


Studies in
1 John

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Studies in 1 John

The Authorship of 1 John

Unlike Paul's or Peter's letters, the author of 1 John did not identify himself. He was well known to his readers. He includes himself among the "we" who heard, saw, observed, and touched "the Word of Life," that is our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Jh. 1:1-3). John recorded Jesus' words when He prayed not only for His immediate disciples but also for those who believe in Him through their word (Jh. 17:20). Not only in the gospel bearing his name but now in this letter, John passes on to others Jesus' words just as Jesus prayed. Therefore, the writer of 1 John was one of Jesus' disciples.

1 John bears so many similarities to the gospel that it seems clear the same person authored both. He refers to Jesus as the Word (Jh. 1:1; 1 Jh. 1:1). He uses the image of light as the visible manifestation of God's life (cp Jh. 1:4; 1 Jh. 1:4, 7). He uses the term *paraklētos* (Advocate in 1 John and Comforter/Helper in John) of Jesus in 1 John and in John of the Holy Spirit as Jesus stated that He would ask the Father to give the disciples another Helper like Himself (Jh. 14:16; 1 Jh. 2:1). He alone speaks of a new kind of command, a command to love like Christ loved His disciples (Jh. 13:34; 1 Jh. 2:8; 3:23). Statistically, John uses the verb *agapaō* sixty-eight times in the gospel and his letters while the other New Testament books total only seventy-five occurrences. John speaks of our birth from God (Jh. 1:12; 1 Jh. 5:1). He tells us about eternal life, that it God's life made visible in Jesus Christ and now possessed by believers through having Christ in us (cf Jh. 6:47, 54; 1 Jh. 5:11-12). Matthew, Mark, and Luke record nineteen statements about eternal life while John has more than thirty in his gospel. Paul writes of eternal life nineteen times compared with fourteen references in 1 John. He also speaks about believers passing from death to life and

not coming into judgment (Jh. 5:24; 1 Jh. 3:13). He tells us of our need to abide or be at ease in Christ and His words (Jh. 15:4, 7; 1 Jh. 2:10, 27; 3:24). John uses the word “abide” forty times in the gospel and twenty-seven times in his letters, while “abide” occurs only fifty-one times in the rest of the New Testament. John carries on Jesus’ promise of the believer’s privilege of asking the Father in Jesus’ name (character) (Jh. 16:23-24; 1 Jh. 3:22; 5:14-15). The evidence is strong that the same writer penned both.

Michael Kruger holds (rightly I think) that Scripture is self-authenticating and requires no council or external criteria to be considered Scripture. He sets out three Biblical criteria for true Scripture. First, Scripture bears divine qualities or demonstrates itself to be authored by God. Second, New Testament Scripture has clear apostolic origins. Third, the Church welcomed it as Scripture.¹ 1 John bears these marks. It has the unique divine qualities or finger prints of God. Early in the second century it was recognized to have come from John’s pen and so it is apostolic. Finally, the Church identified 1 John as one of the writings to be treated as Scripture. It was recognized in the Muratorian Canon, a second century fragment identifying the books and letters the Church was reading and encouraged believers to read. Polycarp (d. 155), a bishop (pastor) in Smyrna wrote to the Philippians and quotes 1 John 4:2-3, “For everyone ‘who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist...”² Eusebius, a fourth century Church historian

¹ Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2012) p. 113.

² J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Michael W. Holmes, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989) p. 126.

quotes Papias (c. 80-155), “The same author (Papias) made use of testimonies from the first epistle of John.”³ Irenaeus of Lyons (France)(c. 130-200) quotes 1 John, “For this reason also he has thus testified to us in his Epistle: ‘Little children it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist doth come, no have many antichrists appeared; whereby we know that it is the last time. 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 departed], that they might be made manifest that they are not of us. Know ye therefore, that every lie is from without and is not of the truth. Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is Antichrist.’”⁴ All these early Christian writers agreed that John the author of the gospel also authored 1 John.

1 John’s original readers

While other writers often addressed a church in a city or an individual by name, John does not identify his readers. John wrote the book of Revelation while imprisoned to labor in the mines of the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). According to Irenaeus, “Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.”⁵ John was exiled to Patmos under the Roman emperor Domitian (c. AD 81-96), though

³ *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilius*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint 1991) p. 127.

⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, Book III, chapter 16 section 5.

⁵ Irenaeus, op. cit. Book III, chapter 3 section 4. See also Book II, chapter 33, section 5.

precisely when history does not tell us. Irenaeus tells us that he continued in Ephesus to emperor Trajan's reign (AD 98-117). This frames John's post-Patmos life, though it is unlikely he lived a long time following his release. Eusebius tells us that John returned to Ephesus from exile and governed the churches in Asia.⁶ Later, Jerome (c. 342-420) wrote that John founded churches throughout Asia (Turkey) and died about sixty-eight years after Christ's death in the city of Ephesus.⁷ John wrote to believers beyond the Ephesian church, perhaps other Asian churches. It is unlikely that a man of advanced years would have traveled to the seven churches of Revelation. While possible, it is more likely that he served the churches in the vicinity nearer Ephesus.

John writes to believers not the unsaved. They are people who have the potential for fellowship with John and the Father and Son (1:3). They can walk in the light and this requires the possession of eternal life (1:7; 5:11). John includes them with himself in the "we" who have Jesus Christ the righteous as an Advocate, a legal term for a friend called to witness on behalf of another's character (2:1). They are beloved (2:7). They are children fathers and young men within God's family (2:12-14). They are the objects of God's unusual love (3:1). They can test the spirits to see if they are from God (4:1-5). They are born from God and have "our" overcoming faith (5:1-4).

The purpose of 1 John

⁶ Eusebius, *op cit.* p. 104.

⁷ St. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, (Dublin: Dalcassian Publishing Co., 2017) p. 11.

John's desired that his readers may share fellowship with him, even with the Father and Son (1:3). However, certain unbelievers had gathered with these believers. As antichrists they denied that Jesus is the Christ and/or that the Son is God (2:22). They denied that Jesus is in flesh (4:2-3). Though plainly unbelievers, their departure troubled some believers. The young believers who had not yet learned to abide or practice eternal life struggled with this departure. The maturing young men were still loving the world (2:14b-15) and were enamored with the positive attention the antichrists received from the world failing to see that those of the world listen to their own kind (4:4-5).

The most serious problems resulted from the antichrists' teaching that conduct is not that important. They claimed to have fellowship while walking in darkness (1:6). They claimed to have no sin and did not consider a life of sin to be a problem (1:8, 10; 3:8). Most seriously, they did not love, so they had no righteousness (3:10).

These false claims negatively affected the spiritually immature believers. God gave us eternal life that we might know Him experientially (1 Jh. 17:3). We live out eternal life as righteous acts of love like Christ did (3:16). John wrote that they might know with certainty that they have eternal life (5:13). However, if Jesus is not God, we do not have eternal life. If He did not become flesh, we have no ground of forgiveness or for the destruction of the devil's works (3:8). Yet He is God and did become man.

Many Bible students identify the problem as an early form of gnosticism. While the teaching in these churches may have later given rise to gnosticism, it is much simpler to see the problems John identifies and how it affects our conduct.

1:1-4 The Word of Life

These opening verses relate John's experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. However, rather than refer to Him by those names, John calls Him the Word of Life. John focuses on the Life that the Son exhibited. He is not only an example of life but He is the life (Jh. 14:6). Possessing eternal life is not about living forever. Everyone lives forever, some with God and some without God. Eternal life provides us the privilege of getting to know God in the realm of our experience (Jh. 17:3). When we use eternal life as the Son did in the realm of His human nature (i.e. Jesus), we fellowship or share in common with the Father and with His Son (1:3).

Four times in his introduction, John uses the neuter relative pronoun *ho* [ὃ] translated "What" [NASB, CSB] and "That" [ESV, NKJV]. "**That which** was...**that which** we have heard, **that which** we have seen...**that which** we have looked at." This pronoun refers to the whole idea of this life that they witnessed.⁸ John also uses "we" several times because this experience was not his alone but that of all the apostles.

"From a beginning" does not express a beginning for the person of the Son. Rather, it is a beginning of John's experience. "Beginning" has no definite article similar to John 1:1. Both passages also have an imperfect tense of the verb "to be" [*eimi* as *ēn*]. The imperfect means that something was ongoing at a past point in time. In John, the indefinite beginning combined with this verb means that at any beginning, whenever that beginning might have been,

⁸ Richard Young classifies this use as demonstrative with the lack of an antecedent, where the reference is clear in the context. *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) p. 76.

the Word was already existing. Therefore, the Word has no beginning. Beginning cannot refer to Genesis 1:1 specifically because the Word was already existing. In the present passage, John considers any beginning of his and others' experience with the Life. When they witnessed the life, the life was already existing, it did not begin, for God the Son did not begin but is eternal with the Father, sharing fully in the life that is God's, the eternal life.

John expresses his experience first with two perfect tense verbs "have heard" and "have seen." The perfect tense emphasizes some continuing result from a past act. We may understand John to say that they heard and it still rings in their ears, that they saw [*horaō*] and the image remains burned into their memory. The vividness of their experience with Jesus manifesting the life remained with them and John wished to encourage his readers to consider this experience. They also saw with attention and contemplation [*theaomai*],⁹ considering what they were observing. Think of the disciples' question among themselves, "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey Him?" (Mk. 4:41). Their hands had also handled him. John, the writer of this letter, leaned on Jesus at the last supper. Jesus was not off hands but had been touched by the disciples. These last two verbs

⁹ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1948) p. 203. Samuel Green distinguishes it from other seeing terms, "to look at purposely, or attentively to gaze upon." *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, nd) p. 375. Stephen D. Renn sees this word to include the ideas of inspect, examine, and perceive" among others. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005)p. 868.

“looked at and touched” are aorist tenses and do not bear the same emphasis of a continuing effect. They were not still looking at Him with contemplation nor were they handling Him.

While all this is about their interaction with God the Son as man, John focuses generally (*peri*) about the Word of the Life. Jesus is the Word. He is the Word of Life. He is our life. The use of the preposition *peri* “about” or “concerning” connects the phrase “concerning the Word of life” to each of the preceding phrases: that which we heard, that which we saw, that which we beheld, that which our hands handled.

1:2 The Life was manifested. The passive verb *phaneroō* means to make plainly visible. In terms of natural revelation, God’s life had been seen many times in history. When the Word became man (flesh, Jh. 1:14) mankind was able to observe God’s life in human terms. It is for this reason that eternal life is knowing the True God and **Jesus Christ** whom He sent (Jh. 17:3). We are creatures. God is Creator. As creatures, God can give us eternal life but we can never possess it as God. Our experience of eternal life is limited to what God makes possible in our human natures. We get to know God experientially within these limits. They saw, again a perfect tense to indicate the abiding images in their minds. This interaction with the Life they then witnessed and announced to other believers, specifically the readers. They did not rehearse the earthly life of Jesus for amusement or for basic interest in stories. How many wish to know more about this event or that and why Jesus did this or that, yet what we know is what God wanted us to know. He did not think it necessary for us to know more. John related events, such as Jesus’ signs in the gospel of John, so believers could see what God has planned for us and made possible for us to live. He witnessed and announced this life that was facing

(with) the Father. John used this same phrasing in the second phrase of John 1:1, “and the Word was facing God.” Facing is the preposition *pros*. The Son, by nature, was worthy to be facing God the Father, for as the last phrase of 1 John 1:1 states, “and the Word was being God.” John is not confusing the Father and the Son. They are two distinct persons while at the same time one God, two sharing fully and equally one single nature. This One was made plainly visible to us, that is John and the other disciples.

1:3 John announces what they had seen and heard to these believers that they might have fellowship with John and others. “Have” is a subjunctive verb meaning it is a potential for them to have fellowship. It is not out of reach. It also expresses John’s desire for his readers. He wants them to have fellowship with them. John’s fellowship and the fellowship of these believers is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. As children born from God (cp 5:1), we share in common with the Father. Having eternal life, we share in common with His Son Jesus Christ.

They could actively have fellowship [a sharing in common] with one another by practicing or using their eternal life. Ultimately, their fellowship is with the Father and Son, since eternal life is God's kind of life. Again, the Son is also designated as Jesus Christ because our personal experience of living out eternal life is only as humans, as creatures never as God the Creator.

1:4 John is writing these facts about the Son manifesting eternal life because he wants our joy filled full. In 3 John 4, John expresses that his greatest joy is to hear of his children walking in truth. Truth has no definite article in that text and so it refers to truth in general, or the quality of truth, therefore, though not specifically the Truth it can still include the Truth. John had this great joy to hear that these

believers live their lives in truth. Knowing that the readers of 1 John (perhaps the same group) would also fill full John's joy. Even more than focusing on people becoming believers, John wanted those same people to go on and experience fellowship with the Father, the Son, and himself. He wanted his experience with the Son to be shared with these readers.

1:5 John announces to his readers that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. John had heard this from Him, that is Christ. Christ is mentioned in the preceding verses as the Word of Life. Too often we read, “God is Light” and dive into our own ideas or what is meant by light or we turn to philosophy in trying to define light. John Stott writes, “It is His nature to reveal Himself, as it is the property of light to shine; and the revelation is of perfect purity and unutterable majesty.”¹⁰ Curtis Vaughan summarizes three main interpretations of light, first “to the majesty, the splendor, and the glory of God,” second, “the moral perfection of God,” and third, “that God is self-revealing.”¹¹ While each of these ideas may bear some truth, especially that God is self-revealing, in his gospel, John defines light for us. He tells us that life was in the Word (Jesus Christ) and His life was light (Jh. 1:4). When the Son came into the world and became man, the Father gave Him to have life in Himself (Jh. 5:26). He was the first human being to possess eternal life, the life God promised Israelis in their resurrection from the dead (Dan. 12:2). Jesus presented His kingdom and promised eternal life in the coming age (Mk. 10:30). As the Son-emphasis on His deity-He eternally possessed this life. Becoming a man He possessed and lived out

¹⁰ John W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) p. 70. In an additional note on light, Stott views light as a universal symbol within religion seeing intellectual symbolism of truth versus ignorance and morally of purity versus evil.

¹¹ Curtis Vaughan, *1, 2, 3 John: A Study Guide Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) p. 30.

eternal life before others, John being an eyewitness. That life was light because others could see it by what He did. They witnessed Divine actions in human terms, terms we can understand, that John witnessed in Jesus' earthly life.

God always manifests His life. He is not idle. There is absolutely no inactivity of life with God. Where as we rest, sleep, take time for leisure, God does none of these. When He ceased creating in Genesis one, He ceased that work. "Rested" in Genesis 2:2 translates the Hebrew *shabat* "to cease." "Rest" is a derived meaning associated with cessation of activity. God did not "rest" as we think of it. He ceased creating, but continues other activities. Jesus stated that His Father was working on the Sabbath and so He also works (Jh. 5:16-17). God is always active. With two negatives particles, John expresses that God is always light. *Ouk* modifies "is"—"is no" and *oudemia* concludes "not one bit" of darkness. Understanding that God always manifests His life in activity is important as John addresses the following inconsistent claims.

1:6 "If we should say" seems most likely to be a believer, hence John uses "we." However, as we continue to read this letter, we'll encounter unbelievers who had left these churches. The claims of these unbelievers may have influenced the believers, so that now they were making inconsistent claims. If a believer claims to have fellowship with Him, then He ought to be manifesting God's life. If he is living His life without manifesting God's life [darkness] he is lying and not practicing the truth. Darkness is the absence of God's life in activity. It may be absent because someone does not have eternal life, meaning they are

unbelievers. It may be absent because a believer is not using the eternal life that they have. The Truth explains how believers can rely upon God. God is the one and only true and living God (1 Thess. 1:9). He alone can save mankind. He needs no help and does not ask us to help but only to believe (Rom. 5:4). Our reliance on God is not for assistance but for Him to accomplish what we absolutely cannot do (Jh. 3:21). When we practice the Truth, we come to the light, so that our deeds can be clearly seen that they are being worked by God. The Truth also explains how He gives us victory over or freedom regarding our indwelling sin nature (Jh. 8:31-32). It is not enough to claim that we depend upon God. God has prescribed specifically how we go about depending upon Him. Christ charged us to abide in Him, to set our minds to who we are in Christ, to be at ease in that reality and Christ is then at ease in us (cp. Jh. 15:4; Col. 3:1-2).

The word “practice” translates the present tense of the verb *poieō* that means to “do” or to “practice.” John uses this verb thirteen times in this short letter to express his concern not only for what believers know but what they do. John desires them to have fellowship. Fellowship involves doing something in relationship with God and hopefully with other believers. Practicing the Truth is relying on God so that our works are His works, which is a form of fellowship with God.

John uses “we” as the ending of the five verbs in this sentence: say, have, walk, lie, do/practice. By using “we,” John can include himself. While this claim may have originated with the antichrists (unbelievers), John is concerned with what believers claim and do. “We” also contradicts the interpretation that walking in

darkness means one is unsaved. A believer may possess eternal life but not live it out, hence darkness. Having eternal life does not mean that one is laying hold of eternal life as Paul charged Timothy and the believers who are rich in the age (1 Tim. 6:12, 17-19).

1:7 If a believer continues to walk or live their daily life in the light, meaning they are manifesting God's kind of life in their daily life, God promises that Christ's blood continues to cleanse them from all that has the quality of sin. This includes the sin nature as well as sin resulting from Satan's deceit. The sin nature is with us every minute of the day. However, God's promise is that the sin nature can not wear down the believer until they eventually give in, if they walk in the light. Christ's sacrifice, pictured as His blood, cleanses them for this. Cleansing is appropriate if we think of the effect that a buildup of filth can have on the health of an individual or the operation of some device. The believer who is not walking in the light, not manifesting God's kind of life in activity, will be worn down by their sin nature. Therefore, those who try to live by their own grit or disregard the importance of walking in the light, they will eventually fall into sin.

1:8 A believer who claims that he does not have sin deceives himself. John addresses acts of sin in 1:10. This claim regards the sin nature, not acts. His experience demonstrates that he has a sin nature. By "sin" John means the sin nature, what Paul calls the indwelling sin (Rom. 7:17-18). Since "the Truth" details how the believer may have freedom from the sin nature, the Truth is absent in those who claim they have no sin nature. They disagree with this Truth by denying the existence of the sin nature and their need for freedom.

In John 8:31-32, Jesus spoke the Truth to those who had believed. They alone had the potential to know this truth in the future. "The one doing **sin** is a slave of **the sin**" refers to the sin nature (Jh. 8:34). The truth, along with many other NT references speak about freedom in our experience from that sin nature.

1:9 If the believer does sin, they are to confess [agree with God] that it is sin. This is not an apology but an admission of guilt, "God, You said this is sin and it is. I did _____, and you say that is sin." God wants us to agree with Him regarding our actions. He doesn't want us to explain why we did it but simply to agree that we sinned. Confession clears the way for fellowship with God. Fellowship isn't possible if we deny we have problems, specifically sin. When we confess, He cleanses us from the sin we committed and from all the unrighteousness that accompanies sin. Many attitudes, plans, and reactions precede sin. Many may be unrighteous and paved the way for the sin we committed. He cleanses us of all that, not only the sin. This is a promise for Christians only. This is not a salvation verse for the unsaved! They are never told to confess. Peter and Paul's evangelistic messages in Acts always involve the simple yet profound response to the gospel, "believe"!

1:10 If we claim that we have not sinned.” The verb “have not sinned” is a perfect tense in the Greek, “we didn’t sin and don’t sin now.” While we might quickly point out that such an individual is dishonest and fails intentionally or unintentionally to evaluate their actions, John states that their actions are against God. If we deny that we sin, we make God a liar and God's Word is not in us. John includes himself, “we.” The antichrists who had been among these believers taught such errors. Sadly, some of the believers in these churches had adopted this error. For this reason, John includes us among those who may errantly make such claims.

If we make such a claim, we are making God a liar. God has made provision for the believer to experience freedom from the sin nature’s dominion. God has logically counted us to have died with Christ to the sin nature and to be alive to Him in Christ (Rom. 6:2-4, 11). We experience this freedom when we logically count true of ourselves what God logically counts true of us. Further, we are not under law, so we sin is no longer a master over us (Rom. 6:14). God has freed us from the sin nature so we might be slaves to serve in righteousness (Rom. 6:18). The Spirit frees us from the cycle of the sin nature and spiritual death by directing our frame of mind to our life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2, 4-6). We do not stop at counting ourselves to be dead with Christ to the sin nature, but we need to continue on to our life in Christ, where we are part of the body of Christ, seated with all believers in the heavenlies, and righteous in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:21). This is The Truth that Jesus said we would know in the future (Jh. 8:32). Jesus spoke about freedom from slavery to the sin nature (Jh. 8:34). So,

why would God provide us a means of freedom from the sin nature if we have no problem with the sin nature? Why would He give us a means of not sinning if we no longer sin? For this reason, claiming that we no longer sin makes God a liar because He says we do and has provided us the means of freedom. To deny the need means His Word is not in us, because His Word tells us both about our problem of sin and God's means of freedom.

2:1 "My little children" can be understood as "my little born ones." Many interpreters understand this noun [ΤΕΚΝΙΑ] to refer to the whole group of believers, as they are all God's children. This is true but the diminutive form *tekniā* versus *teknā* means "little children" or "little born ones" while the latter is simply "children" or "born ones." I understand John to be writing the whole church but considering the problems of the spiritually young believers.

This letter reminds us well that doctrine seriously affects our actions. These little born ones were struggling spiritually because of errors to which they had been exposed. In 1:8-10, John makes it clear that sinning is not OK. He is writing so that they won't sin. However, we do sin and God has provided a means of dealing with sin in our life. For this reason, John is writing that they practice the Truth and do not sin.

If we should happen to sin (aorist subjunctive) we have Christ Jesus as our Advocate. The Word "Advocate" translates the noun *paraklētos* from the verb *parakaleō* meaning to call alongside, encourage, exhort. A *paraklētos* is one who comes alongside to help. Jesus used this word four times in the upper room referring to the Holy Spirit as our Helper who does what we

could not otherwise do. In our text, John uses the word of Jesus Christ in its technical and legal sense of one who comes alongside to help His friend. The word does not describe a lawyer [*nomikos*] but a friend who acts as a character witness in a trial. Jesus Christ is the righteous one and He is our propitiation. Therefore, Christ Jesus doesn't need to say a thing on our behalf when we sin. His presence in heaven at the Father's right hand is sufficient because He is the righteous one. Further, we are righteous in Him (1 Cor. 1:30, He has been made for us righteousness). We have been made God's kind of righteousness in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). Our righteous standing before the Father is Christ and therefore, unalterable. We didn't earn it. It is by grace. Christ is our righteousness. If our sin could alter that, our salvation would not be by grace but works (Romans 10:6).

2:2 Jesus is not only our Advocate but the propitiation or satisfaction concerning our sins. Propitiation involves the word family *hilaskomai* meaning, "to conciliate, appease, propitiate."¹² Biblically, God has satisfied Himself through the death of His Son rather than requiring us to do something to satisfy Him. A form of the word propitiation describes the **place** of satisfaction (Rom. 3:25). In setting out Christ as that place, God demonstrates Himself to be righteous due to His having seemed to pass over the sins done before the cross. In Hebrews 9:5 this same form refers to the lid of the ark of the covenant, popularly, but I think inaccurately, referred to as the "mercy seat." The lid was the place of **covering** [*kaphar*]

¹² G. Abbott-Smith, op cit. p. 215

because the high priest sprinkled the sacrifice's blood on [a] the lid (Lev. 16:15-16). In so doing, the priest made a covering for Israel's uncleanness and transgressions related to their sins. Transgressions involved the violation of the law's commands. The tablets of the law were inside the ark which is also called the "ark of testimony" for it held the tablets as a "witness against you." (Lev. 16:13; Deut. 31:26; Ex. 25:21-22). God dwelt above this lid between the cherubs. The blood was sprinkled to cover Israel's unrighteousnesses and this way it satisfied God who otherwise became angry with Israel (e.g. Num. 16:46). Now, Christ is the **place of satisfaction**. God is not angry with us.¹³ When we sin, God the Father is already satisfied with reference to our sin because of Christ.¹⁴

Jesus Christ is the satisfaction concerning our sins and those of the world. In both cases, the Greek preposition *peri* indicates a general idea as opposed to specificity. Specifically, God is satisfied with Christ for our sin natures. Before Adam sinned, he trespassed (offense) against God by choosing to eat the fruit before he ate. In this way, the sin nature and the spiritual death entered into the world (Rom. 5:12). The sin nature is the cause of sin. Paul said that he did not do unrighteousness but the "indwelling sin" (Rom. 7:17,

¹³ The pagan world used the *hilasmos* family as satisfying a deity's anger/wrath. Certainly God has expressed anger against Israel and will do so in the future, but neither the Old Testament or New ties propitiation to God's anger except a couple brief references (cp Ps. 78:38; Nu. 25:10-13).

¹⁴ This is contrary to the Roman Catholic view that a person's sins after conversion must be dealt with later.

20). Paul was not shirking responsibility but explaining why he went ahead and sinned when he wanted to do something good. Paul is explaining the power of the sin nature when believers try to live by law and do not consciously relate to their life in Christ Jesus (cp Rom. 8:2). Because Christ is the satisfaction for our sin natures, that satisfaction extends generally to our acts of sin. Propitiation is applied by believers being baptized (placed into) Christ's death and resurrection and also by regeneration which reverses spiritual death caused by our sin natures.

Christ is not the satisfaction only for believers' sins, but also those of the whole world. The world does not enjoy the benefit of Christ being this satisfaction. By faith alone, the benefit of Christ's work is applied to our problem. Apart from believing in Christ, they are neither placed into Christ nor regenerated, and due to this, they remain unsaved. So, how is Christ a propitiation for their sins also? The satisfaction He accomplished is sufficient for their salvation. When He died for Adam's sin, He died for the sins of the whole world even though most of the world does not believe in Him. The importance of Christ being the satisfaction for the sins of the world is that the antichrists are part of that world. While they claimed to have no sin and to not sin, they lie because Christ had to satisfy the Father for their sins also.

The New Commandment, Love & Eternal Life

2:3 "Know" is an important word to John. In the gospel of John, he uses the word *ginoskō* fifty-seven times and twenty-five times in 1 John. Compare this to fifty-four times in all of Paul's letters, three times in James, and twice in 2 Peter. John considers this kind of knowledge a key aspect of our relationship with God. He also uses *oida* for knowledge fifteen times in 1 John and eighty-four times in the gospel, compared to one hundred six times in all Paul's writings. Here in 2:3, the verb is *ginoskō* not *oida*. *Ginoskō* refers to experiential knowledge, while *oida* is objective or book-learning. John is concerned with our experiential knowledge of God. He is concerned with us personally knowing God's work in our lives. This makes up an important aspect of our spiritual life. God does not desire His children to merely know about Him, such as facts and Bible verses. He wants us to know Him. God wants a personal relationship with believers and that relationship involves His activity with us and our activity with Him.

We experientially know God because we keep His commandments. "Keep" is the verb *tēreō* and means to keep safe and secure. His commandments are not burdensome (5:3). John is not speaking of the Mosaic Law which both Peter and Paul called a burden (Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:1). John means the commandment to love given in John 13:34-35. This is a new kind of commandment. The adjective *kainos* indicates a new kind or quality of a thing. This command differs from previous commandments. The highest command of the Law was, "love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). We can summarize this, "love God with everything you've got."

Christ's new command changes the standard from us to Christ. We are now to love like He loved not with everything we've got. The difference between the highest command under the law and our new commandment is vast. To compare our loving with all we've got with Christ's love for us is arrogant.

John calls it "commands." That's plural. How does a singular command become commandments? Christ restates His new command to love in several versions. John also restates that command in different forms. They all are different expressions of the one command so that it becomes commandments (commands).

- John 13:34 Love as Christ loved us.
- John 13:35 Love so you know you are His disciples.
- John 15:9 Love like the Father loved Christ.
- 1 John 3:16 Love by laying down your life for others, i.e. others before self.
- 1 John 4:7 Love to experientially know God.
- 1 John 4:12 Love so you fell at ease [A.V. "abide"]
in the Father's love.
- 1 John 4:21 Love the Father by loving others in
the family, other believers.
- Galatians 6:1-4 Love by bearing one another's
burdens.
- 2 Corinthians 9:21 Love by giving to others'
needs.

This love is supernaturally produced by the Spirit as a part of the Fruit (Gal. 5:22). It is impossible for the believer to generate this love on his own. This love is the natural expression of God's kind of life (eternal life) in the life of a believer.

2:4 The believer who claims to have experiential knowledge of God but does not love other believers, is a liar and the truth is not in him. God is love (4:8). That same love should be reflected in the lives of those who know God. John uses *ginoskō* again for an intimate or experiential knowledge of God. A person who claims to know God but does not love others is not only a liar but the Truth is not in him. As in 1:8, **the Truth** is the teaching that there is one true God. The Truth also teaches that only the one true God can free us from the dominion of our sin nature (Jh. 8:31, 34-36). The Truth also teaches us that only the one true God can accomplish the works in us that God desires (Jh. 3:21). The believer who does or practices the Truth can know that his works are worked by God. The Truth teaches us to set our frame of mind to our position in Christ (cp Col. 3:1-3). Christ called His own to “abide in Me” (Jh. 15:4). Abiding is being at ease or relaxing while remaining in a location. It is directly related to setting the frame of our mind to who we are in Christ. Christ tied our abiding in Him to His abiding in us (Jh. 15:4-5). In fact, apart from Him, we can do nothing. Christ’s indwelling gives us eternal life (1 Jh. 5:11-12). Putting all this together, John means here and in John 3:21 that the works we do that please God are in reality done by God. by practicing the truth we simply allow God to accomplish these works in us that only He can accomplish. We come to the light so that it is plain that God is the one doing the works. It makes no difference if we claim we are living in dependence upon God or tell God that we want to depend upon Him. Neither of these constitutes real dependence on

God. We depend upon God when we abide in Christ and God then does works through us. Those works are chiefly acts of love. If we claim to know Him but do not love our brothers, then none of this is true and we are not relying on God and we don't know Him.

2:5 Whoever guards His word, the love of God is being matured in this one. "Perfected" translates a Greek word meaning to move in the direction for which a thing is intended. A translation like "mature" gives us a better sense of what John means. The tense of the verb is perfect meaning God's love has been matured and remains mature in such people. God intends our love to develop, not to remain stagnant. When we guard God's Word, we hold it as important and not up for debate. We stand firmly for the existence of the Truth as our only means of victory over the sin nature and the only ability to live out God's kind of love. This maturing of God's love in us is how we know we are in [positionally] Christ. We rest [akin to "abiding" as in John 15:4ff] in our graced, God-given position in Christ. The outworking of that rest in Christ is experiential knowledge of God.

2:6 Recall from 2:4, that to abide is to rest at ease or to be comfortable while remaining in a location. God desires us to know we have a position in Christ and to rest comfortably in that position. When we abide or rest in Christ, we find ourselves the most productive regarding God's purposes for us. So, if we claim to abide in Him, we ought to be organizing (walking) our daily life just as our Savior organized His life. The Son always lived in dependence upon the Father. He did what the Father instructed Him to do (cp John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:39). We too can live like this.

New Command or Old Command?

2:7 John is writing many years after Christ left the earth. The new commandment He gave in the upper room on the night of His betrayal was now common knowledge among believers. John assures his readers that he is not writing something completely new. This is the new commandment but it is already 60 years old (providing that John is writing about 90-95 AD). Some have objected to this being a reference to the John 13:34 command, claiming John would never have called it “old.” However, John wants it clear that he is not telling them something he has just recently come to know. They were having this very command from their beginning. “Have” is an imperfect tense viewing the action as ongoing in the past. They did not come to possess this command and then allow it to sit on their mental shelf. They actively were having this command and this indicates the exercise of the command. “Beginning” has no definite article and does not refer to the very beginning of history or of Christian truth but their beginning. This command is elementary Christian doctrine. I think that within the first week that one had believed in Christ, the apostles taught these new believers who they are in Christ and then taught them the new command. That is how basic these truths are to Christianity. After evangelizing in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, a group followed Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:43). What Paul tells them indicates these are believers, because Paul and Barnabas were persuading them to continue in the grace of God. Unbelievers cannot continue in God’s grace for they are not in God’s grace at all. “Persuading” is an imperfect verb meaning that this was not a brief comment. Luke is telling us that between the two sabbaths, Paul and Barnabas were explaining to these new believers about God’s grace. If they did not do this first, how could they continue in that grace?

The New Commandment, Love & Eternal Life

2:8 From the perspective of history, this commandment which John wrote, was indeed new. It was sixty years new. It was sixty years old. "New" indicates a contrast to the Law that was 1,500 years old. "Old" indicates that it is not recent with John at 95 AD for Christ gave it to His disciples sixty years prior.

The commandment is true in Christ and in believers. Christ manifested love that He used as the standard for this commandment. The darkness [lack of God's life being manifested] is passing away. The true light [God's life being manifested or made plain] is already shining. When Christ walked the earth, He was the light of the world and shone. It is shining in those believers who rest in Christ so that God's life is manifested through their love for other believers.

2:9 The believer who claims to manifest God's life [light] but hates is in darkness at that moment. *Miseō* is a milder form of hate, a lack of fondness for another, distinct from aggressive hatred. This is not an unbeliever but a believer who is failing to show God's life by love. The doctrine of men, not Scripture, thinks that a believer must always manifest the results of God's saving work. This very idea contradicts the truth and is related to the denial of the sin nature in 1:8 and of acts of sin in 1:10.

2:10 The believer who is loving his brother, at that point in time, is resting comfortably in the light. He is manifesting God's life. He is doing so comfortably. An interesting addition to the idea of love is given here. When the believer is living this way, there is nothing in his life that would cause another believer to stumble. A disregard for other believers [as in hate- *miseō*], the carelessness in our lives for how our actions and choices will affect other believers is an

expression of darkness and is not love. Such actions are the basis of stumbling other believers.

2:11 The believer who is hating his brother, at that point in time, is not manifesting God's life in love. He walks about in darkness and does not know where he is going. He goes about in darkness and he himself stumbles as well as becoming a cause of stumbling to others, for he does not know where he goes. The believer who is rightly related to his position in Christ is led by the Spirit so that the Spirit makes it clear where he should go. For this reason, he is not under law for law could never be a guide for his life in the manner which the Spirit is (Galatians 5:18).

Children, Young Men, and Fathers

In the following verses, John views his audience at different levels of maturity. He places Fathers in the middle as the peak. These are not designations of physical ages within the Church but spiritual ages. Little children are spiritually young believers whether 4 or 80. The same could be said of each group. Each group has a certain degree of knowledge and some have needs. Bible students do not agree with this distinction. Some students understand John to be addressing all believers under three designations. Morris represents this view, "But as all the qualities ought to be found in all believes it is best to regard the division as a stylistic device, adding emphasis."¹⁵ He then quotes C.H. Dodd who writes, "All Christians are (by grace, not nature) children in innocence and dependence on the heavenly Father, young men in strength, and fathers in experience." Some see "children" as referring to all believers and "these readers fall into two, not three, different groups: those who may be

¹⁵ Leon Morris, *New Bible Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994) p. 1401.

described as ‘young men’ and those who may be described as ‘father’”.¹⁶ The challenge is that John uses the first word translated “little children” six times in 1 John and nearly always as a term of endearment for all believers (e.g. 2:1; 3:18). (See notes on 2:1) Jesus used it for all eleven of His believing disciples (Jh. 13:33). However, in 2:14 John switches to *paidia*, which also refers to young children but adds the element that they are young learners. John seems to consider the young learners (*paidia*) as having problems with the presence of antichrists that have left their assemblies (2:18) and are in danger of being led astray regarding the character of those individuals (3:7). For this reason, I understand three divisions, with John’s use of *teknia* in the first group intended to remind them that they are indeed God’s little born ones.

2:12 The little born ones know they have their sins forgiven because of the person of Jesus Christ. A basic fact known to young believers is the forgiveness of their sins. The forgiveness of sins is held out as a promise we receive when we believe the gospel (Acts 10:43; 13:38). The effect of the antichrists' teaching was to minimize sin, either as something about which nothing could be done or that it didn't matter. Sin does matter. Christ appeared to take away sin (3:5). John was writing that we don't sin (2:1). These young believers know their sins were sent away because of who Christ is and what He has done. That this is what they know is significant for unbelievers have no such knowledge, however, the immaturity has not advanced beyond this vital truth.

¹⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) p. 88.

2:13 The Fathers experientially know Him–Christ—who was from a beginning. The designation “Him who was from a beginning” is how John introduced Jesus Christ in 1:1. The fathers have reached a place of maturity which involves an experiential knowledge of their Savior. Paul desired this for himself, “to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings while being conformed to His death;”¹⁷ (Php. 3:10). Again, this is not simply knowledge about Him, gained by study. It will never contradict such knowledge. This knowledge is the very experience of those truths concerning Christ, truths revealed in God's Word. Christ suffers now with His body (cp Php. 3:10; Acts 9:5). We too can suffer with other believers. Many believers never come to the place of really knowing their Savior. Husbands and wives should know each other as years of marriage pass. They should know their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, wishes and fears. So we should come to know our Savior. It would be a sad marriage if spouses knew each other in the shallow degree that many believers know their Savior.

The young men are at the intermediate level of maturity. They have overcome or been victorious in their experience over the wicked one (i.e. Satan). They have reached the place of maturity in which they know how to put on the Armor of God and do so when necessary (Ephesians 6:10ff). As a result, they have become victorious.

¹⁷ This is what Paul desired in his Christian life. He wished to experientially know Christ. He wanted to experience the power that raised him as part of daily living. He wanted to share in Christ's present sufferings, not His cross-suffering, but His sufferings with His body the Church. All this happens while enjoying the effects of His death that frees us from the sin nature's dominion (Rom. 6:10-13).

“Victorious” is a perfect tense, meaning that they have had victory and continue to do so in an iterative sense or as “recurrent intervals.”¹⁸ Satan is only one of three enemies, the others being the sin nature and the world. But before one can put on the armor, one must receive strength in his position in Christ (Eph. 6:10). Therefore, they are also having victory over the sin nature. These have learned to have freedom from their sin nature and victory over Satan.

2:14 In 12 and 13, John used the present tense verb “I am writing.” He switches to the aorist tense in 14. He is not referring to a previous letter but to what he has just written. He expands what was said in two cases: children and young men.

This word translated “little children” is a step up from that used in 12. Here it is *paidia*, a young learner, perhaps like a preschooler or kindergartner. While this may add a fourth group, it is more likely that John is designating the first group by their learning and growth rather than their state as born ones. In addition to knowing their sins are forgiven, they know the Father. In their experience, the Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are God’s children and He cries out “Abba Father” (Roman 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Young believers naturally cry out to their Father. When they pray, “Dear Father ...”

¹⁸ H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Toronto, Ont.: Macmillan, 1955) p. 203.

Children, Young Men, and Fathers

2:14 John adds nothing about the fathers that he did not say in 13. Nothing else can be said. They have matured to such a point that their life is best summarized as those who experientially know Him. This is not to say that they have reached perfection, or are without sin, and have no areas in which to grow. Rather it describes them in such a way that they have come to a very important point in their spiritual growth— they know Him. Their growth now would involve even greater consistency in their daily lives. We may note that the presence of John's letter indicates that the fathers have not stepped up to help the other believers as they should, but John does not state this, so it is my conjecture.

John addresses the young men again. They are strong. The adjective *ischuos* describes one who has been endowed with strength that strength originates elsewhere.¹⁹ We receive this endowment of power when we abide in our position in Christ. We are strengthened by the grace in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1). We are made strong in the Lord to put on the armor (Eph. 6:10). We are visibly mighty [display of strength] for all things in the one strengthening us (Php. 4:18). Therefore, these have reached a place of maturity in which they know how to rest in their position in Christ so that they experience this endowment of strength.

The Word of God is also at ease or comfortable in the young men. These individuals have matured so that they no longer wrestle with God's Word. Believers who resist the plain teaching of Scripture and view God's Word as too deep are immature or carnal, able only to drink milk (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Many twist the Scriptures to fit their preconceived ideas,

¹⁹ Samuel Green, *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (New York: Fleming H. Revel, nd) p.384.

unable to accept the plain statement of Scripture. For example, Scripture states that we are not under law (Rom. 6:14-15). However, some cannot imagine God setting aside the Law (Heb. 7:18) and attempt to interpret Paul's words in a manner that upholds the law as a standard for Christian living. In this very letter, many refuse to consider that a believer might walk in darkness. They view salvation as always displaying God's work, yet John is very concerned that believers might not manifest God's life in all situations. We may wonder how believers reach this place of maturity. I suggest that they began by abiding or being at ease in their Savior (Jh. 15:7). They appreciate and rest in who God says they are in Christ. By doing so, Christ's words are also at ease (abide) in them (Jh. 15:7). When He gave a new command to love others as He loved them, they do not make it the commands of the law. They treat it with the new standard set by Christ. They appreciate His words about their new relationship to the Spirit, to the Father, and to Christ (cp Jh. 14:17-20). They do not attempt to fit it into a law framework. They do not attempt to fit it into the world's view of life. John implies that they practice what they know from God's Word. To know it but not live it is the opposite of it abiding in us. The Word would not be comfortable if they knew what it taught and yet were not practicing. They are again described as having victory over the evil one— Satan.

2:15 While John praises the young men for their strength, attitude toward God's Word, and overcoming Satan, they struggle with the world system. They are not to love the world. "Do not love" is a present imperative and can be translated as "Stop loving" or "don't begin to love." The translation depends upon whether or not one is loving the world.

The world system is a subtle enemy. It surrounds us. It sets the standards, goals, aspirations, and means for everyone in the world. The world system developed after Abel's death (Lk. 11:50-51). The world system developed when Cain went out from God's presence. It consists of the human development of urbanization, polygamy, commercializing livestock, music, industrialization, emphasis on feminine beauty,²⁰ and violent vengeance (Gen. 4:17-24). These form appeals to everyone. Believers are not immune to the world's appeals. The world even sets the standards and methods for accomplishing God's purposes (1 Cor. 1:20-21). God does not use these methods nor does He want us to do so, but many use them. The world pervades and wraps many of us Christians in its things and methods. Sadly we do not know it nor do we think there is anything wrong with it.

The world distracts us with its things. If we love the world, we are not loving the Father (2:15). Jesus said that a person cannot serve two masters, for they will hate one and love the other (Lk. 16:13). Likewise, a believer will either love the world or love God. James warns us that if we try to be the world's friend, we make ourselves God's enemies (Jas. 4:4). This love (*agapaō*) comprises Jesus's new command (Jh. 13:34). This love sacrifices for the best of another. To love the world is to sacrifice one's self for that system. We may sacrifice to acquire its things or to make it better. Many believers engage in politics, which are part of the world system, in an attempt to fix the world or make it better.

²⁰ We should pay attention to a daughter listed as it is rare. Her name Naamah means "beauty." This demonstrates the world's value for women.

2:16 The things in the world involve cravings or lusts for the flesh, for the eyes, and the empty boast related to this life. Our flesh craves comfort. It wants whatever makes it feel good. In Paul's list of the works of the flesh, we find works that obviously involve natural cravings (Gal. 5:19-21). The fall twisted God-given desires. The first three works twist the God-given desire for sex. It twists our God-given desire for Him by replacing Him with idols and things. God created us with a need to maintain our self-integrity but our fallen nature does this with anger, arguing, zeal, and division. God created us with a need to eat and the flesh pushes us to indulgence or drunkenness. We have a created need for community and the flesh turns that into riotous partying. The world system draws out those cravings in socially acceptable forms. The world assures us that we're OK to look out for ourselves and fulfill our needs. It wants us to fulfill them in the twisted versions of those God-given desires. It offers ways of doing this that make us more a part of that system. For example, riotous partying fulfills our need for community but by it, the world unites people to engage in mindless acts, for example, rioters burning businesses and cars in their neighborhoods. How does that benefit them? Do not love the world with its plan for using our flesh for its purposes.

The world system appeals to cravings for our eyes. We use our eyes to evaluate things all the time: fruit and bread for color or mold, automobiles based on paint, scratches, and how shiny or clean it is, ourselves and others by physique, hairstyle, clothing, and skin tone. James warned us against showing favoritism to someone dressed in fine clothing and adorned with jewelry who enters our church but withhold kindness from a person who enters but is noticeably poor and dressed in dirty clothes (Jas. 2:1-4). Our culture, which is part of this world system, trains us on how

to respond to these people. Yet there is not one single culture but cultures for everyone. One culture may train us to treat the rich man with contempt and unite with the poor. Loving the world may mean we are concerned with the externals of how we or things look.

The world system appeals to our desire for bragging rights. “The boastful pride” translates the noun *aladzoneia*, the arrogant, often false claims of a salesman for his product, “It will cure all diseases.” The specific boast from the world involves this life, what John terms *bios*, this physical life. The world parades the success of others before us and lures us into chasing whatever we think will allow us to also make such great, although empty, boasts. We’re trying to keep up with the neighbors. We want people to be impressed by what we have accomplished, acquired, or where we are going. John’s choice of the word for “boast” means that none of these things have any content worthy of such a boast.

God wants us to love other believers. The young men are allowing the world system to distract their love. My illustrations have missed one aspect of this distraction. The world also tells us how it thinks we should serve God. Its religions involve the cravings of our flesh and it tempts us to do the same. Its religions concern themselves with external form and beauty and tempt us to serve God in this way. Its religions arrogantly boast about what it accomplishes and drive us to do the same: how many adherents/converts it has, how much wealth it amasses, and how much literature it dispenses. Rather, we should focus on meeting the needs of other believers, and in this way, we love God.

2:14 cont. God wants us to love other believers. The young men are allowing the world system to distract their love. My illustrations have missed one aspect of this distraction. The world also tells us how it thinks we should serve God. Its religions involve the craving of our flesh and it tempts us to do the same. Its religions concern themselves with external form and beauty and tempt us to serve God in this way. Its religions arrogantly boast about what it accomplishes and drive us to do the same: how many adherents/converts it has, how much wealth it amasses, and how much literature it dispenses. Rather, we should focus on meeting the needs of other believers, and in this way, we love God.

2:15-17 cont. This love [*agape*] is sacrificial and desires the best for the object loved, therefore, this love is not merely a love to have but also a love to improve, a love to fix the world. This is common in our modern Christianity, with so many involved in politics attempting to improve this world through government. Many spend themselves trying to address the world's social ills: crime, addictions, abuse, hunger, and homelessness. As God places individuals with such needs in our paths, we have an opportunity to do good to such people (Gal. 6:10). Having encouraged us to do so, Paul reminds us that we are especially to do this for believers or those who are of the family (household) of the Faith. However, many see an immediate problem in front of them, and rather than addressing that one individual's problem, they attempt a larger-scale systemic solution. This goes beyond the Biblical call and distracts us from God's command to love other believers. Those pressing for systemic change are loving the system and the things in that system. To love that system means the love for the Father is not in them.

2:17 This world and its cravings are passing away [present tense]. Right now, this system is changing and breaking down. About the time we catch up to a trend, the trend changes and we hustle to catch up. We waste our time. Paul reminds us that we can make use of the world but we should keep in mind that the external scenery of the world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). Paul uses the noun *schēma* for the outer appearance. The ESV and NIV attempt to clarify this with “present form.” Both Paul and John indicate that what we see today will not be the scenery we will see in a short time. The world at its base design does not change, but how it presents that form does, always shifting its outer appearance.

So, John reminds us that this whole system will come to an end. However, he encourages us that the one who does God’s will can be at ease [*menō*] into the age. Though some translations have “live,” the verb *menō* has the idea of remaining at ease or being comfortable in a location. While the world constantly changes, falls apart, and moves closer to its end, the believer who does God’s will can be at ease rather than pained or exasperated by this system’s constant change. God’s will has been expressed as love for one’s brother in Christ (2:10). Loving other believers does not go out of style. It is always appropriate even while the world around us remains in flux. If we focus on loving believers rather than the system, as the age progresses, we can remain at ease.

2:18 John addresses the teachable young believers [*paidia*] to remind them that it is the last hour. We have been in this last hour through the whole history of the Church. They had heard that antichrist is coming but many had already arrived or come to be. The words “have appeared” [NASB] translate a perfect tense of the verb *ginomai*: to come to be. These

antichrists have come to be and remain at the time John writes. This was how a believer can know it is the last hour.

This is the only text with the expression “last hour.” Our text is anarthrous speaking of the quality of a last hour. It is what we should expect of a last hour. Jesus spoke of the last day in which He would resurrect those whom the Father has given Him, who believe in Him and who received Him by faith (eating and drinking) (Jh. 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24). This is not the time of which John writes. Those who refused Jesus’ words will be judged by His words in the last day (Jh. 12:48). This does not appear to be the time of which John writes. Paul warned Timothy that difficult or violent times would come in a last kind of days (2 Tim. 3:1). In the following verses, Paul describes the kind of people Timothy would face. Peter and Jude tell us about last days when mockers will mock any notion that God will judge. They do this because of their own lusts, wanting something unrighteous so badly that they mock God’s judgment to suggest that God will do nothing about their unrighteousness (2 Pet. 3:3; Jd. 18). Paul also alerted Timothy to latter times in which believers would depart from the faith (God’s promises that comprise our Christian life)(1 Tim. 4:1). They will turn to a version of the Christian life consisting of abstention from marriage and certain foods, and disciplines of the body that are of little profit, in contrast, to a genuine grace-oriented, God-honoring (godliness) way of life (4:2-3, 7-8). The last days mentioned in 2 Timothy, 1 Peter, and Jude appear to agree with the last kind of hour about which John writes. The presence of the antichrists seems to agree with mockers and those who dismiss the issues regarding their unrighteous conduct.

The noun antichrist could mean one opposed to Christ or one trying to replace Christ. Many Christians have

looked for a single individual who will rule the world in opposition to God: the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3), the prince who makes a seven-year treaty, and will be or cause the abomination that makes the Holiest place desolate (Dan. 9:26-27). He is the willful king (Dan. 11:36), the beast who stands up out of the sea of mankind, receives worship from the world, and speaks arrogantly against God (Rev. 13:1-8). He is a real individual who will come. But he does not come until after the body of Christ departs earth and gathers to the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1-3). Since he does not come while the Church is still present on earth, the presence of antichrists cannot refer to this man.

Antichrist refers to anyone who exists today who opposes the Biblical identity of Christ (definition two in the last paragraph). "Christ" is an English pronunciation of the Greek *Christos* and means "anointed one." The Greek *Christos* translates the Hebrew *Messiah* which also means "anointed one." Many bore the title "anointed one"—such as priests (Lev. 4:3), and even king Saul (1 Sam. 24:6). Yet the Hebrew Scriptures anticipated a specific anointed one who is both God, man, king, priest, and savior (Ps. 45:1-7; Ps. 2:2-7; Mic. 4:1-5; 1 Sam. 2:10).

God changed the emphasis of the title "Christ." In Acts 2:36 on the day of Pentecost, Peter full of the Holy Spirit spoke a new sense regarding this anointed one. Peter stated that Jesus who you killed, God raised and exalted high to God's right-hand (Acts 2:23, 32-33). So God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ (2:36). He was Lord and Christ during His earthly ministry in fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. God made Him Lord and Christ in a new sense at the point of His resurrection and exaltation. His Lordship is now with reference to Church. He is anointed as the one who is resurrected and exalted to God's right-hand. This latter

status is what antichrists oppose. This is seen when they deny His deity, that He is God (1 Jh. 2:22-23) and by denying that He is coming in flesh (1 Jh. 4:2-3). Donald Burdick recognizes the deity side of Christ, writing, "It is clear that the two designations are parallel and thus that the term Χριστός is used to refer to the deity of Jesus, rather than His Messiahship in the Old Testament sense of the term."²¹ So antichrists deny both the deity of Christ and His bodily resurrected existence. They replaced Christ. This means that Christians have faced myriads of antichrists throughout history.

2:19 The problem for John's readers is that these antichrists had been in the church or churches. They left the church because they were never genuinely part of the assembly of believers. They were unbelievers sitting among believers pretending at being part of the group. It appears that they had shared their views in the church so the young believers should have been able to identify them as unbelievers. They could hear that they were not the same as the rest of the assembly. Their departure was good for the young believers because it helped them recognize that these people do not only sound different, they are different; they are not believers. However, their departure created a problem in the church, troubling some of the believers. It should not have troubled them, but when unbelievers sit in our assemblies for a length of time, they become friends, and even though we may identify problems in what they believe, if they leave, we may experience sadness or trouble in our soul. Therefore, John will explain why they were different to remind them that they are gone for a reason.

²¹ Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 201.

The problem of the antichrists

2:20 The problem of the antichrists is solved in part by the presence of the believer's anointing. The noun "anointing" [*charisma*] has the *-ma* ending, which indicates the result of an action. The verb *chriō* means to anoint or smear upon. In the Old Testament, individuals approached people or items and smeared or poured oil upon them, so that the item or person was then anointed. In the case of some individuals, the physical act of anointing was accompanied by the spiritual act of the Spirit coming upon them, as with Saul and David (1 Sam. 10:1, 6; 16:12-13). Jesus was Christ because the Spirit came upon Him, that is, the Spirit anointed Him following His baptism (Jh. 1:32-33; Lk. 4:18). God has also anointed all New Testament believers by giving us the downpayment that is the Spirit in our hearts (1 Cor. 1:21-22). In the Old Testament, the anointing of the Spirit involved the Spirit coming upon individuals to enable them for a specific task as a king, a judge, a prophet, an artisan. In the present age, the Spirit anoints us by indwelling us.

The Spirit does many works in this present age. He convinces individuals of their need for salvation to prepare them for hearing the good news (Jh. 16:7-11). When people believe in Jesus Christ the Spirit baptizes or puts believers into Christ, into His body (Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:13). He also regenerates or causes a new birth. In that new birth, He indwells us and He also joins us to the Father and the Son so that they also indwell us (Tit. 3:5; 1 Jh. 5:1, 11-12; 3:9). By His indwelling, the Spirit teaches, guides, fills, puts to death the practices of our bodies, makes alive our mortal bodies, intercedes, produces fruit, and grieves (1 Jh. 2:27; Gal. 5:28; Jh. 16:13; Eph. 5:18; Rm. 8:13-16, 11; 6:23; 8:26; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:30). Each of these works are vital to Christian living

and God's glory or reputation through our lives. Our anointing is from the Holy One, a reference to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ sent the Spirit (Jh. 14:15; 15:26).

John focuses on the Spirit's work of teaching. For this reason, John tells the young believers [*paidia*] "You know all things." The adjective *pas* for "all" is always "all" but that "all" is defined by context. In this context, the "all things" involve the truths which the antichrists have denied. Christ gave teachers among the gifts for the body (Rom. 12:6-7; Eph. 4:8, 11). If the Spirit as our anointing teaches us all things, why did Christ give teachers? When Paul spoke God's truth, the Spirit put together the words to communicate that truth (1 Cor. 2:13). Unsaved (soulish/natural) people do not accept these things because the Spirit is necessary to evaluate those truths and soulish people do not have the Spirit (Jd. 19). Soulsh people reinterpret Scriptures that reveal God's design and plans for us in a way that fits their thinking. The fleshly believer cannot handle the deeper truths that reveal God's wisdom for believers (1 Cor. 3:1; 2:9). The fleshly believer wishes to serve God and live a "Christian" life by his own standards and God's designs do not fit in that thinking. Often, fleshly believers resort to portions of Scripture that do not explain God's plans for believers today but were His plans for others, such as Israel living by the Law. The Spiritual believer is characterized by the Spirit's work. They welcome these truths about God's plans for us, truths taught by the Spirit. The spiritual individual "appraises" [NASB] or evaluates these things, these plans of God and they do so by the work of the Spirit. They see value in these truths. The Spirit does not cause them to find messages written between the lines. He gives such believers the ability to appreciate God's plainly revealed words, to recognize that those truths are for us and that they make a massive difference in our lives.

In 1 John 2:20 and 27, the Spirit teaches believers so even these young believers “know all things.” John uses *oida* to describe them as having objective knowledge. Sadly, many churches do not teach new believers much. Many young believers know very little about the Biblical Jesus and churches do very little to correct this problem. As a result, too many believers do not “know all things.” The Spirit does not infuse believers with a whole bunch of new truth at the moment they believe in Christ. That’s why Paul and the other apostles spent so much time teaching new believers, even teaching them daily. However, their knowing all things rests on their anointing, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He reminds them of what they have been taught. Even if they are not mature enough to discern all the reasons false teachers such as the antichrists are in error, the Spirit takes the correct truth the believer knows and helps them see the contrast: this is the truth and this looks very different.

2:21 John has not had to write to these Churches because they don’t know the Truth. They know the Truth. Whether through John or another teacher, these young believers objectively know how to allow God to work and how to keep from letting their sinful natures get in the way, often by its own efforts. In this immediate context, the Truth involves the error of the antichrists who deny the deity of Christ/Jesus. The Truth affirms that Jesus Christ is one God with the Father. Further, John ties our possession of eternal life to the Son’s deity. They know the Truth sufficiently to recognize that the lies of the antichrists are inconsistent and cannot have risen from [ek] the Truth.

2:22 John identifies the liars who have agitated the young believers and others in these churches. The liar denies that Jesus is the Christ. John does not use “Christ” with its Old Testament emphasis of Israel’s anointed king who is both

God and man. He uses Christ with the New Testament emphasis that Jesus is risen and glorified. In Acts 2:36, Peter stated that God had made the Jesus whom Israel had crucified Lord and Christ. "Made" is in the aorist tense, so that after they crucified Jesus, God then made Him Christ in this new sense that emphasizes the resurrection. Peter has already stated this differently in Acts 2:32-33 that God raised this Jesus and exalted Him to His right hand. Jesus is Israel's king but is not yet sitting on His throne. This is not as important to the New Testament believer as His resurrected and exalted identity. We are raised in Christ, not in Israel's King (Rom. 6:4-5; Col. 1:12-13). He is our Lord, not our King (Rom. 1:4; 4:24; Eph. 3:1). Never once do the New Testament writers refer to Jesus as King of the Church. He is our life as the one who is raised, not as Israel's King (Col. 3:4; 1 Jh. 5:11). Therefore, the antichrists lie by denying that Jesus is resurrected and exalted. John expands on this in 4:1-4 and 2 John 7. Jehovah's Witnesses are a cult that denies that Jesus is bodily raised from the dead. They assert that His body disappeared or dissolved but not that He rose in the very body, exists in the body now, and will return in that body.

The antichrists or at least some antichrists denied the Father and the Son.

2:23 They deny the Father and the Son by denying the Son. John does not call the Son Jesus. Son is His divine title of equality with the Father. This is missed by many modern readers because rather than examining the texts that articulate His being the Son they read "son" in the same sense we use it in our culture. When Jesus called Himself the Son of God, the Jews knew He meant that He is God (Jh. 10:30-31, 33, 36). In 1 John, the Son demonstrates eternal life (1:1-3). He is how we possess eternal life (5:11). If the Son is not God, He cannot give eternal life and we cannot have

eternal life by His indwelling us. He and the Father are the ONE TRUE GOD (Jh. 17:3; 1 Jh. 5:20). The Spirit is also the ONE TRUE GOD, but the antichrists were not talking about the Spirit. To deny one person of the Trinity is to deny the whole Trinity. The Father does not exist apart from the Son, nor the Son apart from the Father. They are one essence, as Jesus said, "I and the Father are one thing (Jh. 10:30). Since some of the antichrists denied that this Jesus is the Son, they also denied the Father.

One cannot have the Father without the Son. If one denies the Son's deity, he also denies the Father and does not have the Father. The one who agrees (confesses) regarding the Son, this one also has the Father. In 3:9, we have the Father's seed and in 5:1, we are born from the Father. In Ephesians 4:6, the Father is **in** all believers. Yet none of this is true if Jesus is not the Son, meaning He is the same God equal with the Father. Christian cults such as the Mormons deny the absolute equality of the Father and Son and that they are one God. They insist they are children of God but cannot be because they cannot have the Father if they deny the Son. They are a modern example of antichrists.

Those who agree [confess] about the Son have the Father. To confess the Son is to agree that He is fully God and equal with the Father. To agree that the Son is fully God means there was never a time the Son did not exist. He is not the progeny of God. His humanity was generated in Mary by an act of the Spirit, but the Son was never generated. He is eternal.

The problem of the antichrists cont.

2:24 Having corrected or helped the young believers think correctly about the antichrists who left their assemblies, John charges them to let abide in them what they heard from a beginning. The Word of God was at ease (abides) in the young men (2:14). They were not wrestling with these truths and they were living up to those truths. When the antichrists left, the young men were not addled by it. However, the young believers were. If they let abide in them what they heard, they would abide in the Son and the Father. In 2:27, John reminds the young believers that the Spirit taught them to abide in Him, that is, in Christ. In 3:24, John specifies two points of His command: to believe in the name of His Son and to love one another. “The term name (ὄνομα) is used in Scripture to express the nature and character of the person to whom the name belongs.”²² So, to believe in His name is to believe in who He is. Faith in Christ begins with the good news that He died for our sins and rose again. Once one has believed in Jesus Christ for this, God has still more promises for the believer related to who Jesus Christ is. Jesus promised that He would abide in the one who abides in Him (Jh. 15:4). This truth is what they heard from the beginning of their Christian experience. Who believers are in Christ and how we are to relate to it is the heartbeat of the Christian life.

Just as Jesus promised to abide in those who abide in Him, so believers will abide in the Son and in the Father if this truth abides in them. The believer’s status in both the Father and the Son is a basis for unity (Jh. 17:21; Col. 2:2 in the Byzantine text type). This abiding in both the Father and the Son addresses the issue of loving one another as He loved

²² Burdick, op cit, p. 173.

us. Contrary to the antichrists who look out for themselves, those who abide in both the Father and Son look out for each other. They see one another as united in the Father and Son and so treat each other accordingly.

2:25 When Jesus called His disciples to abide in Him, He indicated that He would abide in them (and so noted in the previous notes)(Jh. 15:4). Our being in Christ is not the same relationship as Christ being in us. Our being in Christ is a result of the Father logically crediting us to be in Christ Jesus and to share in His various works such as dying to the sin nature, being buried, rising out from dead ones, being made alive, and sitting above in the heavenlies (cp. Rom. 6:3-5; Eph. 2:5-6). It is credited to us. However, Christ in us is how God gives us eternal life (1 Jh. 5:11-12), and the Father being in us is how we are God's children (3:9-10). These two truths work together. When we abide in Him, He abides in us. We cannot access, lay hold of, or in any other way use eternal life apart from our mentally relating to who we are in Christ. We have eternal life down here on earth (for those still living) but we can only access it as we abide above in Him. Yet apart from having eternal life, setting our minds to who we are above in Christ would have very little impact on our practical living. Therefore, God's promise of eternal life is not mere possession but the exercise of eternal life. The exercise of eternal life is seen in acts of love which are our chief form of righteous activity (3:10). Antichrists do not have eternal life because they do not believe in the Christ of Scripture. Antichrists do not have a standing in Christ to which they can relate. Only believers in Jesus Christ have a standing in Christ and eternal life. John is reminding the young believers that they have something infinitely superior to anything the antichrists might promote.

2:26 John has written to these young believers regarding those who are trying to deceive them. The antichrists were not innocently gathering with the believers. They had a goal. They intended to lead these believers astray. They might confuse these young believers. They wish to focus them on a religious lifestyle as opposed to God's plan for freedom, service, and love. As throughout all of the Church's two thousand year history, religious groups target believers. They may use similar language but subtly alter what they think about Christ, the Father, eternal life, and sin. Nearly all such groups focus believers on duty which is the base idea of the Greek word for religion. Christianity is not a duty but a relationship to God and His work in us. Just as John has done, it is sometimes necessary to point out the contrasts between those who lead believers astray and God's gracious work with us.

2:27 While John has been pointing out errors and comparing them with truth, he assures the young believers that the Anointing they have received from the Father teaches them. The Anointing is the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22). The Spirit abides at ease in them. He is the promised teacher from Christ (Jh. 14:26). Therefore, they don't need anyone to teach them. John or whoever taught them at the beginning of their Christian experience explained who Jesus is. When the truth was presented accurately, the Spirit causes them to evaluate all these things and recognize the value of the things God has prepared for those who are loving Him (1 Cor. 2:9, 14). Therefore, they have been Spirit-taught and don't really need John to be teaching them this again. John does not state that the Spirit teaches them everything, but "about all things." "About" represents the Greek preposition *peri* meaning generally around rather than specifically. Sometimes "all" is simply "all" but context often narrows

and defines “all.” This context involves the details about Christ’s identity, who believers are in Christ, and that we have eternal life. The Spirit makes the value of these truths real to believers. The Spirit is true and the Spirit is not a lie or a liar. The Spirit taught them to abide or be at ease in Him. “Him” may refer to the Spirit Himself or it may refer to Christ. Because we are chiefly called to abide in Christ, Christ would seem to be the best object of the pronoun. The Spirit teaches believers to abide in Christ. He leads us to our life in Christ (Rm. 8:2; Gal. 5:16, 18). He calls us upward to our position in Christ (Php. 3:13).

2:28 Because the Spirit teaches us to abide in Christ, John calls these believers to abide in Christ (Him). One objective to abiding is having boldness whenever He (Christ) may appear rather than being ashamed in His presence (coming). This brings up the question of whether a believer will be ashamed when Jesus appears. Many have used such statements to motivate believers to action, particularly to the action that the one speaking wishes for. In 4:17-18, John tells us that perfect or mature love throws fear outside. Fear involves punishment. Christ has borne our punishment and those who are mature know that is not a concern. As He (Christ) is, so are we in the world. Christ will judge the world but in Him, we are free of condemnation. However, immature believers worry about the future. They are uncertain as to how they will stand or appear before our Lord when He appears. This is especially true when they have been influenced by the errors of the antichrists. While John could simply tell them that they will not come into judgment, and he will shortly, God’s solution is to call believers to abide in Christ. Rather than tell them, “Don’t worry about it.” John tells them to abide in Christ. By abiding, believers gain experience and mature. With maturity, comes a more mature love. With more maturity

comes peace regarding our future. The way to do away with fear and shame is to encourage believers to rest at ease in who God says they are in Christ.

Some teachers suggest that certain believers will be ashamed at Christ's coming. Some think this shame will last for a long time and others for a brief time. Paul told the Thessalonians that they would appear before the Father holy and without blame (1 Thess. 3:13). Therefore, this shame cannot last very long as the Son presents us before the Father upon our arrival in heaven. He also told them that whether we are awake or asleep, we will all live together with Him (1 Thess. 5:9-10). In that text, the word "sleep" is not the verb *koimaō* in 4:13 but the verb *ketheudō* which Paul uses negatively of a lax attitude and lifestyle of those who belong to the night (4:7). Though believers may live like the unsaved at times, Paul assured the Thessalonians that we will altogether [ἅμα] still live closely [σὺν] with Him [ἅμα σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν]. However, just as Christians often ask unbelievers how many good works one has to do to earn a righteous standing with God or how many sins it takes to overrule our good works, we ask, how much a believer must do to avoid shame? Reading the New Testament epistles we would find few believers who we would think should be free of shame. Again, I understand John to be addressing the fear problem immature believers have, a problem God addresses by calling them to mature in love and this happens in connection with abiding in Christ.

The problem of Antichrists cont.

2:29 If we might know that He (God the Father or perhaps Christ) is righteous, we know in our experience that everyone who is doing righteousness (largely acts of love) has been (perfect tense) born from Him (God). This is written as a third-class condition which is probable but not certain. The young believers may not yet know this objectively but have the potential to do so. Their possible lack of knowledge in this area likely affected their struggle when the antichrists left their group. If they objectively knew the connection between God's righteousness and our practical righteousness they would have identified a problem in the antichrists' behavior. Believers have righteousness in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), but John is talking about doing righteousness. In 3:10, John explains "not doing righteousness" as "not loving His brother." This distinguishes God's children from the devil's children. The antichrists were devoid of this love, for this love is produced by the Spirit. The Spirit's work in believers causes us to know in our experience that we have been born from Him. In 5:1, John will state that our birth is from the Father and for this reason, I think that the subject of "He is righteous" in the first clause of this sentence refers to the Father.

The believer's future affects our conduct.

3:1 John points believers to look at the unique sort of love the Father has given to us. It is unique because God has called us His children. He not only calls us His children but we are His children. He just stated that we are born from Him and He will repeat this in 5:1. We are His children by birth, the new birth. We are not His children by adoption. Adoption has to do with outstanding as sons.

Because we are God's children, the world does not experientially know us. They don't get us, cannot

comprehend the effects of the new birth on individuals. We have been born from above not from this world below (Jh. 3:3). The world did not know God (Jh. 7:28; 15:21; 16:3; 17:25). They did not know the Son (Jh. 8:19, 55; 16:3). They do not know God's children. Our attitude and nature are foreign to the world. God's kind of love demonstrated to others through us is foreign to a world that does not know unselfish love.

3:2 Restating the fact that we are God's children, John points out an obvious problem, namely that it is not yet plainly visible what we will be. The verb "plainly visible" or "appeared" is passive, meaning it has not yet been caused to be visible. This is because our Lord has not yet come for us. "What we will be" refers to our future as God's children. We see ourselves in bodies where the sinful nature still exists. We struggle with emotions that feel contrary to what God is doing and has called us to do. However, we look forward to a day when the Son will appear for us. When the Son appears, we will be like Him. We will see Him even as He is. This indicates that those who have died are in the presence of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8) but in some way have not seen Him truly of fully as He is. He may be veiled in His and the Father's glory so that He is not seen as we would think of seeing Him. When Stephen looked into heaven, he saw God's glory and Jesus standing "out from the right of God." (ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ) (Acts 7:55, 56). Jesus sits **in** the right of God (Heb. 1:3). It appears that Jesus had to step out from that glory so that Stephen could see Him distinct from the Father. So, at the Rapture of the Church, Christ will come in the air for us and when we are gathered to Him, we will finally see Him as He is. We become like Him because He will change our humble bodies to be like His body of glory (Php. 3:20-21). We do not become deities or even little deities. We become like His glorified humanity.

3:3 Seeing Him as He is and being made like Him is our hope. Our hope is the completion of our salvation not just living forever. Everyone who has this hope on themselves purifies themselves like He (Christ) is pure. The appearing of Christ for us is not a pie-in-the-sky hope or an impractical hope, but a hope that moves us to purify ourselves. It isn't purity of a normal human sort, but a purity that is like Christ's. John addresses purity in the next verse where he speaks of sin and the sin nature. Peter stated that we can have a proper love for one another when we purify our souls by obeying the Truth, that is, having freedom from the sin nature's dominion (1 Pet. 1:22). James called his readers to purify themselves from the pursuit of the world's appeals that produced fights and severe harshness between believers (Jas. 4:8). Paul wished for believers to be a **pure** virgin presented to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2, 3). This pure virgin does not join with unbelievers in trying to accomplish God's purposes nor gives attention to their errant gospel and spirit even though their Jesus may appear similar to ours. Paul had demonstrated this purity when he was with the Corinthians and they could see that he did not depend upon or join hands with unbelievers in carrying out His God-given work (2 Cor. 6:6). Jesus did not need for anyone to testify about Him on His behalf for He knew the faulty and mixed motives in all people (Jh. 2:24-25).

This matter of purity addresses their issue with the antichrists. They didn't need to worry about the antichrists leaving. The antichrists had nothing to offer them. The antichrist could not help them for the antichrists could only operate from their sinful natures-they were not children of God-, under the direction of Satan, and by the standards of the world system. John's readers needed none of these things. Like Christ, they could pursue God's purpose without the help of the unsaved.

3:4 The matter of purity leads to the matter of sin. John already addressed the denial of the presence of sin and the denial of sinning in 1:8, 10. Here, he points out that one who is doing (present participle) the sin is doing the lawlessness. The Greek expression *πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν* “everyone doing the sin” is identical to the words of Jesus in John 8:34. Jesus’ words are about enslavement to the sin nature. In most New Testament texts, when the word “sin” [*ἁμαρτία*] occurs in the singular and has the definite article it refers to man’s sin nature (e.g. Rom. 5:12; 6:1, 11, 23). So in the present text, John is not speaking of sin in general terms but specifically the issue of the sin nature and how it affects believers as well as the conduct promoted by the antichrists.

Lawlessness is an attitude that refuses any limits or boundaries. Our boundaries are not a set of rules. We are not under law (Rm. 6:14). Our boundaries involve our status as God’s children and His sons. Lawlessness is not accidental but intentional and defiant. It refuses to recognize that God has planned any particular lifestyle for His family. The hope that we will be appear as His children causes us to purify ourselves as He is pure (3:2-3). That has to do with being a child of God. Righteous conduct is consistent with our being born from God (2:29). That involves being a child of God, one born from Him. He trains or disciplines us as His sons so that we might bear the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:6, 11). That has to do with our being God’s sons. Believers need to remember this because the antichrists minimized the seriousness of sin. They treated it as no big deal. Yet Christ fully dealt with our sins. His suffering and death show sin to be a big deal. Yes, those sins will not alter our eternal relationship with God, but they affect how we daily relate to God and how we treat other believers. When we act from our sin nature, we treat our gracious, God-given salvation with contempt.

The Greek construction **the sin is the** lawlessness treats the two nouns as the same. Our acts of sin are lawless, but our sinful nature-that part not yet saved-is certainly lawless. Whenever we sin, we do so from our sinful nature. This is true whether we give into temptation from the sin nature/flesh, from Satan, or from the world system. Whatever the temptation, if we sin, we act not from our new nature in connection with God, but from our sinful nature. The Greek construction handles the two ideas as= interchangeable. We can say that sin is defiance toward God. Sin is not accidental. This understanding all demonstrates that what God counts to be sin today, differs from the time under the Law. Under the Law, a person could sin and break the Law in error without knowing it was wrong. Today, we never sin accidentally. We may do unrighteous things that are like sin, but are not sin because we did them ignorantly. If we sin today, we are defying what we know God wants for us.

3:5 As believers, we should remember that Christ was made plainly visible, that is, He became man, to take away the sin. If sin were not an issue, Christ would not have had to come into the world to deal with it. Sin is a problem. Christ died for our sins so He could take them away. Christ could take away sin because He alone had no sin in Himself. He is the only human to be sinless. As the sinless lamb, the sinless Savior, He carried our sin in His body on the tree (1 Pet. 1:19; 2:24).

3:6 Everyone who abides or is at ease in Him (in Christ) does not sin. This agrees with Paul's statement in Romans 6:11 that we are to logically count ourselves to be dead ones to the sin nature in Christ but living ones to God in Christ. Abiding in Christ is being at ease with who God says we are in Him. We were put into His death and into His burial and can walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-6). The Spirit frees us by means of our life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2). This is abiding. The Spirit leads us to set our minds to who we are in Christ. In Him, we find freedom from sin. "Does not sin" is in the present tense meaning that while a believer may sin (cp. 1:10, 2:1), he does not sin as a way of life.

Everyone sinning has not seen Him and has not known Him. Both verbs "seen" and "known" are perfect tense meaning he did not come to know Him in the past with a continuing result of seeing and knowing. John is telling us that the antichrists sin as a way of life (present tense) and this testifies to the fact that they have never seen or known Christ. Clearly, in chapter two, John cites the antichrist's claims to have known Him, but their lifestyle demonstrates otherwise. John is not giving a criterion for judging people in general but for considering the nature of these false teachers who claim to know God. They claim what John states is true of the fathers (2:13-14).

3:7 With this information in mind, John charges the young teachable believers to not let anyone lead them astray. These antichrists who have left their church or churches want the young believers to follow. They want these young believers to adopt their teaching and their errors. Similar to his previous statement, the one doing, as a way of life, the righteousness is righteous like Christ is righteous. This righteousness consists largely of selfless acts of love for other believers. Such acts are absent in the lives

of the antichrists. All unbelievers act from selfishness. They may deceive themselves that they are selfless, but Paul states in Rom. 2:7f that they act in their own interest. Christ's washing the disciples' feet and laying down His life exemplify selfless love.

3:8 All believers sin and to deny that we sin is to lie, even more, it makes God a liar (1:10). John has warned these young believers against being deceived by the antichrists because the antichrists attempt to deceive them as to their origin. Those who sin (literally "are doing sin", i.e. it is their way of life) are from the devil. The preposition *ek* indicates their source. The devil sins from a beginning. "Has sinned" [NASB] translates a present tense of the verb "sin" and means that the devil sins continually from a beginning. From the moment the devil chose to do what he desired and defied God, he has continued in defiance of God. Sin is lawlessness or defiance. Therefore, those who live in sin are like the devil from whom they originate.

In contrast to the devil who only promotes more defiance against God, the Son of God was made visible in the world to destroy the devil's works. His works are not just sins but all aspects of defiance, all attempts to organize spirit beings and people in opposition to God. All sin has the same character as unrighteousness²³ (5:17). When we confess our sins, God not only cleanses us of our sins but of **all** unrighteousness, because sin is never in isolation but involves other unrighteous matters (1 Jh. 1:9).

3:9 Everyone who has been born from God does not do sin. The participle "been born" is a perfect tense emphasizing that these were born and remain God's born

²³ The Greek text joins the nouns with the conjunction *kai* "and" but neither has a definite article "the." They share common character.

ones. One who has been born from God does not become unborn from God. The result of our birth from God is that we do not do sin. “Do” translates the present tense verb *poieō*. John uses this verb thirteen times in 1 John and all but one are in the present tense to describe an ongoing state or action. It occurs in the perfect tense because one has constituted God a liar and holds that to still be true (5:10). On the present tense of this verb in 1:6, Donald Burdick comments that it “thus comes to refer to a continual practice.”²⁴ After reviewing the many interpretations offered by Bible students, in my opinion, Burdick offers the best understanding of John’s words, “Thus John is declaring, not that the regenerated person does not commit sin, but that he does not continually engage in sinning. The Christian does not follow the example of the devil, who has been continually sinning (ἀμαρτάνει present tense) ever since his fall.”²⁵

John explains a result of the birth, namely that God’s (His) seed or *sperma* abides at ease in him (i.e. the believer). As physical birth involves the passing on of certain traits to one’s children, so God has passed on to His children certain traits. *Sperma* refers to the seed that a father contributes in the conception of a child and by which the child inherits characteristics of the father. Traits from God include new desires expressed in this context as love and righteousness. [On new desires, cp. Php. 2:13] Both are contrary to sin. For this reason, the child born from God is not able (present tense) to sin (present tense). John has established that we do sin and to say otherwise is to make God a liar (1 Jh. 1:8, 10). However, we do not sin continually or as a way of life.

²⁴ Burdick, op cit, p. 122.

²⁵ [Burdick, op cit, pp. 246-247.

Continual sin is interrupted by God's desires within us. Sin is interrupted because we have been born from God.

3:10 Some people are children of God and some are children of the devil. The two are distinguished by the absence of righteousness in the children of the devil. John uses the adjective *phaneros* meaning plainly visible or "obvious" [NASB]. Everyone who does not do (present tense) righteousness is not from God, hence a child of the devil. Apart from God, righteousness can seem subjective. Many people consider certain works or activities as righteous: religious rituals, confessions, charity. However, John adds "and/even the one not loving his brother." The conjunction *kai* (and/even) does not add an additional action but clarifies righteousness. As seen in chapter two, love constitutes a key aspect of practical righteousness and the exercise of eternal life. Unbelievers do not have eternal life and cannot exercise this righteousness God has made possible. This is comparable to the judgment of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, where it appears that Christ judges on the basis of works. Rather, those people live through the most incomparably horrible time on earth, and the true character of each will be seen. Unbelievers show selfish character and do not seek the good of those who bring them good news, while believers will. Today, only believers can exhibit genuine, unselfish love.

3:11 John reminds them that the announcement they have heard from a beginning is the command to love one another. He does not use the word command but announcement [*angelia*]. It is not from **the** beginning as if it went back to the beginning of time or creation. It is a beginning or a quality of beginning. It is when Christian truth began in the upper room with Jesus' announcement of this new command (Jh. 13:34). This is not love in general for

all people. It is love for those who are similar and part of the family of believers - “one another.” It is the love for God’s children (cp 5:1-2).

3:12 This love is not to be like Cain’s love. Cain characterizes the selfish love of the unbeliever. He was one of the devil’s children or “out from [ek] the evil one.” He slew his brother like a sacrifice. *Sphadzō* is a sacrificial slaying, a slitting of the throat most commonly.²⁶ This means that Cain did not rise up and club his brother like a primitive Neanderthal. After God addressed his attitude and sacrifice, he offered his brother as a sacrifice, most likely to spite God for not accepting what he offered. He slew his brother because his works were a malignant evil [*ponēros*]. His defiance of God spread. His brother’s works were righteous. He brought what God asked. John compares this to our proper kind of love. John does not say that Cain had no love for his brother. But, his love was the selfish sort that just as soon slays the object of love if it serves one’s self. If it does a kind act, it hopes or expects to be reciprocated. As in 3:10, the children of the devil do not do righteousness and Cain fit that character, while his brother did righteousness.

On *sphadzō*: John uses *sphadzō* of believers beheaded in the first three and a half years of Daniel’s 70th week (Rev. 6:4, 9). This suggests that their killings are also of a ritual nature. It refers to Christ pictured as a freshly slain lamb, an animal whose throat they slit as they offered it (Rev. 5:6, 9). The noun *sphagē* refers to sheep for the slaughter, again by means of slitting their throats.

²⁶ See Abbott-Smith, op cit, p. 435, and Mounce, G4969.

3:13 John calls these believers to not be surprised if the world hates them. Not only had the antichrists left with no genuine concern for the believers, but the world also had no care for believers in Christ. On top of that, the world pays attention to the antichrists because they are part of the same family but they do not pay attention to believers. John addresses this issue in chapter four.

The Greek word *miseō* indicates the world's "hatred." This term is milder than *exthra* which is among the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20; Rom. 5:10). The latter is overtly hostile, while our present word is indifference or lack of any concern. They are probably put off if we experience any benefit but could care less if we come to harm. If we get in their way, they may just as easily kill us as Cain did Abel.

On *miseō* and *exthra*: Jesus used *miseō* of one "hating his life/soul" (Jh. 12:25). This is not a violent hatred for one's life but an indifference to it. One realizes some things are more important than life. Jesus did not call disciples to be hostile toward parents, wives, or children, but to have an indifference towards them in light of following Jesus as His disciple (Lk. 14:26). Romans 7:15 demonstrates that this indifference can be more fierce when one is frustrated with his own undesired actions. No one has ever been indifferent to one's flesh but feeds and cares for it and so husbands should not be indifferent to their wives' interests and needs (Eph. 5:29). So in 1 John, the one who claims to walk in the light but is indifferent to his brother is walking in darkness (1 Jh. 2:9, 11). This means either that this one is not a believer or is a believer but is certainly not living out God's life. Paul referred to a magician who was attempting to turn another man away from the faith as an enemy of all righteousness and uses *exthros* for "enemy" (Acts 13:10). The man was not indifferent but hostile towards the faith. Herod

and Pilate had been enemies [*exthros*] or hostile towards each other, not merely indifferent (Lk. 19:43). Paul described the Jews as enemies of the gospel (Rom. 11:28). Paul had been among those Jews who aggressively persecuted believers (cp 1 Tim. 1:13; Acts 17:5, 13). Though both words are represented with the idea of hatred in some texts, *miseō* has a milder sense than *exthria*.

3:14 In contrast to the world's hatred for believers, we know we have transferred out of death into life because we love the brothers. John uses *oida* for objective knowledge or knowledge by observation compared to *ginoskō* which is knowledge involving experience. It seems that the latter verb would make more sense, but *oida* is certain as objective knowledge in contrast to the subjective knowledge of our experience. John's point is that this is a certain fact. It does relate to our experience with loving but it is in the face of the antichrists' claims that John uses the idea of objective fact. The fact that John points to is our having been transferred from death to life. Jesus used the same verb in a promise to those who would believe (Jh. 5:24). By "life," John meant eternal life.

Our move from death to life is evidenced by our loving others. Love is one of the chief manifestations of eternal life. The one another in verse 11 are designated as brothers in verse 14. However, if one is not loving his brother, this one is at ease in death as opposed to life. Certainly, unbelievers are at ease in the sphere of death for they have no life; they are alienated from God's life. But believers may also be at ease in death in the same way that they may be at ease in the realm of their sinful nature (cp. Rom. 6:1). "Death" is articular in both cases and refers to spiritual death. Believers are regenerated so we have life in the realm of our human spirits. However, our body and soul

are as yet unregenerate. When believers let the soul and body take the lead in how we live, we are yet moving in the realm of death. This is shameful for believers and means we are missing out on getting to know God better. Limiting the description “remains in death” to unsaved people not only fails to understand the limit of our present regeneration but presumes that salvation means believers automatically live properly all or most of the time. John is concerned that some of his readers are not living out eternal life but are moving in the realm of death. The consequence is that they do not love their brothers and so they are not helping each other with the issues connected to the antichrists’ departure. Real love would have moved these people to step up and help each other, especially the more mature believers helping the less mature.

3:15 Everyone who is hating or acting with indifference to his brother is acting like Cain and is a manslayer. Many translations have “murderer” though “manslayer” is better. The word “murder” should translate *phoneuō* while our present word is *anthropotktonos* and closer to our idea of manslaughter. Manslaughter may not be intentional but results from the indifference of one person for the wellbeing of others. A drunk driver who strikes and kills another likely did not do so with malice and intent. By becoming drunk and choosing to drive in that compromised state, they put others at risk out of an indifference towards others’ safety. This is John’s point; a believer who hates or is indifferent to his brother is no different than a person who kills another person out of selfishness and indifference. A manslayer does not have eternal life at ease in him. One cannot be having a comfortable relationship with eternal life made visible by exercising love and at the same time be indifferent to how their choices might affect others.

3:16 John switches to the verb *ginoskō* for our knowledge of God's kind of love. It is exemplified by Christ laying down His life. "Life" translates *psuchē* which can also be translated as "soul" (cp 1 Thess. 5:23). When the Greeks used this word for life, they included the cares, aspirations, and interests that make up one's life. When Christ laid down His life, He washed the feet of His disciples as a slave, an activity that probably held little interest to Him as a human being. It wasn't an activity people chose to do for fun or to pass the time. But Christ's love for the disciples motivated Him and He washed their feet; He laid down His life. Even laying down His physical life involved His doing something that He did not crave as a human being. So, we too should lay down our lives for our brothers.

3:17 Many read "we should lay down our lives for the brothers" as though we should be ready to die for other believers, an opportunity that is rare even in a Church history smattered with persecution. However, John explains that we lay down our lives by helping meet the needs of other believers. John states this negatively, "Whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" "Goods" translates *bios* [βίος]. Our modern word biology derives from this word, but in New Testament times, *bios* indicated the "course of one's 'life' or the 'material possessions, property' by which that life subsists."²⁷ Paul seems to indicate that life requires food and a sufficient raiment (1 Tim. 6:8). Therefore, the world's goods as they relate to another believer's need would consist of these. One believer can provide sufficient food and clothing to another believer who lacks these. The verb "see" represents *theōreō*

²⁷ Mounce, op cit, pp. 404-405.

[θεωρω], which from the New Testament's six words for seeing or sight, can emphasize inspection or examination.²⁸ The first believer does not have a passing idea that the second has a need, but has seen and knows it well. Their response is shutting up the heart (bowels) or gut feelings from [apo] him. If a believer responds in this manner, John wishes to know how God's love remains at ease in him. His love is not at ease because it isn't being exercised in a context for which it is an appropriate response.

3:18 John calls these believers to not love by speech alone "word or tongue," but to love in work and in genuineness. It is easy to tell someone else that we love them, but others need more than our words. They need concrete demonstrations of that love. As James says, telling a brother or sister to be warmed and full does them no good (Jas. 2:15-16). Work refers to what they do for another. Truth means the work is genuine love. A believer might know what love is supposed to look like and mimic the actions for a variety of reasons: impressing others, gaining approval, demonstrating themselves to be righteous, but without love. For this reason, John calls the believers to not only act but do so with genuine love.

²⁸ *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, ed. Stephen D. Renn, (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005) p. 868. Samuel G. Green adds, "to look at purposely, or attentively to gaze upon" and "to know by seeing." *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, nd) pp. 375 and 446.

3:19 “And” points to a benefit of loving our brothers properly. “By this” refers to the preceding verses regarding genuine love. When we live out this genuine love for our brothers, we have experiential knowledge that we are from (*ek*) the Truth, or put another way, the Truth is the source of our activity. To be “from the Truth” means we are living out this absolute dependence upon God exhibited by Spirit-produced love. Apart from God, we cannot produce this love. We may go through the motions of love (word and tongue) but it is not God’s kind of love (work and genuine).

As a result of living out this love, we will persuade our hearts before God. With the heart, we make decisions. We consider and respond to matters around us. So, knowing what Divine love is, we persuade our hearts if our hearts accuse us before God.

3:20 We persuade our hearts because the false teachings of the antichrists have confused our decision making. John stated that the antichrists do not practice righteousness specifically as acts of love (3:10). They have their own selfish and twisted version of love. We need to persuade our hearts that what John has said about loving other believers is appropriate for us. Our hearts may accuse us because the antichrists tell us what we should be doing. From the beginning of the Church, the world has attempted to dictate what we are supposed to do, how we meet, what we can say. The world wants us to be OK with its denials regarding the Son and the Father. Presented with an opportunity to do good to another believer, our heart may wonder if we should love the world. The world often presses us to love it, try to fix it, and make it better. Often, we must choose between loving a believer or doing something for the world. The act for the world may seem innocuous but distract us from serving believers. Our hearts may accuse us of focusing on

believers too much, leading to guilt about helping believers but not doing enough for the world.

Our hope of seeing Christ as He is and being like Him moves us to purify ourselves (3:2-3). I demonstrated that this purity is related to sin and to the problem of the antichrists' departure. Purity from their influence allows us to love from a pure heart according to Peter. So, though our hearts may be divided about what we hear we should be doing what God wants us to do. We need to do God's will expressed in 3:16-18.

We need to remember that God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. He knows if we are acting according to His will or responding to the world's call to love it. God can help us avoid the guilt the world would impose on us for not following it's "unrighteous guidelines for churches." We can engage in many good activities that Christians designate "loving" but are distractions from God's one command. John encourages us to serve in genuine love but rather than sitting on our hands waiting to be certain that our motives are absolutely pure, we can let God sort out the details and choose to serve.

3:21 John begins his next encouragement by addressing his readers as beloved. We are the objects of God's unusual sort of love (3:1). If our heart does not condemn us means we are not struggling with the matter of proper motives or being pulled between love of believers and love for the world. We then have boldness, confidence, or freedom to speak before God. The noun "boldness" represents *parrēsia* which indicates free-flowing speech. Often we hesitate to speak to God freely because we worry our attitude, thinking, or motives are not what they should be. When these are correct, it encourages us to speak freely. We should speak to God at any time and even ask for His help in correcting our

attitudes, but it is better that we are doing God's will so our heart does not condemn us.

3:22 Speaking freely includes asking God. The verb *aiteō* is asking as a lesser to a greater, such as a servant to a master. It is the chief "asking" term used in our communication (prayer) with God. John says that "whatever we happen to ask." When our motives are skewed, our asking will often be selfish (cf. Jas. 4:1-4). Proper motives normally affect our asking and is the kind of asking to which God responds as opposed to turning a deaf ear (5:15). Proper motives involve love and the rest of the fruit from the Spirit. All parts of the fruit frame our asking. How do these qualities affect our asking? Asking from joy, peace, and patience doesn't ask God to act against another believer due to hurt feelings or another believer's wrong actions. We may ask for life for them but not punishment (5:16). Asking from goodness seeks not only what is best for another believer but also that which may bring them a sense of well-being and happiness. Asking from faith we'll believe God's promises even when we have doubts about other believers; He will finish in them, as us, what He started (Php. 1:6). Asking from meekness or gentleness keeps us focused on God's will so we ask for what God desires for us and others rather than those things that distract. Asking from self-control means we do not ask from our own impulses and cravings but for what pleases God (1 Cor. 9:25-26).

When we ask with this attitude, we receive from God whatever we ask. He is the source of good gifts. In our flesh, we may want many things and due to our flesh we may resent God for not giving us what we want but James tells us that the genuinely good gifts and acts of giving come from the Father and He does not vary in His character (Jas. 1:16-17). John explains that the basis of our proper attitude is

guarding His commands. His commands in this context involve the various ways that we love one another. Loving others is pleasing before Him. Loving others is pleasing to Him, but so is children obeying their parents (Col. 3:20), giving of our possessions for the needs of other believers (Php. 4:18; Heb. 13:16), sharing with other believers from our goods, time, and spiritual gifts (Heb. 13:16), being an ambassador while we await our Lord's coming for us (2 Cor. 5:9). Examining this list, several involve acts towards other believers, acts that we may identify as love. So, the chief attitude of the believer that results in boldness in asking God is love for other believers. Such a one will not ask selfishly but selflessly. This attitude seeks what is best for another believer.

3:23 John reiterates His command to the disciples and by extension to us. Notice that this is one command with two parts. First, we ought to believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ. This is not the faith for initial salvation. Faith for initial salvation does not require one to believe and then go love other believers. Remember this is one command with two parts. This is believing as part of our Christian life. It is the purpose John gave for recording the signs in the gospel bearing his name, "these (signs) I have been written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jh. 20:31). This is not an evangelistic statement. John recorded signs that demonstrate to believers who Jesus Christ is so that we may live a life that exemplifies His character (His name). He wrote John to help us see that we can live as He did in many ways. Many believers fail to see that God has made many promises to us regarding who Jesus Christ is for us right now.

His command is also that we love one another. Remember, this is one command with two parts. Our faith in who He is for us now results in acts of love. Paul stated that our way of life should be faith in-working through love (Gal. 5:6). Paul thanked God when he heard about the Ephesians' faith in the Lord Jesus and about their love (Eph. 1:15). The Ephesians were already believers. Paul knew them. He is thanking God to hear that they are continuing to live by faith in God's present promises and that faith ties to love for one another (cp Col. 1:4). For the Thessalonians, they believed God's promise that they could serve and so faith produced work and love made that work a labor; love extended itself (1 Thess. 1:3; 3:6).

3:24 John has already charged us to abide in Christ (2:24, 27, 28; 3:6). Abiding is being at ease in Him, to be OK with what God says about us in Christ. When we are keeping His command to love, we can know in our experience that we are abiding in Him. If we do not abide in Him, we can do nothing, especially love one another. The Spirit who produces the fruit in us and leads us to abide in Christ is the source of this knowledge.

God has given us the Spirit. The Son asked the Father to send the Spirit and so the Father and the Son sent the Spirit to dwell in us (Jh. 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Spirit has come. He indwells us and performs many works in us, one is leading us to our position in Christ (Gal. 5:18). When we abide there, He produces the fruit in us (Gal. 5:22).

4:1 John charges his beloved spiritual children to not believe every spirit but put them to the test. He will give them a test for doing so. In 2:18ff he gave them tests for identifying antichrists by their denial of the Son, that is, they deny that Jesus Christ is God and therefore not the Son. The present test involves Jesus Christ's humanity. The verb for "test" is *dokimadzō* which is the act of testing looking for what is good. While John tells them not to believe every spirit, with this verb he is also taking the hopeful approach that they will find the spirit to truthful. By "spirit" John refers to what we would popularly call angels. The term angel both in Hebrew and Greek means "messenger." These spirits brought revelation to people. Prophets spoke as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21; Eph. 3:5). However, they also received revelation from spirits (1 Cor. 14:32).

Before the Church had a completed canon of Scripture, God gave some people the gift of discerning spirits (1 Cor. 12:10). As in our present text, this gift appears associated with the gift of prophecy. God was giving prophecies so the Church would know what His will was for them and what He planned. However, the Church needed a means of knowing whether a prophetic revelation came from God, from the imagination of a man, or from lyings spirits (cp 1 Ki. 22:22). John writes close to the completion of the canon. Many of the temporary gifts intended to fill the gap that Scripture would make superfluous, were disappearing, their need being closed by the apostolic writings. So, John does not call on them to find someone with the gift of discerning spirits, but rather he gives them a test to determine if the spirit was from God or a spirit connected with antichrists. He does this because many false prophets have gone out into the world. The verb "gone out" is a perfect tense emphasizing that these prophets went out

and remained in the world. John does not say a few but many. The beloved needed to exercise discernment as to whom they listened.

4:2 This is John's test by which they could know if a spirit was from God: every spirit from God agrees (confesses) that Jesus Christ has come and is in flesh. Again the perfect tense "has come" indicates that Jesus Christ is still in flesh not just that He came in flesh at one point. I prefer "agree" for *homologeō* as it communicates the idea without the baggage of our English "confess." These spirits giving revelation to the prophets agree that Jesus is in flesh even today.

4:3 Those who do not agree that Jesus Christ is come in flesh are not from God. John uses an ellipsis from the last sentence for the verb phrase "has come in flesh." It is not merely that one agrees there is a Jesus but that this Jesus is in flesh even now, that He lives as a man, albeit glorified, but still a man. In chapter two, the issue was with Jesus' deity. That antichrists denied He is God. Here, the issue is whether Jesus Christ or this one who is God came into the world in a real human nature and is still in a genuine human nature. The Son is simultaneously completely Divine and completely man. If these two are mixed, then He is hybrid and not truly god or man but something else. Therefore, theologians have rightly stated that Christ possesses both natures but they do not mix.

Those spirits who deny that Jesus Christ came in flesh and remains in flesh they are of antichrist. Believers were told that antichrist was coming, but antichrist is already in the world. Though I have stated this already, the term antichrist is not applied in Scripture to the man identified in Revelation as the Beast. It is applied to false prophets and teachers who in the present deny either Jesus

Christ's deity or His humanity or perhaps both. They were present in John's day. They had left the churches to whom John wrote. They had troubled some believers with their claims and disagreements about Jesus' identity. We should not be surprised that these same people exist today in the world and like the churches of these people, they may sit with us and we may naively think they are believers and that we are just misunderstanding them. John does not bemoan their departure but assures his beloved readers that it was a good thing they left. They were never part of us.

4:4 John's readers, those he termed beloved, are from [ek] God. They are children born from God. The noun *teknia* from *teknos* emphasizes birth but the diminutive ending means "little born one" as a term of endearment. It reminds them that they are not only God's children but precious to Him. It also reminds them that they are immature but they should not be intimidated by these false prophets. As God's children, they have overcome them-the antichrists. The reason is that the one dwelling in them is greater than the one in the world. We presume that John means Satan or the devil when he says "the one in the world." Satan directs the lying spirits who give false prophecies to the false prophets by which he continues to blind the conclusions of the minds of the unbelieving (cp 2 Cor. 4:3-4). "Overcome" is perfect tense meaning they overcame and remain those who overcame. "Overcome" simply means to win, be victorious, or conquer. How have they won? First, the One in them is greater than the one in the world. The One indwelling them is in this context the Father. His indwelling constitutes them His children. So they have won by being God's children. In 5:4-5, John further explains that their faith overcomes these false teachers.

As noted in 3:8, Satan organizes anyone and everything at his disposal in defiance to God. The false prophets, these antichrists defy God by denying what is true of God's most significant act in human history: The Son coming into the world in flesh, dying in flesh, and rising again in flesh to provide the forgiveness of our sins. When Israel's religious leaders sent their officers to seize Jesus, they were confronted by His words (Jh. 7:32-44). Upon returning to their leaders without Jesus, they were asked why they didn't bring Jesus back with them (7:45). The officers replied that no one had spoken like Jesus did (7:46). The leaders responded, "Certainly you have not also been led astray? Not one of the rulers have believed in Him, nor any from the Pharisees? But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." (7:47-49). This is how the world works under Satan's leadership, they mock and intimidate people into silent submission.

Paul addresses another aspect of this in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, where some of the Corinthians were dabbling in the world's methods to preach Christ. Paul states that God does not use any of those means to reach people. Rather, God reaches people through the foolishness of simply proclaiming Christ and what He did (1:21). Sadly, many Christians still feel that people can be reached by scholarship, debate, and philosophy despite the plain statement of Scripture. John states that our faith overcomes the world (1 Jh. 5:4). It believes who Jesus Christ is and what He has done in the face of overwhelming opposition and derision from the world.

As God's children, we need to remember that God is greater than any of these antichrists, and the world is filled with them. We should go on loving as we received command. We should go on proclaiming Christ despite the world's

denial of the Biblical Jesus and its intense opposition to the one true God.

4:5 The false prophets, these antichrists, are from the world. John contrasts our source “from God” or rigidly “out from God” [ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ] and their source “from the world” or rigidly “out from the world” [ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου]. John reminds believers that we are part of a different family. We are God’s family and they are the devil’s family (3:9-10). Because they are from the world they speak from the world (same Greek phrase). The world tells them what to say and how to say it. The world trains them from birth on what is and is not acceptable. Because they speak what the world tells them, the world listens to them.

This is a likely encouragement to the young men referenced in 2:14-17, whom John warned against loving the world system, or even to stop loving it, as some were already doing so. Youth or spiritual immaturity asserts that we can use the world’s methods to reach the world, contrary to Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians one and his charge to avoid “youthful lusts” which involve debates (2 Tim. 2:20-23). It appears they are frustrated with the attention the world gives to these antichrists but not to them.

4:6 Again, John reminds them that we are from God. Those who experientially know God listen to us. Put another way, believers listen to those who speak God’s truth. However, those who are not from God do not listen to us. There is nothing we can do to change this fact. We can only continue proclaiming God’s truth God’s way. We cannot repackage it or make it palatable to or for the world. So, returning to the opening issue, this is how they know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error; use the two tests regarding the identity of Jesus Christ.

4:7 Having pointed out why the unsaved world listens to unsaved teachers such as the antichrists, John reminds his readers, and specifically the young men, that our love is for one another. He warns the young men against loving the world and its things in 2:15ff. The young men were struggling with how to get the world to listen to them as it listens to the antichrists. This is a form of love, focusing on the world and trying to fix a problem. We are not to direct love to the world but to other believers. Loving the world, even by tweaking our message or approach in an attempt to reach the world, which sounds noble, is a form of love for the world. It distracts believers from the proper object of our love as Christ stated (Jh. 13:34).

Love is from God. He is the source of our love. Here, God refers to the Father. We are His beloved children (Eph. 5:1). As His children we have His seed in us (see notes on 3:9). Love is one of God's attributes which He can communicate or give to us as His children. We cannot be all-knowing, or all-powerful, but we can have love, righteousness, etc. The Spirit gives us the ability to live out this love, to love like we're one of His children. Love is part of the fruit that the Spirit produces through our sharing in God's kind of nature (Gal. 5:22; 2 Pet. 1:4). We share in His kind of nature because we have been born (begotten) from God. "Begotten" in the perfect tense emphasizes that our birth is settled. We were born and remain born ones from God. The Spirit caused our birth in the sphere of our human spirit (Jh. 3:3, 5).

When believers exercise God's love, we experientially know Him. Remember, John's letter is about eternal life lived and demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ (1:1-3). Jesus said that eternal life is experientially knowing God and Jesus Christ. Love is a chief way by which we live out

eternal life, and therefore when we love it is one way we experientially know God.

4:8 “He who does not love” translates a present participle. “Has not known” involves an aorist verb looking at their situation as a whole. The object of their knowledge or lack of knowledge is God. The present tense views action without consideration of the past or the future; it is their circumstance, their life. This appears to be an unbeliever, even an antichrist for they are absent of God’s love, God’s life, and therefore the knowledge of God. In 3:1, John stated that the world doesn’t know [present] us because it didn’t know [aorist] Him. John uses the same form of the verb in 3:1 and in 4:8. Even the young believers had known (perfect) the Father (2:14). John draws a contrast between believers and unbelievers. The unbelievers are characterized by the present tense participle as not loving, and therefore they have never known God.

They have not known God because God is love. They have neither experienced the love of God nor do they love. Therefore, they don’t know God. This is different than John’s statement in 3:15. There, the one hating his brother does not have (present) eternal life abiding (present) in him. John was speaking of the experience of a believer that has eternal life but it is not abiding in them. In 4:8, the issue is whether they have a knowledge of God tied to their pure lack of love. This follows logically on the issue in 4:1-6. The world listens to the antichrists. Those who **know** God listen to us. This also relates to the matter of loving as an aspect of experientially knowing God.

Loving others and experientially knowing God follow the fact that God is love. Love is one of God’s eternal attributes or characteristics. Love, like His other attributes,

defines Him.²⁹ Since love is a defining characteristic of God, if one does not love, one has not known God.

4:9 God's love had been made visible among us, by His act of sending His special kind of Son into the world that we might live through Him. The word manifest means to make it plainly visible. "Among us" was first the disciples among whom Jesus walked, but also to us who have heard of Jesus coming among mankind. The adjective "only begotten" refers to one who is "only" [*monos*] and "kind" [*genēs*], the only one of His kind or special, unique³⁰. Jesus is the special kind of God (Jh. 1:18, though some manuscripts changed God to son). God was never "begotten" but the Son was **unique** because He became flesh and explained God by walking as man among them. Isaac was Abraham's special son, described with the same adjective (Heb. 11:17). Abraham had an older son, so Isaac was not Abraham's only begotten son, but rather he was the **special** son, the son God promised. Being God, the Son was not sent against His will but with the Father and the Spirit had planned this event. The Father demonstrated love by sending Him. The Son was sent specifically so that we might live through Him. We possess eternal life because He indwells us (5:11-12). When we lay hold of eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12), we make use of that life and live as God planned for us. Therefore, through Him, we live. God showed His love by providing us this ability to live.

4:10 John points to another manifestation of God's kind of love. God loved first. It is not that we loved (perfect) God, but rather He loved us. Love comes more easily when the object

²⁹ While God is love as to His nature, Greek grammar does not allow us to reverse this statement, and say, "love is God."

³⁰ Mounce, p. 214, entry G3666, op cit.

of our love loves us in return, at the same time, or even initiates that love. However, God loved first and He sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins. Since “propitiation” was addressed in 2:2 (see notes), this is a brief review. “Propitiation” and the modern rendering “atoning sacrifice” do not explain the idea to the modern reader. The Greek noun indicated a satisfaction and the verb to provide a satisfaction. Our sins wronged God, and Christ’s death satisfied God’s righteous demands regarding our sinful nature that produces these wrongs. The Greek world viewed their gods as needing appeasement to avoid their fierce, almost human anger. The God of Scripture does not have this kind of anger and does not need appeasement in this way. Rather the Son satisfied God regarding our sinful nature because our sinful nature is opposed to God (Rom. 8:6). The Son provided this satisfaction by His spiritual death or separation from God while physically alive on the cross. His words “it is finished” referred to the end of His spiritual death so that He could commit Himself into the Father’s hands. He could not have done this if He were still separated from the Father. He was separated as we were to end our spiritual death and give us eternal life not mere physical life, though we also have that. The “for” in “for our sins” translates the preposition *peri*, which when used with the genitive case refers to something general. Christ was the propitiation specifically for our sinful natures but since our nature is the cause of our sin, His death was also **generally** for our sins. The significance of this is that His love didn’t love the lovable. He loved us by sending the Son to satisfy Him regarding our sinful nature that openly and fiercely opposed God. As Paul said, He loved us when we were still sinners and God’s enemies (Rom. 5:8, 10).

4:11 John points to the logical outcome, if God loved us in this way, we are obliged to love one another. He addresses

his readers as “beloved.” They are beloved to God but they are also beloved to John. John cares for them. He is living what he is encouraging them to do, love one another. The adverb *houtōs* means “in this way” or “this manner.” That manner is love even for those who may be unlovable. We do not provide propitiation as the Son did, but we may find ourselves with believers who are having problems, and may even be hostile at times. When people leave our church who are not believers but have attended for a time, people react differently. Some worry and that worry gets in the way of good fellowship. Some become frustrated even bordering on anger thinking something else might have been done so as not to drive them off. Whatever, the exact situation, John calls his beloved readers to love as God loved.

4:12 No one has seen (perfect) God. The verb is *theaomai* to see so as to consider with perception of what one sees. John used this in 1:1 of the disciples seeing and considering Jesus. God is anarthrous and refers to the Godhead. No one has watched God so as to consider Him. If we believers love one another, the God whom we have not seen abides at ease in us and His love has been matured (perfect) in us. He does not say His love is matured because we are expressing it in an extraordinary manner but that we are loving other believers. It is very simple. Though John will address the matter of not seeing God in a little while, he seems to suggest that the matured love gives us a glimpse of God as He works in us.

4:13 John uses the phrase, “by this” [ἐν τούτῳ] to refer normally to a statement that follows. John uses this expression twelve times in 1 John. Twice the same words are used but John means “in this one” (2:4-5). In 4:13 “by this” refers to the following statement “from the Spirit He has given us.” The verb “given” is in the perfect tense reminding us that the Spirit is a permanent possession. We have experiential knowledge we are abiding in Christ and He in us. This is the practice of what Jesus told His disciples to do in John 15:4-5. They were to abide in Him and He would abide in them. The Spirit is the source of this knowledge. Our love comes from the fruit that the Spirit produces in us when we abide (Gal. 5:22). We choose to obey Christ’s command but the Spirit makes it possible for us to use the kind of love that Christ had. Shortly after giving His disciples the new command (Jh. 13:34), Jesus promised to give them a new Helper the Holy Spirit (Jh. 14:17). The Spirit is the One who results in us being in Christ and Christ in us (Jh. 14:20). We could not fulfill the new command without the work of the Spirit.

4:14 We beheld and we are testifying that the Father sent the Son to *be* Savior of the world. The verb “beheld” [θεάομαι] is perfect tense and emphasizes a sight that examines and considers what it observes. With the perfect tense John reminds his readers that he not only saw and examined the Son but what he saw was still fresh in his mind. With that information fresh in mind he gives testimony to what he and the other apostles observed. They observed His glory, glory of one who is unique kind of one from the Father (Jh. 1:14). In John 1:14, the English translation “only begotten” describes Christ as the unique or special one from the Father [See notes on 4:9]. He was special because He alone was God in flesh. John used the same verb “beheld” in John 1:14 that he now uses in this verse. The

apostles witnessed the unique character of the Son, so He chose them to testify about Him since they had been with Him from the beginning of His earthly work (Jh. 15:27).

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. "Sent" is in the perfect tense emphasizing that He was sent and remains sent to be the Savior. "Of the world" reminds us that Christ's death was not for a few, not for the elect alone but for the whole world. Though for us it is only applied in Christ, Christ's work was sufficient for all as John said about Christ's work as satisfaction for our sins and those of the whole world (2:2).

4:15 In contrast to the antichrists who denied the identity of Jesus, whoever agrees (confesses) that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and he abides in God. As in 2:22-23, being the Son is to be God. To deny One is to deny the other. The Father and the Son are one thing (Jh. 10:30). They share one divine nature, divine power being one aspect or attribute of that nature. Jesus expressed that power as "My hand" and the "Father's hand." The antichrists denied that Jesus is the Christ and that He is God along with the Father.

Those who agree that Jesus is the Son of God have God abiding in them and they in turn abide in God. While abiding is often a command that believers choose to obey, in this case abiding is simply being at ease with Jesus' identity. When believers simply appreciate who Jesus is we can also abide in God and God in us. Believers will not abide in their God-blessed place in Christ if they do not appreciate the Son's identity.

4:16 We have come to know [perfect tense] and have believed [perfect tense] the love that God has in us. This is true of John but he assumes this is also true of his readers. As

he told them in 2:20-21 that they knew the Truth. This means they already knew what John wrote about the identity of the Son and the work of the Son. This is why John used the perfect tense of the words know and believe. One of the truths about God they had already known in their experience and had believed is the love God has among us. This love is what God is doing for believers now. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:38-39, God loves us in Christ Jesus now. He loves us by continuing to say that we are in Christ, or as Paul states in Ephesians 1:3, He blesses us in Christ. So they know and accept this truth.

God is love in His very nature. Love is one of the attributes that is eternal. Some attributes are temporal related to present situations. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit have perfect love towards each other in all eternity. As Paul explained the nature of our spiritual gifts and the importance of love, he concluded that faith and hope will cease at some point but love will continue (1 Cor. 13:13).

The one who abides or is at ease in the love, God is at ease in them. Though we were and at times still are unworthy of God's love, we should appreciate that love rather than wrestle with our lack of worth. We should focus on God's great love toward us and rest at ease in that reality. When we do, we are at ease in God. We are not struggling with our lack of worth. We enjoy and are comfortable, in whatever degree of maturity we are, in God because we are also comfortable with His love to us. God is also at ease in us. This implies that when we focus on our unworthiness, we are not a comfortable or hospitable environment for God. God remains in us but is not at ease. This is another place to remind ourselves that the verb "abide" [μένω] means more than just remaining in a location. If that is the meaning, then John would be saying that God is only in those who remain in

His love. The reverse would be that if someone does not remain in God's love, God does not remain in this person. This would be a denial of the eternal security of our salvation, a truth made abundantly clear in many texts.

4:17 John points us to another "by this," in this case the maturity of our love. "Mature" or "perfect" is a perfect tense verb indicating that the love had matured and remains matured. The "by this" points to how this maturity is measured, we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Many Christians do not mature in love. They continue wrestling with their unworthiness, and as a result, they do not have boldness when they consider the day of judgment. They worry that they will be judged. They worry that they will be found unworthy. Abiding in God's love would settle this problem. As noted above, abiding in God's love involves at least in part God's love for us in Christ. It involves our abiding in who God says we are in Christ. This ties to the next phrase, "because even as that One is, also we are in this world." Christ went to the Father and separated Himself from this world (Jh. 17:19). Since we are in Him, we are set apart from this world just as He is and we are not out of this world just as He is not out of this world (Jh. 17:16-18). God says (blesses) us that we are raised up and seated in the heavens and made near to Him in Christ (Eph. 2:5-6, 13). So we are not in this world. Jesus said that those who believe in Him who sent Him, have eternal life and do not come into judgment, but have passed out of death into life (Jh. 5:24). John repeats a variation on this in 3:14. Believers are not the objects of God's judgment. The world is the object of God's judgment. In fact, we will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). If we abide at ease in His love, His love is matured in us, and that means that we do not view our future with fear. We see that our standing in Christ guarantees our freedom from judgment with this world.

4:18 Fear does not exist in the love about which John is writing. Mature love, which John has been illustrating, throws that fear outside. Fear has punishment. The noun “punishment” [κόλασις] occurs only here and in Matthew 25:46 where the goats are consigned to eternal punishment. The verb is used of the Jewish religious leaders not knowing how to punish the disciples (Acts 4:21) and of the unrighteous being kept secure for a day of judgment (2 Pet. 2:9). God “disciplines” [παιδεύω] those He loves. This verb emphasizes the act of training or raising a child. It has both negative and positive ideas depending upon the circumstances, but is always pointed towards a good objective, that of our sharing in His holiness, and experiencing the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:10-11). Our present text is concerned with punitive punishment, not positive correction. Love doesn’t have that kind of punishment.

The one who still fears or is fearing [present participle] has not been matured [passive] in the love. They may know about God’s love, have experienced God’s love, have exercised God’s love, but still **feel unworthy** and thereby demonstrate their lack of maturity. They are immature in Christ and specifically in God’s love to us both in what Christ did in the past, and who He is for us right now.

4:19 God is the initiator. He loved first. He did not love us because we were lovable but while we dishonored Him, were sinners, and were hostile to Him (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). This reminds us that God's kind of love is subject drive and object focused. That means, it starts with God has the subject but focuses on the us as the object of God's love. Common human love is object driven and subject focused, meaning something in the object elicits our love but we love with some personal interest or benefit for ourselves. Think of a man who falls in love with a women. Something about her draws the attention of his love. He loves her but he's looking for her to love him in return. As John has already stated, God showed His love by sending His Son into the world so we might live through Him (4:9). His objective was something better for us than death, namely life, than separation from Him, namely fellowship, than sin, namely righteousness. None of these ideas came from the mouths of the antichrists, the false prophets who proclaimed a different Jesus. The message of God's love has resulted not only in our eternal salvation but also our opportunity to love as He loved us.

4:20 John is still concerned with the effects of the false teaching on believers' conduct. So, some might happen to say that they love God but they hate their brother. They see nothing incompatible with thinking this way about their love and their conduct. They may even justify such attitudes because they do not understand the nature of God's love. This may indicate that the antichrists claimed a love for God but an indifference toward others, especially toward believers. Some of John's readers appear to have adopted this same way of thinking. John states that this is not possible, for they have seen [perfect of *horaō*] their brother but do not love them, so they are not able to love God Whom they have have not seen [perfect of *horaō*]. John already told us that no one has seen [perfect of *theomai*] God at any time

(4:12). *Theaomai* meant to see so one may consider what one sees. *Horaō* is the simple act of seeing something objectively. It does not involve consideration specifically, though it doesn't rule it out. It is simply sight. Therefore, not only do believers not see God so as to consider what they are seeing, but we do not even see God as a visible entity. We do see our brother as a visible entity, and our brother should be the immediate object of our love.

4:21 We have a commandment from Him. The nearest antecedent of "Him" is "the God" in the last sentence. This agrees with 3:23-24 that the commandment given by Christ is also from the Father (believe in...His Son). In John 13-16, Jesus restated the new command in several different forms. Here, John states differently that love for our brother is love for God. If one loves God whom they have not seen, they should love their brother. Stated another way, we love God by loving our brothers. A friend once put it like this, if we tell God that we love Him, but we are not loving our brother, God responds, "You're not loving Me, or you'd be loving my family." This is what John will develop in the following verses.

5:1 "Whoever believes" translates *πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων*, an articular participle modified by the adjective "all" or "every." We can also translate this "Every one believing." The object of their faith is Jesus and the content is that Jesus is the Christ. What John means by "Christ" is explained in the notes under 2:22. Simply, it emphasizes that Jesus is now resurrected (alive) and glorified. This faith is the opposite of what the antichrists teach. They deny that Jesus has come in flesh so as to still be coming in flesh. They deny His literal resurrection in addition to denying His absolute equal deity with the Father. "Believing" or faith always involves a promise from God. It is future. It may be more distant future

or it may be immediate future. The promise in the gospel is that the one believing receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43). Even the spiritually young believers knew their sins had been forgiven because it is God's first promise held out to people in the gospel. So, contrasted to the antichrists, John writes to those who have believed.

Those who have believed that Jesus is the Christ, they have been born from God. "Born" translates a perfect tense; they were born with the result that they remain God's born ones. This text corrects a common error held by Christians, namely that we are the devil's children but God has adopted us into His family. Some, having described our salvation in this manner, use this idea to suggest that if we sin or choose to walk away from God, we lose our salvation. They assert that after all, we were only adopted into God's family. As in 3:1, we are not only called God's children, we are God's children. Here in 5:1, John states that we are born from God. "Born of God" (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται) begins with *ek tou theou*, where *ek* followed by the ablative form of *theos* (God) emphasizes that God is the source of our birth.

Jesus foretold this when speaking with Nicodemus in John three. Jesus' words were intended to shock Nicodemus, "You're the teacher of Israel and you do not know these things?" (Jh. 3:10). Nowhere in Scripture had God spoken about a birth from God as Jesus did. Merrill Tenney comments regarding Nicodemus, "He wanted to know how this experience could become his. Nothing in the Judaism he knew offered anything like this."³¹ But on 3:10, Tenney gives his opinion, "Evidently Jesus felt that since the OT contained this teaching in principle, those who read the Scriptures

³¹ Merrill C. Tenney, John in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

were responsible for knowing and believing the truth.”³² Therefore, Nicodemus could not have known these for they were new things. We confuse truth about our salvation thinking that Jesus implied that such teaching was to be found in the Old Testament. The birth from the Spirit that Jesus spoke of is not part of the new covenant promise in Jeremiah 31, or the giving of the Spirit promised in Ezekiel 36-37. God did promise a relationship to the Spirit for believers in the future age. However, comparing those promises to our promises demonstrates two distinct types of relationships. Therefore, Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus about a new relationship based on a work of the Spirit, namely birth. Jesus said this birth is “from above” not “again.” The Spirit produces the birth but it is a birth from God the Father.

Therefore, as part of regeneration, believers are born by a work of the Spirit so that we are born from God. Regeneration as in Titus 3:5 (*palingenessia*) and 1 Peter 1:3 (*anagennaō*) are both built on the root for “birth” that John uses here in 5:1. Therefore, when the Spirit brings about our new birth, similar to how Jesus explained our birth from above in John three, we are born from God. This is how we become His children. As already noted, the term “child” or “children” most commonly translates *teknon* in 1 John and refers to one who is **born**. It derives from the verb *tiktō* meaning to bear a child.

Every individual who is loving the One who has caused their birth, namely the Father, also loves the one having been born (perfect) from Him. This clarifies what John just said in 4:20-21. We love God by loving His family.

³² *ibid*,

5:2 This is how we experientially know that we love God's children. We know whenever we happen to love God and we do His commands. The later conditions give context and motive to our love. We've already seen that one might "love" but selfishly. God's kind of love for others involves love for God and recognizing that such love is part of His commands.

5:3 This is God's love, that we keep safe His commands. Again, the verb keep safe (τηρέω) involves watching over something carefully to be certain it is safe. Many misstate the commands, replace them with the highest commands from the Old Testament, or even exercise love selfishly. We guard it first by making sure we remember the command correctly and then reminding our brothers and sisters in Christ what this love is to be. If we do not keep these commands safe, then we easily cease to love according to His command and switch to loving by human standards.

His commands are not burdensome. Peter described the Law as a yoke that they were not able to bear (Acts 15:10). Paul described the Law as a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1). Peter and Paul were speaking of the whole law not just circumcision for that ritual was not burdensome, but doing the Law was. Because God's love is produced by the Spirit in those who abide in Christ, His command is not a burden. He commands us to love and gives us the love to exercise towards one another.

5:4 Because every one being born from God is victorious with regard to the world. “One being born” translates a perfect participle; they were born with the result that they remain a born one from God. A child once born, remains the biological child of the parent regardless of whether another raises the child or some other form of alienation exists. So, a child of God remains God’s child. See the notes under 5:1 on the error of confusing birth and adoption.

The verb overcomes or conquers translates the Greek verb νικάω [*nikaō*]. Mounce offers “to conquer, overcome, vanquish, subdue...to prevail” [Mounce: Gk G3771] as translations. The object of our victory is the world. John considered the problem of the world in 2:15-17 and 4:1-6. The world is a system organized by Satan to oppose God, His work, and His people. Regarding God’s people, the world pressures people to submit to its ideas. Certainly the world involves many contradictory ideas about gods, religion, cosmology, economics, government, etc. However, as long as these ideas detract, distract, and lead people away from faith in the one true and living God, Satan employs them in his system. So, how do those born from God win over the world? The victory the conquers or defeats the world is our faith. As noted in the comments under 4:4, the world mocks the idea of Biblical faith in Christ. It mocks the idea that anyone can come to proper faith in Christ apart from scholarship, power, and debate. Many have wasted immense effort on attempting to use the world’s methods to accomplish God’s purposes and bring people to faith. Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 1 that it does not work. The gospel about Christ Jesus is so simple and yet so powerful. It tells us that He is one who has come down here to earth to be like us, lived a righteous life and did good to and for others, but He was rejected and crucified, buried, but God raised Him. We receive the forgiveness of sins by believing in Him. That is

the message Peter gave in Acts 10 and Paul in Acts 13. In both cases, neither makes an argument for who Christ is or why it makes sense to believe in Him. They simply give the message and in both cases, people respond. Faith in Christ, Biblical faith, is contrary to how the world works.

5:5 The victor over the world is the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. “Son of God” emphasizes His deity not His humanity. Christ did not become Son through the incarnation. He was already a Son when He was begotten or celebrated by God raising Him, installing Him as priest, and as King (Acts 13:33; Heb. 5:5; Ps. 2:7). When He claimed to be the Son of God, the Jews did not understand Him to say He was inferior but equal to God (Jh. 10:28-30, 33, 36; 19:7). When on “trial” He agreed that He was and claimed to be the Son of God, His Jewish accusers charged Him with blasphemy (Lk. 22:70-71). Jesus claimed that people were to honor Him as the Son just as they would honor the Father (Jh. 5:23). This is an idea foreign to our use of the word son. The expression “only begotten” translates *monogenēs* and refers to Him not as being “begotten” as we think of a birth. Rather it describes Him as “one-of-a-kind.”³³ John used the term *monogenēs* attached to “God” in John 1:18.³⁴ “Only begotten” God sounds odd and makes no sense because God is the uncaused cause and. However, John means the unique God or one-of-a-kind God, referring to the Son, because He is the

³³ NET BIBLE (2ND ED.) NOTES, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Biblical Studies Press, 2019) Note on John 3:16.

³⁴ This text has a textual problem of whether the noun is God [θεός] or Son [ἴδιος]. There is a fair amount of evidence in favor of God that balance against the evidence for Son. It seems more likely that a copyist would have corrected what he thought was an error and changed God to son than that one would have changed son to God.

One who became flesh and demonstrated [exegeted] in human terms what God was like.

Believing always looks forward to a promise. It is not in static facts. People enter into salvation when they believe that because Christ died on the cross and rose again, their sins will be forgiven. Receiving forgiveness is the promise. John connects believing that Jesus is the Son of God with having “life in His name” (Jh. 20:31). This does not refer only to how one obtains life but how one who has eternal life can have that life or use it. The promise for John’s readers is that they can live out this life as Christ did when He walked the earth. They can demonstrate love to other believers; they can show compassion.

While the antichrists deny the Son by denying that He is absolutely God equal with the Father, believers believe that Jesus is the Son of God. As John stated in 2:25, the promise attached to believing in the Son is that God gives us eternal life. Eternal life is connected to the Son being God. John will get to this in 5:11.

5:6 Jesus came by water and blood. Several interpretations have been offered of this expression such that water pictures His physical birth from Mary and blood to His death on the cross. The text doesn’t seem to look at His whole earthly life as beginning with physical birth and ending in shedding of blood. Some suggest that it refers to the way that Jesus died, namely of a broken heart based on Psalm 69:20 that reproach had broken His heart. So when the soldier pierced Christ’s side, out came blood and water (Jh. 19:34). If this were the idea, we ask what did it mean “not by water only”? I would like to suggest that water and blood refers to His spiritual life and His physical life. In John’s writing, he used “water” as a reference to the Spirit and the life associated with Him (Jh. 3:5; 4:10-15; 7:38-39). Blood

refers to the flesh or physical life (Jh. 1:13; 6:53-56; 1 Jh. 1:7). The antichrists would agree that this Jesus had spiritual life but some of them denied that He had come in flesh (1 Jh. 4:1-3). He wasn't only spiritual. He didn't merely appear physical but remained only a spirit, but He became flesh. Note also that in 5:5 and here in 5:6, John uses "Jesus" as a reference to His human nature. The Spirit testifies of Jesus' identity. Jesus said that the Spirit would glorify Him speaking what He heard from Him (Jh. 16:14). The Spirit is the Truth. He too is the genuine God. He too is the One who provides the believer freedom. He too is the One who gave honest demonstrations through Jesus that supported Jesus' identity.

5:7-8 The Spirit, the water, and the blood are three that all witness to Jesus' genuine identity as both God and man. These three are one and work together to this end. This reminds us that we can become focused on the Spirit's identity and ministry, and certainly the apostles give space to help us know what He is doing. However, unlike some Pentecostals, the Spirit points to Christ. His purpose is to draw attention to Christ and His identity.

Note that in the Textus Receptus [TR], the Greek text behind the New Testament of the Authorized Version (KJV), 5:7 includes the word "The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit." This is a statement that occurs in the Latin translation. When Erasmus collated seven manuscripts to form the TR, he received an objection that this phrase was not included but Erasmus did not have a Greek text that included it. Afterwards, he was presented with a Greek text that included the phrase and Erasmus included it. According to Bruce Metzger, Erasmus, "indicates in a lengthy footnote his suspicions that the manuscript had been prepared

expressly in order to confute him.”³⁵ The teaching of the Trinity does not depend upon this text, but is supported by many other passages.

5:9 If we receive the testimony of men, God’s testimony is greater. Contrary to the false claims of the antichrist regarding Jesus’ identity: not really God, not really human, the Spirit testifies that Jesus is both God and man. The Spirit is the Truth, and is therefore, the God giving testimony regarding the Son’s identity. “His Son” at the end of 5:9 relates this to the Father, but the Father was directing the Spirit as to how to glorify the Son and what the Son was to do.

5:10 The individual who believes into [*eis*] the Son of God, he has the testimony or witness in himself. “In himself” refers to God’s work in the life of the believer NOW! It involves regeneration and its effect on the individual.

The one who does not believe God or in God has made God a liar. John uses *tō Theō* [τῷ Θεῷ] the dative case of “God” indicating that they do not believe what God has said. The one who does not believe has made (perfect tense) God a liar. They have not believed in the witness or testimony that God has witnessed generally about (*peri*) His Son. (to be continued)

³⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) p. 101.

5:11 God testified concerning His Son. He testified to His Son's deity, to their relationship, and to His ability to do the works of God (Jh. 5:32, 37, cp 5:17-18). The Father spoke as a witness to the Son's identity (Mt. 3:17; 17:5; Jh. 12: 28). This testimony also involves the Son having eternal life. If someone believes in the Son, they too have eternal life (Jh. 3:36). In John 3:36 John explains to his readers that Jesus was anticipating this present age in which the Church exists. The present tense "has" does not indicate that anyone had or received eternal life at that time, before Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Like the Father, the Son makes alive those He wants (Jh. 5:21). As the good Shepherd He gives eternal life to His sheep (Jh. 10:28). Part of the Father's testimony about the Son involves the Son's deity and ability to give that life to us.

Therefore, John can say that the testimony about the Son includes God giving us eternal life. We the sheep share in the life of the Shepherd who is the Son. This life exists in the Son. However, we do not have eternal life by being in Christ. We have resurrection life, which is human life restored, in Christ, in His resurrected humanity at the Father's right hand (Eph. 2:5-6; Rom 6:11). This position is by the baptizing or placing-into work of the Holy Spirit.

5:12 He who has the Son has life. Jesus promised that in that day, they would know that "I am in you." (Jh. 14:20). By regeneration, we are joined or cleaved to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). Christ indwells us. We have a position in Christ, "I am crucified with Christ" and we have Christ indwelling us, "nevertheless I live, and yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). We have eternal life by His personal indwelling. His life flows in us believers through His very presence within us. C.I. Scofield offered a correction to an inaccurate understanding of how we possess eternal life. "I had for a

long time the idea that somehow by some operation of the divine Spirit, in the moment of faith, there was implanted in me the germ of a new life; that I had it for myself in the same manner in which I might take a seed from a fully developed and perfected plant, take it quite away from the plant, and deposit it somewhere else in the earth, and then I should have an independent life growing there. I took it, the impartation of eternal life to me by the energy of the new birth was like that; but that is not the truth, and it is not the way it is stated in Scripture ever.”³⁶

The one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. Christ does not indwell unbelievers. He is not in the antichrists. Only by His indwelling does one have eternal life. So, these do not and cannot have eternal life. Again, eternal life is not length of life. It does not emphasize duration. It is God’s kind of life. As the Father has life in Himself, said Jesus (Jh. 5:26). Jesus is the life (Jh. 14:6). Having eternal life is how we personally know the Father and Jesus Christ. So those who do not love do not know God (1 Jh. 4:8). The antichrists do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, do not know God, and do not have eternal life. Believers need to look at what we as believers have and what unbelievers do not have.

5:13 John summarizes what he has said about eternal life. He assures us of God’s promise (cp. 3:25). John has written these things so they who believe in the name of the Son of God might objectively know that they have eternal life. To believe in His name is to believe who He is, in His character as God and man, in His death, resurrection, and current work in heaven (see notes under 2:24). Believers have not merely assented to Jesus’ existence or to His death. Believing in

³⁶ C.I. Scofield, *Where Faith Sees Christ*, (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, nd) p. 48.

Christ is more than acknowledging historical facts. Believing in Christ is believing what God reveals about His Son and the accompanying promises from God to us (see notes on 5:1, 4). The antichrists have not believed what God says about Jesus Christ. They didn't deny Jesus' existence, but that He was the Christ, that He had come and still is in flesh. They denied the Son and so denied the Father because they are one God. We believe He is Christ, has come in flesh, and as the Son is God. With this, we believe we have salvation solely through who He is and what He has done. So as believers, we have eternal life.

Many years ago while a college student and attending a prayer time, two representatives of a false religion that claims to be Christian visited. When students began to ask them questions, their carefully misleading answers began to confuse several new and very young believers. I asked them if they had eternal life. They replied that they did not but hoped to have it one day. I asked again, and they did not change their response. This got the attention of the young believers who **knew** they had eternal life. I shared this verse (5:11-13; I couldn't remember the Scripture reference at that time). I pointed out that this is God's promise to us NOW not just for our future. We HAVE it NOW not just in the future. They disagreed and claimed that they might have it one day. My fellow students recognized the error of these antichrists (they denied that the Son is absolutely God equal with the Father). John wants the immature believers to realize the difference between themselves and the antichrists. We have life and they do not. In 1 John, the young men and fathers should have stepped up to point out these errors to the little born ones and young children.

5:14 Having reminded them about eternal life, John reminds us of God's promise of access into His presence. In the Upper Room, Jesus promised the eleven disciples that they would be able to ask (pray) God (Jh. 14:13). He promised that if they would abide in Him they could ask God and it would be done for them (Jh. 15:7). He promised that they would be able to ask in His name. That was a new privilege, which they had never done (Jh. 16:23-24). John encourages His readers that they have boldness or freedom of speech [παρρησία] facing [πρὸς] Him (God). Too often believers talk to God timidly or cautiously. According to Jesus, if we would abide in Him, we could enjoy this boldness rather than be timid.

The word "ask" is *aiteō* [αἰτέω]. John uses this verb six times in 1 John, and eight times in the Upper Room (Jh. 14-17). Five of these involve some idea of asking for "whatever." Too many Christians have lost faith in God due to these statements. They claim that they ask in His name (cp Jh. 14:13) but do not receive what they asked for. Often, they do not know what it means to ask in His name. It is not attaching His name to a closing of the request, trying to feel like Jesus, or mimicking His exact words. Asking in His name is asking as we "abide" in Him and His words "abide" in us (Jh. 15:7). First, abiding in Christ means we know who God says we are in Christ and then being at ease in truth. Second, His words that are to abide in us are His commands regarding loving other believers as He loved us. Too often we ask and do not receive because we ask with evil motives, asking that we might spend it upon our own fleshly

pleasures³⁷ (Jas. 4:3). We do not ask with a motive of love but of selfishness. We might even couch our request in love language trying to make it not selfish when all the while it remains selfish. So in our verse, it is asking by the standard [*kata*] of His desirous will. As Jesus conditioned the request on His word abiding in us, here His will is likewise expressed in His command to love one another. That is the opposite of selfishness. Love looks out for what is best for other believers. When we ask like this, God hears us. God hears all things because He is omniscient or all-knowing, but John means that He listens to us or acknowledges what we are saying. He does not turn a deaf ear to our requests. The opposite is implied, when we ask otherwise, He does turn a deaf ear to us.

It is interesting that here in 5:14 John uses the verb in the Greek middle voice, meaning there is some personal interest from the one asking. They may be asking for themselves but in an unselfish way. Perhaps they see themselves intimately involved with others' needs and so ask with a personal interest in those needs. Of the eight times Jesus used the verb in the Upper Room, twice He used it in the middle voice (15:7; 16:26) and twice in 1 John (5:14-15). Christ asked for Himself but never selfishly but with the interest of others (cp Jh. 11:41-42).

5:15 Knowing that He hears us when we ask in this manner, we know that we have the things we request from Him. "Have" is present tense to indicate the certainty that we will have what we ask for. This knowledge is objective

³⁷ "Pleasure, gratification, sensual pleasure." Mounce, op cit, (G2454). Gingrich adds "enjoyment in an unfavorable sense." F. Wilbur Gingrich, Rev. Fredrick W. Danker, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 86.

because we may not have yet experienced the reception of the things for which we have asked.

5:16 John has addressed our privilege in asking (prayer) and now turns to asking about brothers (believers) who have sinned. In this letter he wrote that no one can claim to be free of sin for that is self-deception and makes God a liar (1:8, 10). He wrote because he didn't want his readers to sin (2:1). Knowing they will sin, he reminds them of Christ's present work on our behalf. So, believers sin, not as a way of life (3:9), but from time to time, perhaps even for extended periods. Most sin is not to death. The expression "to death" involves the preposition *pros* and the noun death. *Pros* normally views a person or action facing or moving in a direction. For example, in 1:2 the Life (Jesus Christ) was "with" or "facing" God. In 5:16, John means it is a sin that is moving in the direction of death, where death would be the outcome or the penalty of the sin.

To understand a sin not facing death, we need to know what a sin facing death is. It is not a specific sin. Some might suggest that lying is sin but not worthy of death, but adultery or murder is. However, Ananias and his wife Saphira died as a penalty for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). Their lying was worthy of death, but it is not the specific sin of lying but the effect of sin. Ananias and Saphira lied about the price of a piece of property. Others had sold properties and brought the price to the church leaders to help those who were needy (Acts 4:32-37). This couple had "kept back," a word meaning to embezzle or misappropriate (5:3). They had authority to do whatever they wished with the property and the proceeds of the sale (5:4). They would have been fine not selling the property or giving only part of the sale price. The problem was a negative act against the body of Christ. It seems they did not genuinely care for others when they gave the gift. So what made this sin worthy of death? Their actions may have influenced others in the church to also give, serve, or help to impress others

but not out of genuine love. The Church is not a place to show off our wealth, skills, or talents! Our activity towards other believers should be driven by love.

After giving the basic details of communion or the Lordian (Lord's) supper, Paul warned the Corinthians against eating the supper in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27). What is unworthy? Communion is about what we share as believers: we are all one bread, one body in Christ so we share in His body, Christ dwells in all of us as part of the new covenant so we share in His life. As we partake of the bread and wine, we are remembering Christ: what He did and who He is right now. We proclaim the effect of His death, that unifies us in Him and He in us. But if we gather, mistreat others, and neglect their needs by perhaps becoming drunk/over-eating while they sit across from us hungry, we promote disunity, not unity (1 Cor. 11:19-22). We lie about fellowship. For this reason, many in the church had become weak and sickly and many died (sleep) (11:30). Like Ananias and Saphira, claiming unity while not treating other believers right is not only lying but fosters a surface respectability in the church rather than genuine love for one another.

The Corinthian church tolerated a brother engaged in an incestuous relationship with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-2). In chapter six, Paul has to tell the people to stop visiting prostitutes, but their actions appear different (1 Cor. 6:15-16). The man in chapter five is flaunting his immorality rather than ignorantly doing so or sneaking around as the others. Additionally, the rest of the church thought they were progressive because they were tolerant of the man and his sin. They were puffed up when they should have grieved over his actions (5:2). This sin and tolerance were like leaven that affects the whole group (5:6). Paul instructed them to

deliver the man to Satan so that his body might be destroyed but his spirit saved (5:5). They do this by putting him out of the church (5:9). Putting him out of the church removes him from the encouragement and help of other believers to direct him back to his position in Christ (cp Gal. 6:1). The church deals with problems within the church; we are not to yell at the world about their behavior, that's God's job (5:10-13). This text is the clearest that severe discipline is due to how one believer's actions negatively encourage other believers to disregard God's will regarding sin.

Even when God disciplines believers in this way, He still loves them (Heb. 12:5-6). "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." God addresses us as sons. We should take His discipline seriously; learn from it and don't brush it off. Don't give up because of discipline. It isn't meant to crush us but to produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness (12:11). God disciplines everyone He loves. No believer is exempt from discipline because God loves us all and wants our best. If a person undergoes no discipline, they are not a son of God but an illegitimate child (12:7-8). Finally, He scourges or whips with severity every son whom He receives (11:6). The word "receives" translates *paradechomai*, from *para*-alongside and *dechomai*-to welcome or receive. When God disciplines a believer to death, He welcomes that believer home. From an earthly perspective, it is severe. From a heavenly perspective, death ends our opportunity to be used by God in loving acts of service. BUT, even in this "harsh" act, the moment that person leaves this earth, they are welcomed in heaven. In fact, discipline is proof of God's love. Though all believers will be disciplined at some point/s, we are not all disciplined by death, but death is still an act of

God's love. Today, we live by grace, and God's loving discipline or child-training ("instructing" NASB, "teaches" NIV) is part of His grace (cp Tit. 2:11-12).

In light of these other texts on Divine discipline and death, John's phrases, "sinning a sin not unto (facing) death," and "there is a sin unto (facing) death" mean that this brother is not merely sinning but sinning in a manner that influences other believers to do the same. Several times John quotes believers who repeated what the antichrists said, "If we say..." The antichrists denied that they have sin and that they had sinned. Some of John's readers were now saying this.³⁸ He warns believers who are mimicking the activities of the antichrists. So, some of these believers, being influenced by the antichrists, now influence other believers. This influence pushes these false ideas and warrants discipline, even discipline to death. God takes seriously our actions against others in the body.

John assumes believers can identify sin in other believers. If a spiritual believer sees a brother caught in a trespass, he is responsible for attempting to restore him by directing his thinking back to his freedom in Christ (Gal. 6:1). This means one believer can identify a trespass in another. If a brother turns around another brother who is straying from the Truth, they are turning a sinner from the error of his ways AND save his soul from death (Jas. 5:19-20). We can identify sin in others. These statements also assume believers can recognize that some sin is more serious than

³⁸ Unbelieving Bible students make claims repeated by Christian scholars lacking discernment. Like the young men, scholars sometimes love the world and want the world to listen to them and recognize them as scholars.

others. It is more serious because it leads other believers to do the same or similar.

When a believer witnesses a brother sinning but not unto death, he can ask [*aiteō*] God, and God will give him life. It does not say what God does for this believer. Perhaps the believer receives wisdom from God as to how to best help them. God does not need our prayer for Him to act, but in keeping with Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19-20, it makes more sense that God gives the spiritual believer direction on how to do their part. After charging spiritual believers with helping the one in a trespass, Paul cautions them to watch themselves so they are not also tempted (Gal. 6:1). James states that acting to turn a believer around from error saves a soul from death. John looks at this as God giving them life, meaning physical life versus discipline to death.

John asserts that there is a sin unto death. He tells us not to ask about that one. John changes the verb ask from *aiteō* in the first clause to *erōtaō* in the last. *Erōtaō* [ἔρωτάω] is a request or question between equals, while *aiteō* is a request as a lesser to a greater. We do not ask God as equals. That is not our authority in talking with God. The Son asks the Father in this manner. One possible meaning is that this is a request for discipline to the point of death, and that is not something we should do. The Son as our high priest alone has that authority. He intercedes for us and this way protects us from any accusation that might harm us (Rom. 8:34). He intercedes for our growth (Rom. 7:25), but by necessity for our discipline when He deems it fitting. The Father disciplines, but our High Priest asks for what we need, even discipline, and as in Hebrews, this is with long-term good intentions.

5:17 All unrighteousness is sin. God's attributes or eternal qualities that define how He operates are all-knowingness, all-powerfulness, goodness, holiness, love, righteousness, and truth. Other qualities derive from these such as mercy and grace. However, these latter qualities require something other than God for their existence. For example, mercy is the response of God's goodness to suffering. Suffering results from sin and is, therefore, not an eternal quality. God is righteous in all His ways (Ps. 145:17). When only the Father, Son, and Spirit existed, everything they did was righteous. When sin entered into God's creation, unrighteousness existed, for all unrighteousness is sin. God does not have an attribute of "unsin" or "no sin." By saying God is righteous we are also saying that God has no sin. because sin being unrighteousness is the opposite of God's righteous character. Therefore, based on how Scripture defines God's character, we can make the theological claim that unrighteousness is the larger term and sin is a facet or subset of unrighteousness.

Neither unrighteousness nor sin have a definite article in the Greek text. Greek writers may have omitted the article for several reasons. One reason is to express quality, "A qualitative noun places the stress on quality, nature or essence."³⁹ John's construction stresses the quality of these two ideas. Unrighteousness and sin do not have the

³⁹ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 244. Young provides a good illustration of the anarthrous noun sin from Hebrews 4:15, "Others say the anarthrous construction refers to sin in general. Although He was tempted, He did not commit any kind of sin at all. The latter appears to be more in keeping with the context of the book." Richard Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, (Nashville, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p. 68.

same identity, that would be expressed with definite articles. Rather unrighteousness and sin share the same quality. When believers sin, we are to agree (confess) with God about the sins (1:9). John uses the definite article with the plural noun sins because these are specific sins we know we have done so we can agree with God about them, rather than deny they exist as the false teachers do (1:8). When we agree with God, He cleanses us from all unrighteousness because sin seldom exists or happens alone. There may have been unrighteous thinking and planning that preceded the sin, perhaps the harboring of unrighteous attitudes that gave rise to the sin. All these and the sin (for it is unrighteous) God cleanses.

So, when a brother sins a sin, whether unto death or not unto death, they are doing something that is unrighteous and therefore, contrary to the nature of God. Not all sin is unto death, and John makes it clear that there is sin not unto death. In this last clause, the word sin does not have the article so John is speaking about sin as a quality, or we might say, there is sin that does not go on to death. In light of the comments on 5:16, we can say that John refers to sin that is private, sin that is not persistent, sin that is not encouraging others to do the same, or thinks of sin lightly. Sin is not merely missing the mark but intentionally shooting at another mark. We must recognize the seriousness of sin as a challenge to God's righteousness.

5:18 We know as an objective truth [*oida*] that everyone who has been born from God does not sin as a way of life. "Born" is in the perfect tense emphasizing this one's birth and continuing state of being one born from God. Sin does not negate this reality. Sin is present tense. So, we do not sin continually. Our lives are not characterized by sin. The devil sins from a beginning (3:8). Sin is his way of life and does

characterize him. He lives in opposition to God's righteousness. John uses an aorist tense in 2:1 to view the believer's sin as a point, a moment, not a continued state.

The second clause involves a textual problem so that it may be translated, "The one having been born from God keeps Himself" or "the One having been Fathered by God keeps him." The problem is whether the final pronoun is "him" [αὐτόν] or "himself" [ἑαυτόν].⁴⁰ This clause begins with the conjunction ἀλλά, which expresses a stronger contrast. The contrast suggests that John has turned his focus, perhaps to another person. John uses the verb "keep" [τηρέω] seven times, all but this one referring to keeping His commands (2, 3-5; 3:22, 24; 5:3). The verb *tēreō* means, "properly, **to guard, ... to keep.**"⁴¹ I would understand this last sense of "keep" to keep safe. Another offers as definitions, "**to watch over, guard, keep, preserve.**"⁴² John has been concerned with believers guarding or keeping safe

⁴⁰ This verse contains a textual variant in which two older manuscripts A, B, 614, 1505 have αὐτόν "him" rather than

ἑαυτόν "himself" the reading found in \aleph , A^c (a corrector to A), P, Ψ , 33, 1739, Byz. The "him" rather than "himself" with the articular aorist passive participle "the ONE being born/generated" as prompted some interpreters to translate the text, "The One (Jesus Christ) who is born from God keeps him (the believer)." HCSB. The New Living Translation replaces "The One Born" with "for God's Son..." The NIV capitalizes "the One who was born..." to indicate that they think this is the Son of God protecting the believer.

⁴¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Public Domain, entry 5083

⁴² Abbott-Smit, op cit. p. 445.

Jesus' commands. In our present text, he assures us either that God's children keep themselves guarded or safe regarding sin or that another person guards them, most likely Jesus Christ. John has stated that we sin and make God a liar if we suggest otherwise. But sin is not our way of life because of this guarding.

If we accept the reading "guards himself", we need to determine how one does this. Paul says that God is the one working within us to desire and work for His good pleasure (Php. 2:13). This agrees with John about our being God's children. In the Philippians text, God is anarthrous and refers to the collected work of the Godhead. God works in us to desire [*thelō*], but we choose to act. Sin as lawlessness (cp. 3:4), is the only way of life the unsaved know. They have no righteous desires for they do not have the Father's seed in them (cp. 3:9). They live in opposition to God and what has and is doing. Paul expresses misery over his sin nature. This is magnified by the presence of good desires which he cannot figure out how to perform⁴³ (Rom. 7:18-20). These new desires conflict with the cravings of the sin nature, but they also cause the believer to guard himself, by interrupting the course of sin in the same way that the sin nature interrupts our desires to do the good. These new desires from God cause believers to keep themselves. This is one possibility.

If we accept the reading "he guards him", we need to determine who is guarding whom. The first participle in this verse "having been born" refers to believers with a perfect tense as John has done nine times in this letter. Only in the second occurrence in 5:18 is this verb an aorist tense. The

⁴³ This was because Paul was trying to live the Christian life by the law (Rom. 7:16).

arist views the whole as a singular act. Jesus was born from God and therefore, is called Son of God (Lk. 1:57). He is not a born one in the sense that we are. Our spirit had to be born anew (Jh. 3:5-6). The Son was never a sinner. The Spirit caused Mary to conceive a complete human nature untouched by sin and holy (Lk. 1:35). At the moment of conception, the Son who has been eternally God also becomes human, joining His person to this holy human nature. Jesus Christ is one born from God.

If He is the One who keeps, how does He keep the believer? In terms of the security of salvation, He is our Advocate or the One who stands as our character witness, as the righteousness One (2:1). He has satisfied the Father regarding our sins (2:2; 4:10). We are not condemned because Christ Jesus died, is raised, sits at the Father's right hand, and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34). Nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:35). His intercession is for our growth, but perhaps also for our discipline (Heb. 7:25). When we are judged we are disciplined under the authority⁴⁴ of the Lord (Jesus Christ; 1 Cor. 11:32). In this way He keeps or guards us. He knows whether our sin is unto death, and can ask the Father in a manner we cannot (5:17).

In light of His work, the evil one (Satan) may tempt us, may make our lives difficult but, He cannot touch us. The brother put out of the church, does not have this assurance for he is turned over to Satan as part of his discipline (1 Cor. 5:5). Apart from such discipline, he cannot touch us.

⁴⁴ I am representing the preposition 'ὑπὸ the person who exercises authority. See Young, *op cit.*, p. 103.

5:19 As John prepared to close this letter, he reminds the believers that we are from God. We are born from Him, we are His children, and we are brothers with other believers (4:21-2). This is the basis of a contrast between believers and unbelievers. We are not from the world. John has already stated this in 4:4 and contrasted us to those who are out of the world (4:5). The world does not listen to us. They listen to those who are like them, those who are part of the world. This is a vital lesson for believers. We struggle with how to get the world to listen to us, not knowing that we cannot. It will be God who opens the heart of a woman to listen, who appointed people to eternal life so they believed, who commands light to shine into our hearts so we see who Christ really is (Acts 16:14; 13:48; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6). During His earthly ministry, Jesus said no one came to the Father unless the Father “draws him” (Jh. 6:44). The word “draw” does not mean woo. The verb is used for fishermen drawing (dragging) their nets into a boat or to shore, or of people dragging an individual in anger (Jh. 21:6, 11; Acts 16:19; 21:30). So God not only births His children but brings them to the place of faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

The world lies in the evil one. The verb “lies” [κεῖμαι] is used for the infant Jesus lying in a manger and the body of Jesus laid in a tomb (Lk. 2:12; 23:53). This term suggests their position is one of comfort like a child. John has addressed the Devil as the source of unbelievers, not that he has birthed them, but their motivation and thinking comes from him (3:8). Cain was from the evil one and his deeds were evil while his brother’s were righteous (3:12). The young men to whom John writes have overcome the evil one; they know how to rely upon God so as to counter the Devil’s temptations (2:13-14), and the evil one does not touch God’s child (5:18). So the evil one does something with the world so that they lie back with him like a child in their

parent's arms. Believers can ABIDE in Christ and in God the Father. Unbelievers do not abide in the evil one, but he apparently makes them "comfortable" with him.

It appears from Scripture that he distracts them from thinking about God, Christ, the gospel, their future, or other related facts. He focuses them on the world, saving the world, or fighting against those who would destroy the world. It is interesting how unbelievers can be conservative or liberal, oppose each other in their attempts to preserve what they view as the ideal life, sometimes with violence, and yet they unite. In the book of Revelation, unbelievers are called "inhabitants" or those settled down at home on earth (e.g. Rev. 3:10; 6:10). Viewing the world as their home preoccupies the unsaved.

The antichrists saw that they were not in agreement with these believers and left. However, John does not suggest that they left because they were uncomfortable with the truth about Christ. More likely they left because they found the words of the believers to be foolish (cp 1 Cor. 2:14). Their lack of guilt in conscience for making claims about Christ that are untrue does not bother them, likely due to the evil one's work. Notice that this is true for the WHOLE world, not just some within the world.

5:20 Contrasted to the antichrists, God's children do not deny who Christ is. Rather, they (we) know that the Son of God has come and given to us an understanding for the purpose that we might know the True One. First, our knowledge is about the Son of God. Remember that the title Son of God does not imply generation as a human father generates a son. Since God is eternal, for God to have a Son, the Son would share the Father's nature as the eternal one. The Son is eternally One with the Father and the Spirit. They are not three gods but one God. They are three persons who

share completely one essence, one nature, one set of attributes or abilities. The Son came into the world and demonstrated what God is like in human terms (Jh. 14:8-9). The Son is how we have eternal life. By eternal life, we experientially know God and Jesus Christ (Jh. 17:3). This at first appears to suggest that Jesus is not God. However, John began his book by telling us that He is God (Jh. 1:1). What this text tells us is that we know God by using eternal life to the degree that a human can live out God's characteristics.

Second, the Son has given us a thinking (*dianoia*). Most modern Bibles translate this word as "understanding." The noun *dianoia* refers to what passes through the mind, namely thoughts. Paul tells us that being joined to Christ, we have His kind of mind (1 Cor. 2:16). Therefore, we can use that mind and have thoughts about God. The antichrists do not think properly about God. They cannot. God makes no sense to them. Part of the Son's work is giving us the ability to think properly about God.

Third, thinking properly allows us to experientially know the True One. We cannot know God if we don't know anything about God. Knowledge about God lets us interpret our experience to discern what God does and what we do from our own efforts. God is love and love is from God. This is one theme of this letter. God's command to love is not burdensome. When we love freely and not as a burden, we experience God. The one doing the Truth knows that their works are worked by God (Jh. 3:21). In this case, loving God's child is a work of God done through the believer.

Fourth, the True One refers to God the Father in these two clauses. The next clause "in His Son Jesus Christ" supports this, as "His" refers back to the True One. The statements in chapter four such as "and he *abides* in God"

remind us that we are in God the Father as we are in Christ (4:15, 16).

On the last clause in 5:20, Christians do not agree as to whether “the True God and Life Eternal” refers to God the Father or to the Son. The nouns God and Life are joined by “and” and share one definite article. This Greek construction views the second noun “Life” as expressing an additional fact about the first noun “God.” Therefore, this is not two people but one person. In 1:1-3, John does not call this person God, the Word, Jesus, or the Son. He calls Him “the Word of Life” and “the Life.” We know this is God the Son because they heard, saw, and touched this One. They never did this regarding the Father. John has called the Father the True One and now applies the title True God to the Son in 5:20. In John 17:3, Jesus called the Father the True God but did not apply that title to Himself. John applies it here for one last response to the antichrists. This Jesus is the True God and He is eternal life. The antichrists do not have eternal life because they reject Jesus Christ as the True God. They may have allowed him to be a lesser god, a demigod, or a demiurge (a designation used by gnostics in a few years following 1 John). If He isn’t the True God, He isn’t Eternal Life. If He isn’t Eternal Life, we do not have eternal life. If we do not have eternal life we do not know God. Using God’s life is how we **experientially** get to know Him, not merely **objectively** know about God.

5:21 “Little children, guard yourselves from the idols.” John’s closing line seems an odd way to conclude this letter. He addresses it to the little children, to those at the very earliest stage of maturity and most affected by the antichrists. This is John’s only specific reference to idols in this letter. Idolatry is a religious work of the flesh that the world system uses (Gal. 5:19-20). When the antichrists left

their church, some idolized the reception the antichrists received from the world. They wanted the world to listen to them in the same way that it listened to the antichrists. But both the world and the antichrists agree that Jesus was just a man and not God. The believers cannot accept this and know that Jesus is God. John's warning to guard themselves from idols means they should not worry about how the world responds and what the world wants Jesus to be. People worship idols as images or by coveting things (cp Eph. 5:5). They think that an idol can help them get what they seek: satisfaction, rest, acceptance by the world, riches, love, and so on. Believers may idolize the attention the antichrists received from the world. They don't need what the antichrists have. Further, they know that Jesus Christ is the genuine God and not an idol. So, John concludes, avoid what those antichrists pursue.

Conclusion

1 John is about a proper view of who Jesus Christ is; He's God. It is about believers having and using eternal life to love each other. However, some unbelievers left this church after voicing their opposition to Christ's deity and incarnation. All the believers knew that teaching was wrong. When they left, some believers apparently missed them—perhaps they had become friends—and others wanted the world to like them as much as it liked these unbelievers. But none of those unbelievers had eternal life and so none could love as John's readers could. John's readers needed to stop worrying about the unbelievers who left and get back to loving each other as we have been commanded.