to find hope outside of Jesus, we will someday see the uselessness of such efforts (Philippians 2:9-11 / Hebrews 11:6 / Matthew 7:22-23 / I Corinthians 1:30-31). May our study of this letter help us see the uselessness of trying to find purity outside of Jesus!

One more comment needs to be made concerning this verse. The expression "purifies himself" may imply to some that the purification of our souls is something we accomplish on our own, by our own strength. This is as mistaken as reading a verse such as "work out your own salvation" (Philippians 2:12) and concluding that one can actually develop his own plan of salvation! We need only to read the following verse, Philippians 2:13, to have a better understanding of both passages. "For it is God who works in you

both to will and to do for His good pleasure." Truly all purification that takes place at the point of conversion and following thereafter is accomplished in us by the power of God. Certainly we must desire this, and work toward that goal, but it is God who made it possible. Based upon the sacrifice of His Son, it is God who *continues* to make our salvation possible through the gift of His Spirit that dwells within the saved.

:4 "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." Verses 4 - 9 serve to bring into focus a clear contrast between those who practice righteousness, and those who are born of Him. This letter is a study in contrasts. By shining light through the negative we can better see the positive.

We begin by looking at the phrase "whoever commits sin." The attentive reader will immediately be alarmed at the wording of these verses. Even the most diligent Christian might begin to wonder, "Am I good enough?" "Even my best efforts fall short of the glory of God." Referring to other translations besides the King James is helpful in this study. Rather than "committeth" sin, the NASV has it as "every one who practices sin." This is the same Greek word in question that is also found in I John 2:29 and is translated; "Every one who doeth (practices) righteousness is born of Him." The point of I John 2:29 is that it is not he who does an occasional "good deed" that is born of God, and likewise it is not he who occasionally sins who is lawless by nature. It is rather the continual practice of sin that is in view here, and such people (both then and now) must not deceive themselves into thinking that they could still be born of God. This section is really a continuation of the same theme as found in I John 1:5-10.

In this verse we also learn that sin is not just "missing the mark" (from the Greek word "harmatria") but that it is also an active decision to rebel against the holy will of God. Thus sin is lawlessness.

:5 "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin." If one thinks he can continue practicing sin (lawlessness) and still remain in Christ, he has missed the entire purpose of Jesus being manifested to mankind. The Son of God was made flesh and visible to mankind in order to give us a living example of a sin-free life, and He went to the cross to impart His sinlessness to mankind. To those who accept His Gift of pardon and forgiveness of sins made available through His blood, we too can be sin-free! All sin has been forgiven as we are raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-7).

:6 "Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him." John again drives home his point. Abiding, (staying) in Christ means staying out and away from sin. Need the point be made again that the sin in view here is persistent, habitual and unrepentant in nature? It may appear at this point that we are going to great lengths to avoid the clear teaching of this passage, yet we must interpret this passage of scripture to be in keeping with all other scripture. If we interpret this verse to mean that Christians simply do not sin at all, we would be faced with a contradiction within the epistle itself. In I John 1:5-10 it is to those who walk in the light that John encourages to confess their sins, and to not fall into the self-deception of saying they have no sin. We must not make this same mistake in our interpretation of this verse.

:7 "Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous." Jesus once said, "by their fruits you shall know them (Matthew 7:16)." To take the thought of that verse a bit further, could one also say "by my works I shall know me!" I can claim righteousness with such conviction that many may be convinced, but the actual practice of righteousness is the true test of its presence.

The equally wrong and opposite deception is to think that even though we are practicing righteousness, somehow we are not in Him. John writes these words to comfort those loyal to Christ, who were being made to doubt by the Gnostics who attempted to make others believe that being "in the know" as a Christian involved an additional "initiation," rather than simple obedience to His word.

:8 "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." The practice of sin in one's life reflects an unseen force at work. Jesus said "he who is not with Me is against Me (Matthew 12:30)." We learn from Genesis that the devil indeed was present and clearly the instigator of the first sin. We also learn from the gospel of John 8:44 that Satan is a substitute "father" to those who are not of God. Being able to see the entire spiritual conflict that exists between God and Satan can help man avoid being used as a mindless pawn in Satan's quest for power over God's creation. Jesus was manifested (see Philippians 2:1-11) for the purpose of "undoing" the wall of hate that Satan has been busily enlarging since the beginning.

:9 "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." There we have it, clearly the most all-encompassing declaration on the subject of sin that we will find in this epistle. John has been building up to this statement, and based on what we have studied thus far it is only logical to come to this conclusion.

To better understand this verse we must first see that the subject of this sentence is "those who have been born of God." Those who do not believe in Him, and even those who have "faith without works" (James 2:14-26) are not under consideration here. To be born of God involves both "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5 / Titus 3:5) which was exactly Peter's response to those who asked "what shall we do" in Acts 2:38.

Secondly, once we know who is being spoken of, we can better understand what is being said about them. Those who are born of God do not sin. It has already been discussed concerning the need to interpret these verses in light of what has already been found in I John 1:5-10 (see comments on I John 3:6). Therefore we must conclude that John is not speaking of an isolated act of sin, but rather the consistent practice of sin. Those who are learned in the Greek language add extra weight to this interpretation, for it is in the Greek language that this distinction is more clearly made than it is in English. The phrase "does not sin" is a *present infinitive* which denotes continued action in the Greek. Had it been in the *aorist infinitive* it would have conveyed a singular act. The difference is that Christians do not sin continuously, consistently, and as a way of life. However this verse is not saying that Christians do not sin at some point in time.

May it never be said, however, that these points are intended to excuse the "occasional" or "isolated" act of sin. These comments are offered to explain and to give

hope to the dedicated Christian who, try as he might, still finds his life falling short of the glory of God. Does sin still bother your conscience? This is good, for it is a sign that sin has not won your heart and your disposition over to a life of sin. Just don't be deceived by Satan into believing that since you still are capable of committing a sin, that you are therefore a sinner lost in sin, and that you can no longer be called a child of God.

In ministering to God's people, one will find this accusation to be one of Satan's most effective weapons against the church. If Satan can demoralize us with self-doubt following our failure to live up to the perfect example of Christ, he has succeeded in his main objective, and that is to take our eyes off of our Savior, and onto ourselves. Faith is our trust in Christ, not our trust in ourselves. If our faith in our Savior's ability to save us and to keep us saved can be shaken, Satan can often successfully "kidnap" a child of God. What began as discouragement then becomes unfaithfulness, which leads to death (see comments on 5:16-17). Christians "fall away" not because they have sinned, but because they refuse to seek God's help and forgiveness, or in most cases no longer believe the Lord capable of forgiving or themselves fit for forgiveness.

:10 "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." We should see this verse as a summary of previous thoughts (see I John 2:11, 29). John's method is to sum up, to put together into a "package" the basic points made thus far, and then to add to them a further ramification of those principles.

It is this simple; in order to determine whose child one is, we need only to look at what is and is not practiced in their lives. Children of the devil do not consistently practice righteousness, and they usually do not display unconditional brotherly love on a regular basis in their lives.

:11 "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another," Although the point could be made that it has been God's desire from the very beginning that man love one another, the phrase "from the beginning" could also here refer to the beginning point of the readers' faith. As Christians we have heard from the beginning that we are to love others. Such is not a recent "revelation."

:12 "not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous." We now go back in time to very nearly the beginning for a case in point. The failure of Cain to show brotherly love to his only brother, and for that matter the only other human being on earth other than his parents, is an extreme example of man's failure to love. We just can't imagine what brought him to do it. But upon reflection it should not be so difficult to see. These verses are putting together the puzzle. This original murder was motivated by jealousy. His motive was jealousy of his brother whose works were righteous and acceptable to God, while his were neither. Cain, by his actions, revealed who his "father" was, both with his displeasing offering to God, and by his demonstration of brotherly hate that ended in murder. Cain is clearly exhibit "A" for Christians to observe how *not* to live.

:13 "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you." Referring back to I John 3:1, we are reminded that the world does not understand Christians, and that the world may even turn to hating those who call Jesus "Lord." We are here not told to enjoy being hated, but to simply accept it as a fact. Christians should not be so naive as to be surprised when the world hates those who are not of the world. However, we should not become pessimistic about the "teach-ability" of those who are lost, or calloused to the world's need to hear the gospel. Rather we should accept the fact that the world as a whole will not like Christians. Christians do not have to provoke this response, or even try to bring it about. The odd thing is that those who hate God will at times hate us even more when we do good to them (Romans 12:20). We continue to do so not to produce this hate, but because it is the nature of those who follow the example of Christ (Matthew 7:12 / Matthew 5:10-12). Darkness does not understand light unless light is allowed to enter into it. This fact is intrinsic to the nature of man.

:14 "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death." What Christian does not need reassurance? Even the most dedicated Christians we know, still need comforting concerning their salvation. Our need for reassurance stems directly from the nature of our enemy, whose very name (devil) means "slanderer." To those who are walking in the light, a few indicators can help them to see where they stand. If we love our fellow man we have crossed over the bridge between life and death. Continuing to hate our fellow man, regardless of whatever "religious" acts we have done, means we still remain in "death." It is not possible to see "life" through eyes of perpetual "hate."

:15 "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Now in surprisingly intense words, those who "hate" are connected to murder. Often a murder mystery novel will attempt to show those who have motive, and perhaps even those who hated the victim. However, it is only he who pulled the trigger that is found guilty. Here such is not the case. One need not plan, prepare, and carry out an actual murder to be a "murderer"! Simply hate your brother, and in God's sight you are no different from those who carry out the act (see Matthew 5:21-22). May it be said that this passage also redefines one's definition of the word "hate." To be angry or upset with someone's actions, or to wish to avoid contact with an individual, does not necessarily denote "hate." Could "hate" be best defined as wishing the worst upon an individual, hoping and planning evil against him even if repentance should take place?

Although it may be difficult to put into words the definition of "hate," for those who do hate there is full awareness of its presence, for to hate is to drive out all else. When one's ability to love becomes an impossibility, eternal life cannot abide in that same heart until radical changes are made.

:16 "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." We may have (at some time) heard someone say, "I don't know what love is." Too often we are looking for extreme visible emotional displays on which to hang our definition of "love." John explains that love can be seen and identified through the quiet actions of our Lord in His laying down His life for us.

With this example of sacrifice before us we are prompted in turn to lay down our lives for our brethren.

The expression "lay down our lives," when applied to what Jesus did for us, brings us to the foot of the cross. However that is not always the necessary outcome of our laying down our lives. To be sure many disciples of Christ in the early days of the church did face a literal cross or other form of torture and death, yet we may "lay down our lives" for our brethren while living to a ripe old age! The meaning of this expression is "to divest oneself" of our claims to ownership of our lives (John 13:4). In life Jesus "laid down His life" as well as in death. In the same fashion we who are yet living may daily lay down our lives for the cause of Christ.

:17 "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" Though we may not see ourselves as having great possessions, all (in varying degrees) have this world's goods. Certainly one who has much can share a greater quantity of goods than the one who has little. Yet the item of concern in this verse is not the quantity of goods given, but rather the motivation behind the giving.

The expression "shuts up his heart" (NKJV) reveals the real problem. This phrase essentially conveys the concept of a human being "shutting himself off" to the needs of others. The original Greek literally reads "shuts the bowels." The Greek language saw the bowels as the seat of compassion and pity. This may seem strange to us, but in order to translate this phrase into modern English idiom, we prefer to speak of another internal organ, the heart! Whatever term (or internal organs) you may employ to describe compassion, this verse asks the question; "How can the love of God be in the same heart that shuts itself off to his fellow man?" The answer, of course, is that such conflicting conditions cannot exist in the same heart. To truly love God is to truly love your brother.

:18 "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." At this point John's epistle begins to sound much like the words of James (James 2:14-26). Such thoughts as these truly separate John's letter from those of his day who preferred a "theoretical" Christianity to the real thing. Are not "words" and the proper use of the "tongue" important? Of course they are, but the tongue uttering the proper words is of little value when not accompanied by the deeds those words describe.

:19 "And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." John's method is now made clearer. It is his purpose to distinguish between true Christians and those who deceive. Once this distinction is made, warnings are given to those "outside," and assurance is given to those "inside." John sees assurance for the Christian as a high priority. If we are loving both in word and in deeds, our hearts should be assured before God. The trouble is, many are not. Only God knows how many souls truly love the Lord and their brethren, yet due to a lack of faith in the saving grace of God, find themselves having little or no assurance before Him. For some (perhaps many) a lack of love is not the problem, it is a lack of faith, and perhaps a lack of proper teaching concerning the forgiveness brought and bought by the blood of Jesus.

:20 "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." The NASV and the NIV versions connect verses 19-20 into one sentence or thought, thus making these verses easier to read and understand. The overall thought is this; knowing that we love both in word and in deed should be our reassurance that practicing Christians are right with God. Such reassurance is greatly needed, especially when our hearts **condemn** us, for God is greater than our hearts! Did John lose us here? Surely we understand this thought. The human "heart" of feelings, emotions, concerns, and compassions, can be used both *for us and against us*. Our feelings can put us to work or to shame. It is good to have a heart that is conscience of our sins, but it is counterproductive to have a self-condemning heart where God has forgiven!

:21 "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God." Just as we thought we had verse 20 figured out, we are hit with this one! Should our hearts be listened to or not? Perhaps we can summarize this entire "heart" discussion in one paragraph.

The human "heart" is only as reliable as its source. A heart that is in keeping with its Creator, will love both his Creator and his brethren (I John 3:16-17). A heart that is deceived by the Deceiver will speak of love, but seldom to the point of carrying it out (I John 3:18). A heart that condemns one who is saying and doing what is right should not be listened to (I John 3:20), and the heart in touch with God will not condemn a practicing Christian (I John 3:21). Reflecting upon these verses we may conclude that the goal of a Christian is to not only bring both words and deeds into submission to God, but also our "hearts" must be brought under His control, that our feelings may be in touch with reality, neither accusing the godly nor excusing the ungodly.

:22 "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." Our first impulse in responding to this verse is to quickly explain what all it *doesn't* mean. Let's resist this first impulse and comment upon what it does say.

For those who are obedient to His commandments, prayers are answered! Notice that the statement is "whatever we ask we receive." The full implications of this verse are staggering. No limits should be applied to prayers of faith! God's wealth of goodness is waiting to be bestowed upon those who obey. May it be said, however, that God's gifts are not bestowed as payment for our obedience, but rather obedience makes it possible for His gifts to be received. "Obedience" is the condition, not the cause of God's blessings. Indeed, the greatest blessing of all, His Son, was given to man before any had even the opportunity or reason to obey the cross. Our accepting the good news in humble obedience does not earn His forgiveness, but simply brings man into the spiritual position of enjoying the benefits of His forgiveness and salvation.

:23 "And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment." Perhaps a slight caution should be observed here. In several instances in this epistle (I John 5:1 / 4:2) John seems to be saying, "Here it all is in a nutshell," yet what he says is clearly not everything we need to know about Christianity. Such is the case in this verse. John is not saying that believing on Jesus and loving one another is all that there is to being a

Christian, any more than Peter was saying (in Acts 2:38) that repenting and being baptized was all that is involved in being saved. Yet John *is* saying that this *is clearly the essence* of the Lord's commandment, that we should believe on His name and love one another. It should also be said that to truly practice and to have both of these commandments internalized in one's "head and heart" is the only basis upon which a productive Christian life can be built.

:24 "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." May John never be accused of making "obedience" of no importance. While it is true that this letter emphasizes the importance of love and "knowing," the practical application of both love and knowledge is obedience. Those who keep the commandments of the Lord are those who stay in a loving relationship with Him.

This is only one out of twelve times the word "abide" is used in this short letter. Abiding in Him (2:24), in the Light (2:10), abiding forever (2:17), is the opposite condition of those who abide in death (3:14) and who do not have eternal life abiding in them (3:15). The further we read the more apparent it becomes that John is pressing the point of our abiding in Jesus. Note that the obedient are promised that Jesus will be in him, while the reverse will also be true, the obedient Christian will also be in Christ. Both statements, while opposites in form, can be true only when there is total harmony. In the physical realm such could only be said about two substances that could actually mix or blend together. Keep in mind however that we are speaking of the spiritual realm. In the spiritual realm the laws of physics no longer apply! As Christians He is in us, while we are in Him.

Returning to a previous theme, however, we must ask; "How can we know this "joining" has taken place?" In answer to that expected question John offers this concrete evidence. To each Christian is given the Spirit of God. The Christian's awareness of the Spirit of God dwelling within in him is proof positive that Christ dwells within us.

Unfortunately it is here we may find ourselves on the "ragged edge" of church theology, for concepts and understandings of the Holy Spirit vary from one congregation to the next. It is doubtful that even two members of the Lord's church could be found who could agree across the board on every matter concerning the workings of the Holy Spirit. This has probably come about due to several reasons.

1. Man has a tendency to try to put spiritual matters into earthly "packages." The Holy Spirit cannot be summarized or "packaged" into easily managed human terms.

2. Untaught and ungodly people love to claim *the power of God* and see the Holy Spirit as an "it" to be used for their worldly benefit (see Acts 8:19).

3. Others (with good intentions) have overreacted to such excesses and claims and have avoided the subject of the Holy Spirit altogether. This is (in part) motivated by a fear of endorsing a personal, subjective, approach to Christianity that has led to subjectivism in the denomination world.

4. Even the most knowledgeable Christian must accept that there is a limit to our ability to comprehend the Holy Spirit, for what human mind can fully grasp the power of God? Because of the breadth of this topic, many individuals seem to focus only on certain aspects of the Holy Spirit, rather than striving to see the overall picture.

Perhaps one of the above reasons has hampered your attempts to understand what God would want you to know about the Holy Spirit's work in your life. Seeing the "snag" may now help you in your further growth.

At any rate, John's point is that the Spirit of Christ within us is the proof we need to know that Christ remains in us. To some this "proof" may seem to be no proof at all! There are large numbers of religious people who seek physical manifestations of miracles and power to "prove" to them that the Spirit is operating in their lives. It is clear that some major confusion exists on this point. To a true Christian, proofs of the Spirit are not needed. The Spirit Himself is the proof. Let's put it this way, if the Spirit of God must "show" Himself in our lives by some outward exhibition of power over nature, then such a conversion to Christ must be brought into question. What is our faith if it must be backed up by physical "proofs"? Is faith not our ability to trust in Him whom we cannot see? Indeed, the Spirit has and will work wonderful works in our lives, but it is by faith we know that He is there, providing we are standing where He is standing!

Chapter 4

:1 "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Although John has just spoken of the confidence we can have by the indwelling of the Spirit of God, he now warns of other "spirits" that originate from another source. It would seem that the confidence one gains in the previous verse is now erased by the warnings of this one. Such should not be the case. John simply states that there are other spirits at work, and that although Christians have the Spirit of Christ within, there will be those who will attempt to confuse the issue. It has been said that a "prophet of God is the mouthpiece of His Spirit." Likewise, false prophets, both then and now, are spokesmen in the service of Satan. A simple "litmus test" is now proposed that such false prophets can be seen for what they are.

:2 "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God," The test spoken of in verse 1 is now given. It is surprisingly simple, however we must not dismiss it. Those who simply state their belief in Christ being the Son of God may not have passed the "test." We can think of several Biblical events in which demons said as much (Mark 1:24 / Acts 19:15). The serious Bible student could not conclude that these demons had the Spirit of God when they spoke such statements of belief (James 2:19 / Mark 3:20-30). John is not by any means indicating that simply words and "lip service" offered by an individual will determine whether or not he has the Spirit of God. The key to understanding and applying John's test is to understand that those who are of the Spirit of God are those who confess as a way of life and not just a combination of words. We are not so naive as to think that Satan is incapable of lying, or saying something he does not believe. Several popular religious cults in existence today actually practice such deception. If a lie is necessary to convert one to their creed, some religious groups are willing to cross that line. Those who have been active in teaching God's Word may have witnessed such unholy deception.

This being the case, however, how useful is this test John has given us? John would say, "Much in every way!" We may apply this test, but we must apply it

completely. In so doing we must see to it that all that we say confesses that Jesus is of God, that He is the Son of God, that He is Deity. In addition, one must believe that Jesus did truly come to earth in human history and in human flesh and form. Upon investigation one may be surprised to find how many religions today deny one or both of these principles in their basic creeds.

:3 "and every spirit that does not confirm that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world." Need it be said that the negative response to this "test" also speaks the reverse? John now informs the reader that those who do not pass the "test" can clearly be identified with the spirit of the Antichrist (I John 2:18-23). Undoubtedly many discussions concerning the Antichrist have complicated the subject unnecessarily. The Antichrist clearly "lives down" to his name. He is "anti" or opposed to Christ. He is that adversary (Satan) that has plagued man from the beginning. In addition, he has many friends in low places. He speaks now through the voice of his followers who are false prophets. They are the many antichrists motivated and directed by *the Antichrist*. These we must be able to identify and sort out from those who are our brethren.

:4 "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." To "overcome" is a concept we long to achieve in our lives. As children of God it is ours to overcome those who have the spirit of the Antichrist, by identifying him and rejecting both his fellowship and his message. Could it not also be said that by the power of the Spirit of God, we can overcome the spirit of the Antichrist in his efforts to influence our lives, and the lives of others to whom we may teach the truth? This is made possible due to one basic principle of the universe. Simply put, God is greater!

Perhaps this point is so basic to our faith that we take it for granted. Have you ever stopped to think what good our faith would be if it were not for this truth? What if the power of God was inferior to the power of Satan? Would there be any comfort in Him? Any hope? Any peace? Indeed such is the case for those who's "god" is Satan, for in the end both he and they will be overcome by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. This verse is worthy to be memorized and branded into our thoughts. "Greater is He that is in you, than he who is in the world." Remember, however, only Christians can say this!

:5 "They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them." As John writes by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it all becomes crystal-clear. The Christian's relationship to the world is a matter of "us and them." Although the Spirit of God that resides within Christians is greater than the "power" of this world, those who are of this world will find an eager audience within this world.

The world loves to listen to its own. What parent does not hear his child above all others in the play? In the same way the world hears its "children" and for the most part tunes out the voices of God's children. It should be no surprise, therefore, when a humanist or atheist speaks on any given subject, that he will find a greater audience, for there are far more of the world who are passing through that broad gate that leads to

destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). May we never, however, mistake numbers for power. In the end, the devil, his angels and his followers, will be cast into the lake of fire. Those who have remained faithful to God will enter into his rest (Matthew 25:31-46 / Revelation 20:10 / Hebrews 4:1-10).

:6 "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." This verse simply sums up the equal but contrasting truth to that which was said in verse 5. If one is of God, then anyone else that is of God will hear (listen) to what he has to say. There will be a "meeting" of the minds.

Before we get carried away in the application of this thought, however, we must recognize the value of one's honest relationship with his Lord. One may be tempted to say, "I am of God and if you do not listen to me you are not of God." May it be said that one's application of the Lord's commands must be first and foremost applied to himself, before he may expect others to listen to his proclamation of those commands. Having the objective truth of God's written word before us provides all with a method of checking those who claim to be of Him. This is understood. Yet here the thought is simply that those who are of Him will find a ready audience among those who are also of Him. If, in all sincerity and honesty, a child of God finds others who will not even begin to listen, the need for conversion is evident. This is true even though "good works" and "baptismal certificates" can be produced!

:7 "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Love has been one of the several dominant themes in John's letter, but with this verse we enter into one of the most concentrated sections of the epistle concerning love. The "case" for the urgency and importance of love is now presented.

The basic motivation for man to love one another is that love finds its source in God. God is where love has come from, in fact God is where all love began! Once we understand this fact we will better understand that no matter what we think or think we know, that love is the ultimate proof that we are born of God.

While it is true that man without God may find many humanistic and social reasons to love, love can trace its "birth" back to God. May we go so far as to say that Godless "love" is a counterfeit love that mimics the acts and appearance of love, and can even produce some of the "good" that is associated with true love. Examples of this are numerous, and those that do not read and learn from God's word are often deceived by the token "love offerings" the devil allows his children to have and to give. When a large number of popular singing stars gathered years ago to sing "We Are The World," their efforts were hailed as an act of love. When Hollywood turned out in mass to volunteer their time to raise money for the victims of 9/11 the media saw it as the ultimate demonstration of true love. Yet, in reality, many of these entertainers may have seen this as a minor sacrifice to further their careers, as they in their personal lives endorse atheism, homosexuality, social drug use, and abortion-on-demand. Love must be "tied" to God for it to produce one who is born of Him and knows Him!

:8 "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." One thing is for certain, that if one does not love, he does not know God. While it is true that many may mimic the acts of love without knowing God at all, one who does know God will demonstrate love! If acts of love and evidence of love are absent from one's life, no other credentials are valid in proving him to be a Christian. Non-Christians may appear to be Christians by their acts of "love," but "Christians" who appear to live and act as unloving people are unquestionably Christians in name only, for the source of love has not taken root in their hearts.

:9 "In this the love of God was manifested toward us. That God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." Although it was not man's first glimpse of love, when God sent His Son into the world it was clearly the ultimate display of love in the history of man. It may be said that man had been seeing God's love from the very beginning. From creation itself God was manifesting His love for mankind. Beyond that we find God's love for man demonstrated repeatedly in the pages of the Old Testament as He forgives and blesses both sinful men and a repentant sinful nation.

Yet at no time in history has God more clearly shown His love for man than in sending His Son into the world for our benefit. If we've missed every other clue since taking a breath this morning, may this one be clear enough and loud enough to get our attention! GOD SENT HIS SON INTO THIS CRUEL WORLD BECAUSE HE LOVES US!!! To send your son is to send a part of you, the part of you that you would die to defend and do anything to preserve. Yet the extent of His love for us drove Our Lord to do that which no father on earth wants to even think about doing. Referring to Jesus as "His Son" may help us to begin to grasp the extent of His sacrifice, yet I am convinced that nothing I have given in my life could come close in comparison to the spiritual cost of Christ coming to this world of sin.

:10 "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." A basic understanding of love must be gathered by taking a close look at God, rather than man. Just as the moon produces no light of its own, but merely reflects the light of the sun, in the same way love is first seen coming from Christ, and is then reflected by man. A study of the moon would produce no information on how "its" light is produced, one must go to the source.

Again John emphasizes God sending His Son as the example of love. This is the second time in his letter than John refers to Christ being the "propitiation" for our sins. Previously in this study we have defined "propitiation" as "that which is offered to God as payment for sin" (see comments on I John 2:2). Although the cross of Christ is not mentioned specifically in this verse, it is clearly understood that it was the manner in which Jesus left this world that stands as a permanent monument to mankind on the subject of love. In this the cross served two purposes, both to redeem man by providing that "propitiation" for our sins, and to stand as the ultimate example of sacrificial love.

:11 "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." It is both God's hope and John's intent that the reader of this verse learns to *reflect* a bit of that love that shone so brightly from the cross. The use of the word "ought" appeals to our sense of

right and wrong. It is only "right" that in light of what God has done for us and the love that He has shone in doing it, that we should begin to be like Him. Acts of love should not have to be coaxed out of us, but rather flow freely from man. Here John emphasizes the need for love for one another.

This appeal, however, will find no response among those who will not read, or those who will not be moved by these words of God's love. It is that sense of "ought" within the reader that must be touched to the extent that we in turn begin to display the love of God, alive and well, and ready for the 21st century!

:12 "No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us." With this verse Bible critics may find what they see as a contradiction. Does not the Old Testament speak of several occasions in which God was actually "seen" by man (Genesis 32:30 / Exodus 33:11-23 / Judges 6:22)? Yet we find in both the Old and New Testaments statements that "no man has seen God." Rather than a contradiction, may we understand that what was "seen" by men of old was God either in human form, or in some visualization that man could recognize as a living being. What they saw was not God as He is, for this very letter informs us "God is Spirit." Can human eyes, (built and designed to see the physical realm), actually focus upon that which is spirit, unless God were to miraculously turn that which is spirit into a physical manifestation (Exodus 33:20 / John 1:18 / John 4:24 / I Timothy 1:17 / I Timothy 6:16)?

Our main point, however, is that although we have not seen God with our eyes, we have "experienced" Him and His presence when true love flows from the Christian heart. Being at peace with the practice of loving your brother is the "visual" result of God abiding in the human heart. This is, in effect, the process of His love being "perfected" or "matured."

:13 "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." Confidence is given to the Christian by the giving of the Holy Spirit. May the reader understand that Christianity is not just a "feeling" or a subjective experience, yet John is stating that for those who are Christians, the assurance of their relationship with Him is found in His Spirit, who dwells within God's children.

:14 "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world." Although no one has seen God at any time, the truth remains that John (and many others) had seen the Christ, and that the Christ did indeed come into the world to save it! John claims witness to that fact, and through his testimony we believe. May we be reminded, however, that even the Christ came in the "form of a servant" (Philippians 2:5-11) and that what His disciples "saw" was His personality, teachings, and love. His physical appearance was of no significance.

:15 "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." Having already stated this basic thought in verse 2, John repeats to emphasize the value and "place" of confession. Confession is the reply of the believing heart to the redemptive work of God. God *sent* Jesus to be the Savior of the world, and man

confesses Jesus to be his Savior. Such a harmonious connection is proof of a relationship destined to be eternal. God in man, man in God!

:16 "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." John includes both himself and all others who have both known and believed the love that God has shown us. It is one thing to "know" God's love, or to speak of His having love for us. It is yet another matter to "believe" His love to the point of being affected by it!

The husband that "knows" his wife's love, yet has trouble "believing" it, may find himself never trusting her alone, nor ever truly accepting her love for him as being "for real." The Simple English Bible puts it this way; "We know the love that God has for us, and we trust that love." Christians have both the "knowledge" and the confident "trust" in God's love that removes doubt and suspicion, emptiness and fear. When "two become one," there's no longer room for items that "singles" carry with them.

God is love. Can we even begin to fully conceive of the magnitude of this statement? God does not just *feel* love, nor does He just *enjoy* love. God does not simply *favor* love over hate, nor does He simply *show* love when He so desires. The text is informing us that God *is* love. Love is the basis of His nature, it is His essence. Love is the "substance" that makes up His being. To attempt to speak of God wholly outside the context of love is to attempt to do that which is intrinsically impossible. "Religion" that is born of hate or even has elements of hate is not of God. Abiding in God, and God abiding in man, displaces the existence of hate within the heart of mankind.

:17 "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." As the individual grows in his relationship with God, he grows in his ability to both give and receive love. As this process of giving and receiving love develops it becomes "perfected." This is not to say that anyone has reached the point of flawless love, but as we learn at the feet of He who is love, we begin to see love perfected (matured) among us.

Boldness in Christ is born of such maturity. Those who cannot see themselves as recipients of God's love find it difficult to truly give love, for they are living in fear. Boldness and confidence in Jesus comes only when one has begun to allow God's love to "flow" in his life. Having such boldness will prepare us for the judgment, for on that day Christians will at last see the "family resemblance" between God's children and the Father.

:18 "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." In this verse we find a principle that has been ignored by many, and misused by many others. In years past the popular concept of preaching was to paint God primarily as fearsome and angry, a God to be greatly feared and held in great reverence. Today the opposite extreme now seems to hold sway, and that is to see God primarily as simply loving and forgiving. It may sound like a contradiction to say that both views together actually "paint" a more complete picture of what God is.

Since John is emphasizing the love of God, we must start there. Since God is love, those who love Him in return need to get over their fear (Greek "phobos" Strongs

#5401) of Him. Such fear does not draw one near to God, but actually drives him away! Here John contrasts fear and love, and finds them to be opposites. Love "draws" while fear "drives" away. We also find the two to be mutually exclusive. Fear does not exist where love is, for the love casts it out. Fear is concerned with torment and punishment, while those who love God no longer see Him as their executioner, but rather as their God and author of salvation.

Yet in many other passages (both in the Old and New Testaments) we are commanded to fear God (I Peter 2:17 / Ephesians 5:21). A quick look at the concordance will reveal that in some of these passages the same Greek word is used as is found here in I John. Thus it is not the word that is different, but simply the context and the application of it.

May it be said that within each Christian heart still dwells the ability to reverence God and to respect His might, even though we have found comfort within His love and forgiveness. Through our love for God we approach Him whose might would have otherwise driven us away. This certainly explains why many go to any lengths to avoid Him, for in God they see only torment.

Perhaps it is an over generalization, but in the past it seems that many Christians chose to see God from the perspective of the lost, while today the lost often view Him as only the saved should see Him. Neither extreme is correct, nor will either produce God's will among mankind.

Can we love God and fear Him at the same time? It is not evasive to answer that question with both a "yes" and a "no." Yes, Christians can love God and all the while still reverence Him for who He is. We can also answer in the affirmative by never forgetting what it would be like to fall into the hands of an angry God if we were to rebel against Him. But as to our answer being "no," he who has been forgiven and who knows the love of God does not "live in fear" of God. Perfect love pushes that type of fear out of the way, that he who has been saved may be free to function without such a burden.

As an illustration, let us consider mans' view of police officers. For those who see traffic laws as their "enemy," and are constantly in violation of them, just the sight of a patrol car is sure to produce terror and fear. Simply the appearance of flashing lights in the rearview mirror may result in a high-speed attempt to flee from the police. Just the words, "May I see your driver's license" may produce a violent response. On the other hand, those who see traffic laws as existing for their protection, and police officers as civil servants, the sight of a patrol car is not so alarming. For certain they may at times surprise us, and we worry if we had absent mindedly broken some law, but our perception of them is not "terror." For the "law-abiding" the police are not an enemy to be feared, but rather seen as those who serve our society. On the other hand, what outlaw would not fear the thought of being in the hands of the authorities?

:19 "We love Him because He first loved us." Many, many times in the scriptures we are reminded of the order of events in this matter of love. Man did not "invent" love and then "create" the idea of a loving God, but rather the reverse is true. Man's love for God came as the result of God's love first for us. Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated His own love toward us while we were still sinners, by allowing Christ to die for us. Again the order of events is clear, God loved first, then giving us a chance to love in return.

:20 "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" Although still on the subject of love, John now reverts back to an argument that he had made in chapter 3:15, and also earlier in chapter 2:9-11. By now we may begin to wonder why John continues to go back over so many of his points in this short letter. While it is not ours to question God's wisdom, our inquiry may lead us to an important principle as to understanding and teaching the word of God. John's letter is written like a burst of thoughts, each connected, yet each building on those previously made. His "reviews" always lead to new thoughts that in the end the reader may not have been able to put together, had it not been for John's reaching back to earlier statements.

Statements of love for God must be backed by actions of love for our fellow man. A living lie exists in the heart of the one who says "I love God" but lives with hate for another. John's argument here is this; "You've seen your brother and you don't love him, how can you then sustain true love for God whom you can't see?" It would seem to be easy to love the visible if the invisible is loved. John's point is that if one is missing, both are actually missing.

One may argue, however, that what we see of man is evil, and thus more difficult to love than He who is sinless yet unseen. Although there is truth in this thought, it is beside the point being made here. Good or bad behavior is not the issue of love. God loved us while we were still sinners. We can be thankful that love as defined in God's book is unconditional. Our ability to love in like manner must also be free of conditions, both in regards to God and to man. Once we begin to develop such love, there will be no further inconsistencies of love in our lives.

:21 "And this commandment we have from Him; that he who loves God must love his brother also." There's no getting around it. We can slice it or dice anyway we wish, but it still comes out that if we are serious about loving God, we must be serious about loving people. In so doing, we must put a face on such love. We may say we love people, but can we love the next-door neighbor, the competitor, your foreman, or even the man on the street. John is not saying that this is easy. If it came naturally, John would not have needed to speak of it so often. Christianity often involves doing and being the opposite of what comes natural to the world. The challenge, however, is before us.

Chapter 5

:1 "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him." To be "born of God" is to believe that Jesus is the "Anointed One." One cannot be consistent in saying; "I believe in God, but I do not accept Jesus." The foundation of this verse is that the Son and the Father are one. To believe in the Father is to believe in the Son, and to love the Father is to love the Son (John 10:30 / John 14:8-11 / John 17:11 / John 20:28-29). It is important for the student of the New Testament to realize that Jesus was not a new "god" to be added to the God of the Old Testament, but rather Jesus was the Christ prophesied

in the Old Testament, who's name would be "God With Us" (Matthew 1: 23 / Isaiah 7:14).

:2 "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." Each key area of love can be used to crosscheck the other areas of love. If we love God we will love our brother (4:20). If we love God we will love Christ who is begotten of Him (5:1). In this verse we learn that true love for the children of God springs from a true love of God. As an indicator to ourselves we can cross-reference our lives as we strive to love in all three directions.

:3 "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." If we love God, we will be willing and active in keeping His commandments (John 14:15 / John 15:14). Love that does not bring us to the point of obedience is not love as God defines it. It may be "love" as the world sees it, or "love" as we prefer to understand it. "Love" in the hands of man has taken on many strange and perverse forms, but calling it "love" does not make it so!

Perhaps for the sake of those who would complain, or perhaps for those in John's day who were trying to make Christianity more complicated and mysterious than it is, John adds; "His commandments are not burdensome." Jesus once said of the Pharisees that they placed upon others "heavy burdens, hard to bear..." (Matthew 23:4). Jesus spoke of "His burdens" however, as "light" in Matthew 11:30. This is not to say that Christianity is an effortless endeavor, but rather when we look at what the Lord has commanded, we do not find a set of irrational commands given to drive us to despair, but rather practical commandments given for the betterment of man.

:4 "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith." We've enjoyed the sound of these words so much we've made a song about it! Faith is the victory that overcomes the world! We should remember that as Christians "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (I John 4:4). Being born of God brings a victory over the world. The "victory" that he speaks of is more than just those individual "battles" we may win from time to time, but more importantly, the entire "war" is won in Christ. The life that is lived for Christ and comes to a faithful end is the life of one who has overcome the world, rather than the world overcoming him.

John had been speaking at length about love when he makes this statement about faith. Can we speak long about the Christian life without mentioning either? If we did not have faith in God we would have no cause or example to love. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Yet without love we are nothing (I Corinthians 13:2). Comparing the value of love and faith in the Christian life is like discussing the importance of each wheel on a bicycle, both are absolutely essential!

:5 "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Faith is still being discussed. Those who successfully overcome the world are those who believe (have faith). Faith starts in accepting Jesus as the Son of God. It may seem so basic, and we have learned it is not "burdensome." For many of this world, however, accepting Jesus as the Son of God is asking "too much." It is as though the

devil knows (and indeed he does) just exactly at what points to "draw the line" in the minds of those who are lost. There are many today who have an ambiguous faith in a "Higher Power," but who resist placing their faith in Jesus being the Son of God. To Christians Christ is our "Higher Power" exclusively, but for many He is not. We will not overcome the world without faith in Jesus, and that faith must be that He is the Son of God.

:6 "This is He who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth." There have been several approaches to interpreting this verse. Some see the "water and the blood" as referring to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Others see this as speaking of the blood and water, which flowed from His side upon His death. It seems more fitting, however, that the "water" mentioned in this verse speaks of the baptism of Christ, and the blood refers to the death of Christ. The point is that Jesus came to us by both water and blood. As His baptism marked the beginning of His earthly ministry, and His death on the cross marked the completion of it.

The "Spirit that bears witness" is the Holy Spirit, He who is given to those who believe (Acts 5:32). Thus as Christians we have both historically (the life and death of Jesus) and internally (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) as evidences of His work and power.

:7 "For there are three who bear witness in heaven:" That which has been mentioned in the preceding verses is the water, the blood, and the Holy Spirit. Although we may not see these three as being in the same category, they are now brought together as "three who bear witness."

Before further discussing the message of this verse, it is necessary to discuss the text of verses 7 and 8. In the KJV you will find additional words that are not included in the text of the NASV, NIV, or the RSV. The KJV adds after the above sentence; **"the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth:"** Although we may not find this addition as being in conflict with other Bible teachings concerning the Godhead, the issue here is that these additional words were most likely not a part of the original text of I John. The only Greek Bible manuscripts that have been found that contain these additional words are a few very late ones, dating from 1200 to 1700 A.D. Not one of the thousands of early Greek Bible manuscripts contains these additional words.

May it be said at this point that we have every reason to have confidence in the accuracy of the text of the New Testament. Such variations in the text as seen above are few, and even in this case create no contradictions within God's Word. Yet it is reassuring that along with giving us His perfect word, God has also given us a means of checking the transmission of His word from one generation to the next. Thanks to many recent discoveries, today, more than any generation since the early centuries, we have available to us the greatest number of manuscripts of the New Testament ever assembled. Through the science of "textual criticism" scholars have effectively "weeded out" the clearly spurious variations within the text, that we may now have access to a very accurate copy of a very ancient book.

:8 "The Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one." As we return our focus to the meaning of the text, we now find that it is clearly the Spirit, the water, and the blood, that are being referred to as the three witnesses. The mere mention of the number "three," however, may make the Bible student think of the Godhead. This may explain how the textual variation (discussed above with verse 7) came to be a part of the text, for some early readers of this passage perhaps saw the Godhead as the "three witnesses" and sought to clarify this passage. May we not, however, jump to conclusions in our interpretations. The subject has been the water, the blood, and the Spirit. If the water and the blood are referring to the baptism and the death of Christ (see comments on verse 6) then we may conclude that the thoughts of verse 6 are simply being emphasized. The perfect life and the sacrificial death of Jesus now stand as two witnesses for the believer to hear. The third witness is the witness from within, from the Spirit of God Himself, that God has given to those who believe.

:9 "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son." The word "if" beginning this verse carries the meaning "since." Since we usually accept the witness of 2 or 3 men whose testimonies agree without collaboration, then most certainly we should accept the witness of God which He has testified concerning His Son.

:10 "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son." The theme of verses 6-13 continues to be that of "witnessing and testifying," as they are interwoven with the theme of "knowing" and "believing."

He who believes in the Son of God is blessed with the presence of the three witnesses discussed in verses 6-8. To believe in the Son of God is to accept His perfect life (symbolized by His baptism) as the perfect sacrifice, which culminated in the shedding of His blood. Such faith will lead one to obedience to His word, which brings about the receiving of the witness within, the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is the 5th time in this letter that John speaks of various ways one may become a "liar." In 1:10 a "liar" is he who says he has not sinned, and in 2:4 it is he who says "I know Him" and does not keep His commandments. In 2:22 it is He who denies that Jesus is the Christ, and in 4:20 it is he who says "I love God" and hates his brother. Now we find that he who simply does not believe God is in reality calling God a liar, which makes that individual a liar himself, for it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6: 18).

:11 "And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." Perhaps some word definitions may be helpful at this point in our study. To "witness" is "to see or know by personal presence and perception." A "testimony" is the "statement or declaration of a witness" or the "open declaration of facts or evidence." So often we think of these words only in relation to a court of law. With such an illustration in mind, we may say that the testimony now being heard is not that of the defendant or the state, but is rather the testimony of the Judge Himself! God's declaration of facts is that He has given us eternal life. We may choose to accept or to reject His testimony, but

if we accept it, we will find life through His Son. If we choose to reject His testimony, we will someday realize we are in the most unenviable position of having called God a "liar" to His face.

:12 "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." Although very basic, the message of this verse is earthshaking to millions today who seek to find salvation outside of Jesus. As early as Acts 4:12 the apostles were risking their lives to get this point across to an unbelieving world. As they spoke of Jesus to the Sanhedrin they exclaimed, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." May we be aware, however, that it is more than a name that is under consideration. The seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:14 serves as a case in point. Their efforts to cast out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus was met with some "resistance" to say the least! The evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know... but who are you?" As we see them overpowered by Satan's servant and fleeing naked into the street, we learn a valuable lesson. As we accept the name of Jesus, we must also accept the message and the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. His Name alone will fool no one in the spirit realm, least of all our Creator.

:13 "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." This powerful sentence deserves our full attention and acceptance. As we have seen from the very beginning of this letter, one of John's main purposes in writing it was to make it possible for God's children to know all that which they needed to know. In the face of those who claimed to know so much (remember the Gnostics) John sought to combat this false knowledge with some facts they could sink their teeth into. At the top of the list is eternal life. What good is all other knowledge if in the end we are lost? What possible value is there in "Christian education" if there is no hope?

John's reassurance is that those who (truly) believe in the name of Christ can *know* that they have eternal life. Confidence in one's salvation is the God given "birthright" of he who is born of God! Lack of confidence in one's salvation is the earmark of he who does not accept the testimony of God. I realize this is a difficult point to accept. I have found that most Christians have struggled with this very concept. We are torn between two positions. One, we are concerned about pride and conceit, and wish not to appear like some who seem to very arrogantly proclaim that they are "saved." We see this as a violation of Christian humility. Yet without confidence in our own salvation, we will find it very difficult to share our "faith" with others, a faith that even fails to give *us* hope.

The solution to this dilemma is to humbly accept the testimony of God, realizing it is not due to our sinlessness that we are saved, but rather due to His love that we are given eternal life (I John 1:7-10). These things have been written that we may "know we have eternal life." If we still don't know that, we have missed much in our study of I John. Either we do not understand, or we do not accept what we have learned. If such is your condition, don't stop reading, and don't stop trying to understand! Finish reading this epistle as you meditate in faith. Your confidence and even your salvation depend upon developing such a trust in His saving grace.

The words of this verse and the comments made above have often been countered with opposing arguments. One argument is this; "Since we are still living and there is always the possibility that one can fall away, how can we *know* we have eternal life?" This is an important question. It *is* true that Christians who are still living are not yet in that eternal "place prepared for them" (John 14:2). It *is also true* that those who are in the grace of Jesus Christ *can fall away* (Galatians 5:4). Belief in these facts, however, need not take away our hope and confidence in the eternal life God has promised the obedient.

For those now living who are saved and remain faithful, life **will never end**. (Even the lost will live on, but in an eternal hell, which is described as the 2nd death in Revelation 21:8). While all must physically "die" as their soul is someday separated from the body (James 2:26), we must understand that for Christians, such will be a *change*, but not the end of the *quality of life* that we have begun to experience here on earth (I Corinthians 15:50-52).

Given the usual use of the word "eternity," we who are living cannot say that we are "in eternity," yet we can claim eternal life as we continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. If such is not true, this verse has no meaning or power. John is not saying "these things are written that you may someday have a chance at eternal life." Such would render his message useless, for in essence he would be saying; "these things I have written that you may know you have eternal life, even though you can't be sure."

The possibility of falling from grace should not take away the hope of those who have their faith firmly focused upon Jesus. The Christian who "builds his hope on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness" need not have his confidence taken by the fear of possibilities, for "perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4: 18). Fear involves torment! While never forgetting the dangers in store for those who fall away, the faithful disciple of Jesus anchors his hope and his dreams upon his Savior, not himself. It is often those who find no confidence and hope in Christ who actually *do fall away*, for their faith was focused upon failure. For those who set their faith upon Jesus, falling away is a possibility that need never become a reality.

:14 "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." For the believer, confidence is not only found in the distant future, it is here and now for the asking. There are conditions however. Here it is emphasized that as we pray to God we must ask according to His will. Just how far does this go? Far be it for any commentator upon God's Word to attempt to restrict or limit the power of God to answer prayer. However this verse clearly teaches that if our requests are not in keeping with His will, they will not be heard.

Some understand this passage to literally mean that if we ask for that which is against God's will, He somehow shuts off His "sense of hearing" so that the content of our prayer does not even register with Him. May I suggest that we understand this metaphorically to mean that God does not "hear" those requests that are against His will, to the extent that He does not *grant* those requests. Perhaps it reduces this discussion to the absurd, but if God truly does shut off His hearing when we ask amiss, how would He know when to turn His "hearing" back on again? Human terms such as "hearing" and "seeing" must all be understood in a different context when applied to God. There is a word used to describe the Biblical practice of using human terms to describe God, it is called "anthropomorphism"!

:15 "And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." Confidence in our salvation and confidence in prayer go hand in hand. A productive prayer life brings God into constant play in our daily lives, as we encounter both success and failure. As the confident Christian fails, or finds God's answer to a prayer to be "no," he learns and matures from his mistakes and wrong requests. As we learn His will we learn to ask according to it. We then know we will have that which we have requested. Could man become proud in making such a statement? No doubt many have. Yet confidence in having our petitions granted need not be the result of pride. Those who humbly submit their prayers daily to the will of God can truly claim results, having their confidence in Christ, not in their own ability to pray!

An interesting use of tense in this verse deserves comment. The thought is that since God listens to us each time we make a request, we should be aware that sometimes He may have "already given" us some of the things we have requested in prayer. We may find this nearly impossible to comprehend, but by faith can we not stretch our minds to see God already having in place the answers to our requests, perhaps even before we ask them (Mark 11:24 / Ephesians 3:20)?

:16 "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that." Still staying with the subject of confidence in prayer, we are now taken to a deeper "technical" level as we consider just whom we can productively pray for.

I find this difficult verse to be simplified by referring to the book of James. James helps us in two ways. First, his letter gives us a clear definition of the word "death." James 2:26 informs us that the body without the spirit is dead. Ecclesiastes 12:7 teaches that "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it". Although (to the human eye) death may appear to be the end of life, God's word is showing us that physical death is merely the separation of the body from the spirit.

May we be aware, however, that there are two types of death that man can experience. James 1:12-15 explains the process by which this second "type" of death takes place. It is this second type of death that is being referred to in I John that comes as the result of sin that is allowed to become "full-grown." There is no mention in this passage of *the body returning to dust*, or of *the spirit being separated from the body*. Here we find only the words; *temptation, desires, sin, and death*. Clearly a "spiritual" death can take place within the heart of one still living in the flesh.

With such an understanding we may quickly begin to find many other verses in the Bible to be very helpful. For example, "Fear not those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). John 5:24 also states; "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." Even Adam and Eve were told that if they ate of the forbidden fruit that they would surely die, yet the "death" they experienced was not an immediate physical death, but rather a *spiritual death*, for due to their sin they were separated from God and cast out of the garden God had prepared for them. Last but not least, this discussion may help us to more fully comprehend the extent of Jesus' sacrifice

upon the cross, for in so doing he not only died a physical death (Luke 23:46), but prior to the separation of His body from His Spirit He also reveals that He was suffering on the cross a spiritual death or separation from God (Matthew 27:46).

We have learned that prayers are powerful and effective. Should we see a brother "sinning a sin not to death," prayers for that brother should continue, for they will be effective. James again is helpful, for in James 5:13-20 we find just how effective and productive one brother can be to another, both in prayer and interaction with that brother. This is not to say that any man can become a "mediator" or "savior" to another, however by letting Christ work through us, our fervent prayers can "avail much." As Christians we can even turn one back to the truth and "cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

In just what way can my prayers for a brother who is sinning give him life? I will not attempt to list the ways, but by faith we do pray in confidence that such prayers will be heard. And why shouldn't they? Isn't it God's will that all souls be saved? Certainly the brother also has a say in this matter, and his heart must be reachable and pliable. This is exactly the point of this verse, that such a brother is not "sinning a sin unto death." John is not categorizing sin into "bad" sins and "not so bad" sins. Rather he is showing to us that based upon the attitudes and motives behind their sins, some who sin are in worse condition than others.

On any given day (if we were to watch closely enough) we could possibly see even the most sincere Christian sinning. This, however, is a far cry from the brother who has given up and given into sin, thus sinning a sin unto death. Would it be wrong to pray for such fallen brother? I don't read that here. The point is that praying for one who no longer seeks God or has habitually turned to sin, will not be productive, and the prayer will not be effective. Perhaps the best rule of thumb would be, if in doubt, pray anyway! God knows the heart.

:17 "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death." Just a bit more explanation is now added to the challenging instructions given in verse 16. May the reader never forget that all unrighteousness is sin. The temptation is to see another's sin as "leading to death," while ours is "not unto death." We must remember that if we reach the point of thinking of our sin as being somehow acceptable, rather than requiring repentance, we are flirting with crossing over that very line that separates life from death.

:18 "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him." We now may wish to refer back to the several other verses in this epistle that say the same basic thoughts as contained in this passage (I John 3:6-9). The Simple English Bible translates verse 18; "We know that anyone who has become a child of God does not continue to sin." Here, as in 3:6 and in 3:9 the concept of "continuous," "habitual" sin is being clearly identified as that which is totally incompatible with those who are born of God. To interpret this verse to mean that Christians are incapable of even committing one sin, we must ask, what then was John talking about in 1:8 - 2:2? There we find those who "walk in the light" being encouraged to "confess their sins." There we also find John writing to the brethren that they "may not sin," yet in the next breath they are reminded that "if anyone sins," they have an Advocate with the Father, that is Jesus Christ.

As has been said earlier in this commentary, may these words not be taken as an effort to excuse even one sin, but may they be taken to give comfort to those who are serious in their diligence to serve Jesus.

In the last part of this verse there is some variation in the Greek text. The KJV and the NKJV translate it that those who are born of God keep "themselves," while the NASV and the Simple English Bible has it that "Christ" keeps him. The NIV somewhat threads the middle of these two translations. This is not due to a deliberate attempt of the translators to alter the meaning of this verse, but is rather due to a minor variation in the manuscripts that make up the text from which English translations are made. May we note that no violence is done to the scriptures either way, and that such variations are few in number.

In keeping with the context, however, it seems most likely that it is the *Son* who is being spoken of as keeping those born of God, that the wicked one (Satan) may not "touch" them.

:20 "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Twice more the reader is told of that which he can "know." First, we can know that Jesus has come, and that He has given us understanding. Second, the purpose for His coming and His giving of understanding is that we may know God. Jesus did not come to suffer the persecutions and indignities of this earth to simply give man a code of behavior. The primary purpose of everything that Jesus did and taught was to bring man back to God. Through Jesus, man came to see the Father. Through Jesus we can see the Father, the true God, and eternal life!

:21 "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen." With one of the most unusual closings found in any of the New Testament epistles, the reader is warned concerning idols. It is as though the ending has been chopped, or that the writer stopped writing just as he was beginning a new paragraph.

Another way of looking at this final sentence is to see it as a deliberate effort to emphasize a point that, if taken, will assist the reader in implementing all that has been previously stated. Idolatry is never specifically mentioned in this letter, yet underlying any Bible teaching is that we should keep ourselves from the worship of anything other than the true and the living God.

As we scan the vast array of idols man has made from then to now, perhaps the most deceptive aspect of idolatry is that it is ever changing. For John's first readers it was actual pagan idols made of metals or wood. However, even then there was the movement toward Gnosticism, and basically the worship of one's ability to know. Today we have the idolatry of sports, movies, beauty, talent, materialism, and technology, just to name a few. With each generation comes yet another platoon of Satan's troops marching before us with the goal of stealing our hearts away from God.

With this warning may we conclude our study, armed and ready to do battle with the "weapon" of true knowledge. And let us not fear, for "perfect love casts out fear," never forgetting that *greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world!*

-Bruce Gleim / Vandalia Adult Class 6/9/02