



## **THINGS WE MOST CERTAINLY KNOW**

*The letters of John, son of Zebedee, were for Christians to see the fundamentals of their calling: true teaching, obedient living, and faithful devotion – in spite of troubled opposition (3John 3,4). Because “God is light” (1John 1:5), Christians should endure and overcome those wicked who oppose the teaching of Christ (2John 9). This assurance of eternal life (5:13) is the objective the good Apostle had for his readers.*

*These letters should do the same for Christians who today to be reminded of the true teaching of Jesus Christ, the life of obedience He has called us to live, and the devotion to endure in faithfulness until the end.*

An Adult Workbook  
By Don Hooton, 2023

## LESSON SCHEDULE

1. [3/12] **INTRODUCING JOHN AND HIS TIMES**  
*Introductory Matters; The Man and Apostle John; The climate set by false teaching of the time and how it compares to the Word of Life; The tests of fellowship John offers.*
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## INTRODUCING JOHN AND HIS TIMES

Imagine yourself in the first century and a stranger appears in your assembly who claims he is a follower of The Way. What would you do? How could you ask the visitor to affirm his relationship with God through Christ? In the first century, they would have had to do this often. And among those were also vagabonds, false persons, and false teachers. John's letters were written for the very purpose to empower true Christians **from what they knew** about The Way and to expose the false claims of those whose conduct betrays false teaching.

John Stott writes, The Apostles "great emphasis is on the differences between the genuine Christian and the spurious, and how to discern between the two" (The Epistles of John, 42) and then adds, "The predominant theme of these Epistles is Christian *certainty*" (50). Later, he notes that the Greek verb (*ginosko*) that means, "**to know by observation and experience**" occurs 15 times and the word (*oida*) meaning, "**to know by reflection**" is used 25 times. The verb (*phaneroo*), "**to make known**" is used 9 times (and the noun once), and the noun (*parresia*), "**confidence**" is used 4 times. John wanted them, and wants us, **to know** with certainty the truth in which we walk so that we can confidently affirm to others that we know truth and that we know error.

**Who wrote 1John?** While it is important to remember that our conclusions are unaffected by who wrote these epistles, it is valuable when we consider the controversy over Christ which permeates the three letters. It makes a significant difference if the author (particularly of 1 John) was in fact an eyewitness to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ as he claims in 1John 1:1-4; and if he stands with other apostles who opposed it in 1 John 2:18-19 with 1Timothy 6:19-20. The second and third letters, however, designate the author as "the Elder," and 1John is anonymous.

There are **external references** that point to the authorship of all three to **the Apostle John** (who would then be "The Elder").

- **Irenaeus'** "Against Heresies" (AD 180), which includes in three passages direct citations of 1 and 2 John. Also, in the same work (1.16.3), there is a quotation of 2 John 11 in which Irenaeus adds that the Epistle was written by the Lord's disciple John, who was also the author of the Fourth Gospel. Other quotations are from 1John 2:18-19 and 21-22 (3.16.5) and 2 John 7-8, 1John 4:1-2 and 5:1 (3.16.8). All of these are part of Irenaeus' arguments against the Gnostics.
- **Tertullian** (died AD 215) quotes 1 John numerous times, referring to it as the work of John the Apostle (Adversus Marcionem 5.16, Adversus Gnosticos Scorpiace 12 ).
- **Origen** (died AD 253) quoted frequently from 1 John and referred to it as by John the Apostle. Eusebius claimed Origen knew of both 2 and 3 John (Hist. eccl. 6.25.10).

From this historical, external evidence, at least, we can say it was being quoted - without question - that the author was John the Apostle, author of the Fourth Gospel as well.

Then there are **internal references** that evidence the Apostolic authorship:

- **The author was an eyewitness to the risen Christ.** In 1John 1:1-4, repeatedly emphasizes the eyewitness nature of his testimony; with what he has "heard, seen, gazed upon, and touched". It appears that the author intends to show that he was one of the original eyewitnesses of Jesus.

- **The author's authoritative tone is Apostolic, just like Paul used in his writing.** What the author assumes is that he will be obeyed (1Jn 4:6) and no compromise with the error of the adversaries will be accepted (2:18-19, 4:1-3).
- **The author's endearment of his readers** by calling them *tekniva* (teknia, "little children", 1Jn 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21) and that he is well known to them, (which may well explain why he feels no reason to include his name) suggests a relationship of endearment that would fit an Apostle.

So, who was John, the Apostle?

- **His family:** His mother was Salome (c.f. Mt 27:56 with Mk 15:40, 16:1) and his father was Zebedee (Mt 4:21, Mk 1:19); his brother was James (c.f. Lk 9:52-56; Acts 12:1-2). Salome helped with Jesus' ministry (Lk 8:3; Mk 15:40-41) and bought spices for His burial (Mk 16:1). Since the family had servants (Mk 1:20), it is believed his upbringing was in affluence of the time.
- **His beginning** as a disciple. John himself met Jesus and became a disciple (Jn 1:35-39) during Jesus' first year of ministry. At some point, John returned to fishing. Jesus called him to fish for men in the second year of ministry (Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:60-20) and then about 18 months before crucifixion, John accepted the call to Apostleship (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:13-19; Lk 6:12-19).
- **His place as an Apostle:** During His ministry, Jesus considered John close in His "inner circle" (Mk 9:2; 13:3; 14:33). But like all of them, they remained close to Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:37ff) but fled at His arrest (26:56). And John was the first to view the empty tomb (Jn 20:1-10).

1John itself contains no hint to whom and from where the letter was originally written. However, because of one of several external sources, most believe John wrote the first *letter from Ephesus* around AD 85-90:

- **Irenaeus** of Lyon (AD 180) says that after the writing of the other Gospels, John, the disciple of the Lord who reclined on his bosom (an allusion to John 13:23, 21:20), published his Gospel at Ephesus (Adv. haer. 3.1.1.).
- And then there is **Justin Martyr**, who was at Ephesus himself (AD 135), speaks of John, one of the apostles of Christ, as having lived there previously (Dialogue with Trypho 81.4).

The only thing that can be said for certain about **the intended readers** based on the content of the letter itself is that 1) *they were Christians*, 2) *they were well-known to each other*, and 3) *there was a looming threat from false teaching* which was deemed "life-threatening" by John (1 John 2:18-19).

### What was the purpose of the letter?

- In the letter itself, John states *why the letter was written*:
  1. "that our joy may be made complete" (1.4);
  2. "that you may not sin" (2.1);
  3. "concerning those who are trying to deceive you" (2.26);
  4. "that you may know you have eternal life" (5.13).
- These statements show that John wanted to secure in the Christians to whom he wrote a **certainty in the truth of the gospel** (1:4), a responsibility to the gospel (2:1), a warning about the gospel (2:26) as well as the assurance of the gospel (5:13).

Yet the concern of those who were trying to deceive his audience is the most telling and descriptive of all the reasons the Apostle gives for writing them. What *would later be called* Gnostic grew in the early circles of first and second century Judaism and Christianity. However, John's letter seems to target teachings similar to Gnosticism with a man named Cerinthus. Summarily, Cerinthus taught

that the world was created by angels, from one of whom the Jews received their imperfect Law. The only New Testament writing that Cerinthus accepted was the Gospel of Matthew. Cerinthus taught that Jesus, the offspring of Joseph and Mary, received Christ at his baptism as a divine power revealing the unknown Father. This Christ left Jesus before the Passion and the Resurrection. So note that it was the challenge of the teaching of Cerinthus that Jesus was Divine from baptism to before Crucifixion. It is John's point in the letter that Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, was God from birth to death.

Other developing Gnostic beliefs could have also been the aim of John's letter. A summary of Gnostic viewpoints is: 1) The material world is bad, the spirit world is good. The material world is under the control of evil, ignorance or nothingness. 2) A divine spark is somehow trapped in some (but not all) humans and it alone, of all that exists in this material world, is capable of redemption. 3) Salvation is through a secret knowledge by which individuals come to know themselves, their origin and destiny. And most believed that 4) Since a good God could not have created an evil world, it must have been created by an inferior, ignorant or evil god.

This caused "Christian" Gnostics to assert that the acquiring of knowledge because gnosis, or knowledge, is the end of all things. And since the world is evil, made by an evil supreme being, Incarnation would be an unacceptable assertion because the Divine could not have inhabited an impure material body. John responses equally argue against this because he speaks of those who do not "acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (2John7; 1Jn 4:2-3); He is a deceiver and the antichrist. He taught explicitly that Jesus "came by water and blood" (1Jn 5:6) (I.e. baptism and crucifixion). He further asserted that there is a unity between Son and Father (1Jn 2.23) that if you reject One, you reject the Other. As evidence, John says that he 1. Heard Jesus' voice, 2. Saw Him with his eyes and 3. Touched Him with his hands – it was no mere appearance.

John saw that these false doctrines led to false practices and to a disregard for the law of God since "the one who says 'I know him' yet does not keep his commandments is a liar" (2:3). So, in the letter, John posits three tests:

1. **The test of truth.** You must believe the teachings about Jesus from Us. One must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (1:3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 10, 14, 15; 5:5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 20), who has come in the flesh (1:1-4; 4:2; cf. John 1:14) by water and blood (5:6), who is the Christ (2:22; 5:1; cf. 1:3; 2:1; 2:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20), who suffered and died for sin (1:7; 2:1-2, 12; 4:10). Consequently, John tells them not to believe every spirit, but to test every spirit (4:1) to see if it is truth or error (4:6).
2. **The test of obedience.** You must obey the commandments. Fourteen times he uses the term "commandment(s)" stating the true believers will obey the commandment(s). In contrast, the one who claims to know God, and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar. John is especially clear on this point in 3:6-10 when he says, "little children, let no one deceive you... the one who practices sin is of the devil and no one who is born of God practices sin."
3. **The test of Love.** In this third and final test, the reader is told, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe his commandments" (5:2, NASU). Obedience and love are linked, since to obey his commandments means that we love one another and vice versa; this love for the brethren proves that a person has "passed out of death into life" (3:14). In 1John alone, the verb "love" is used twenty-eight times in seventeen different verses and the noun form is used eighteen times in fourteen different verses.

As we begin this study, we can hardly over-emphasize that John urged these Christians who had their "anointing" (2:27) which the Apostle urged matched what he had "written to them" (2:12) so

they would continue to “abide in Him” (2:28). And so to us, we can hardly over emphasize the need for us to study their words. Christians are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Without the right theology we could hardly have the right doxology. True worship springs from truth in our teaching (c.f. John 4:23-24). And before them was the ever present danger of error. And before us is the same challenge. It may not be Gnosticism, but it will be something that will in the final analysis make us lose God (2John 9).

*Review and Reflection*

1. What are the **internal** references to John the Apostle as author of 1John?
2. How would you describe Gnosticism?
3. How would you describe the teaching of Cerinthus?
4. What four purposes for writing 1John does not he mention in the letter?
5. What are the three tests John presents for authenticating someone’s walk with Christ?

## *We Proclaim To You*

1<sup>st</sup> John 1.1-4 | 3/19

**While he uses the word “love” some thirty times in just his first letter** from which he has come to be known as the Apostle of love, still, the Apostles reason for addressing that is because of the sixteen times, just in the first letter, that he says we know.

In John’s day, those who were teaching error regarding Jesus because of their various preconceived ideas or teachings from their philosophical past were in fact, not loving. And John says, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments” (1John 5:2, NASU).

Listen to the Apostle:

- 1 John 2:3,5-6 | By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.
- 2:18 | Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.
- 3:2 | Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.
- 3:14, 16 | We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death... We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
- 3:24 | The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.
- 4:6 | We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
- 4:13 | By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.
- 5:2-3 | By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.
- 5:15 | And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.
- 5:18-20 | We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

What we know should come from knowing God, knowing that we are in fellowship with Him, knowing what life after death can be, knowing we have passed from death to life, knowing we have the spirit of truth and that He abides in us—just to name a few. This “knowing” was to John the key truth “so that we may know Him who is true” (1John 5:20). In the second and third letters, addressing peripheral issues from the first—but equally important—will John return to say to that those who “know the truth” (2John 1:1) are those who he rejoices in when he sees them “walking in the truth” (3John 1:3).

So, never conclude teaching does not matter because in the end—it will always change the way you act—and—the way you love.

*Review and Reflection*

1. What does John say in 1:1 that defines the existence of Jesus as material and real?
2. How does this combat Gnosticism?
3. What does John call Jesus Christ in verses 1 and 2? Explain.
4. What is it that John says they have done with the information about this Word of Life (3)?
5. Define “fellowship” (3).
6. How is joy made complete (4)?



## *Light And Darkness*

1<sup>st</sup> John 1.5-2.2 | 4/2

**John begins by announcing that his message is not his:** “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you” (1:5). This is the gospel of Jesus—not John and the same approach the Apostle Paul used to the churches of Galatia to emphasize the (Gal 1:11-17). And that singular truth John states is that God is light, the same truth advance by Paul (1Ti 6:16) and James (1:17), and the same message about God that his gospel begins with—namely that He was the light of men (Jn 1:4) and the true light (1:9) which brings man his light. And He became flesh (1:14).

And this message, John says, is visible by its contrasts. The message of God is this light and contrasted from this darkness. These persons of the heavenly realm that fight for the souls of men are God who is light and Satan who is the prince of darkness (Lk 22:52).

And here John introduces the first test of who the true children of God: the test of obedience (1:5-2:6). To obey God, John says, is to “walk in the light as He himself is in the light”; and the converse is to disobey which is to “walk in darkness”. This “walking” is, according to Vine’s Expository Dictionary, used “figuratively [and] ”signifying the whole round of the activities of the individual life.” Our fellow-ship should be signified by our walking in light.

Our son-ship with God was being saved from death to life (3:4; 5:11-12). Christians do sin, but this does not mean they must be saved all over again. Rather, John says God is faithful to forgives us when we confess our sins to him (1:9). Sinning in the life of the believer (3:6; 3:8-9) breaks the fellowship but does not destroy the son-ship. In other words, we must confess our sinfulness to God but because we have sinned, we do not need to become sons again.

A child of God will always be a son even if his life in prodigal. But the prodigal who will return to God in penitence “will live again” (Luke 15:24).

Of course, the objective of this confidence is to admonish the believer from sinning (2:1). But Christians will sin. If we say we have not (1:10) or do not (1:8), we are lying to ourselves and to God.

John’s point is that if we claim to be walking in light but living in darkness, we are liars: 1) lying about fellowship, 1:6-7; 2) lying about our nature, saying that we have no sin, 1:8; 3) lying about our deeds, saying that we have not sinned, 1:10; and 4) lying about our obedience, saying that we have kept His commandments when we have not, 2:4-6.

But for the earnest believer, there is calm assurance. With this word “advocate” that means “one who pleads a case” (the same Greek word as “Comforter” in John 14:16), John says that Jesus Christ the righteous (one) stands to represent us before God in heaven. Carefully read Romans 8:31-34.

He is our “propitiation.” He is the expiatory victim, the propitiatory sacrifice that has been offered to God, the Judge for all our offences. Jesus is the mediator of intercession (1Ti 2:4), the Advocate (1Jn 2:1) and the propitiatory sacrifice in His death. This sacrifice does not lose its value and efficacy. Once and for all, Jesus “entered the holy place” (He 9:12) and “appeared in the presence of God for us” (9:24) and by that “one offering, He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14).

In which fellowship will we walk? Will it be in darkness? Then we will not be children of God. Will it be in light? Then if we sin, we have the certain assurance that if we confess our sins to Him, He will forgive us.

But the truth of who we are will be seen in what we do: "By this we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1John 2:3).

*Review and Reflection*

1. What does John mean when he says, "God is Light" (5)?
2. If we say we have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness, what does John call us (6)?
3. What does John say is a condition of fellowship with God (7)?
4. What are we to confess to God before He forgives us (9)?
5. Is there a difference in saying "we have no sin" (8) and "we have not sinned" (10)?
6. What is an "Advocate" (2:1)?
7. What is "propitiation" (2:2)?

# The Tests of Love and Obedience

1<sup>st</sup> John 2:3-17 | 4/9

**As John describes the life that is real**, he uses three words repeatedly: life, love, and light. In fact, he devotes three sections of his letter to the subject of Christian *love* (2:7-11; 3:10-24; 4:7-21). In these three sections, then, we find three good reasons why Christians should love one another:

1. God has commanded it (2:7-11).
2. As His children, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (3:10-24).
3. God first revealed His love to us (1 John 4:7-21).

**The new command** (7-11). John called his audience little children first in 2:1 (which he will repeat). However, in this section, he calls them “Beloved” (NASU) (“brothers” in the KJV) which he will also repeat (1Jn 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7; 3Jn 1-2, 5, 11) because they were loved of God and God’s children love the children of God (4:21).

With that, John’s second test of who truly are children of God is nicely introduced: the test of love. John says that he is writing “a new commandment” but is really an “old commandment that they had from the beginning” of the gospel. It was “old,” in that Christians as such had heard it from the first; but “new” [kainee, not nea: new and different from the old legal precept], in that it was first clearly promulgated with Christianity. Even in the days of Moses were the people of God commanded to love one another (Lev 19:18), but it was not until Jesus that they saw that love fully expressed and fully explaining God (John 1:18). Christianity first put love to brethren on the new and highest MOTIVE, instinctive love to Him who first loved us, constraining us to love all, even enemies, thereby walking in the steps of Him who loved us when enemies. So, Jesus calls it “new,” John 13:34-35: “Love one another, as I have loved you” (the new motive), John 15:12.

Still, when we are in fellowship with God and we are walking in the light, we should also be walking in love. Consequently, when we are out of harmony with our brothers, it means we are out of fellowship with God. We are all members of God’s family, so we ought to love one another.

**The love of family** (12-14). Like a loving father, John calls the saints “little children” (Gr., teknia) as he did in 2:1; but, in 2:13, he will call them “little children” (Gr., paidia) which here stands for “infants” (in age and standing) (JFB).

However, John called his readers dear children...and fathers, and young men. Some see a grouping by age. Others see a grouping by maturity. In either explanation, it is odd that “fathers” are in the middle. But it seems that each of them, while addressed separately, are equally “forgiven” and they “know” God the Father.

While fathers held positions of honor and authority; and children were in positions of learning and lacked status and authority; and young men were generally associated with strength and vigor; here together they had overcome the evil one by participating in Christ’s victory (4:4; 5:4) over sin (3:10-12).

**The danger everyone faces** (15-17). There is conflict between love for the Father and love for the world. By “the world” John means all that belongs to this life that is opposed to Christ. It is Satan’s

system; it is the society opposed to God and taking the place of God. If we love the world, we lose the love of the Father and cease to do His will. Anything in our lives that dulls our love for spiritual things or that makes it easy for us to sin is worldly and must be put away.

John identifies where these problems emerge in us: the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. Is this not that for which the people of the world live? But living for the world means losing everything in time, because the world is passing away. Lot suffered such loss. But if we live for God, we will abide forever.

And if a true child of God obeys God's commands and loves as God loves, he will know that there can be no true fellowship with God without love in us. Unless we love God and God's children, we cannot walk in the light and fellowship with God. For only in this way will we ever "abide forever" (2:17).

### *Review and Reflection*

1. What is it that John says verifies that we know Christ (3)?
2. What does John say shows God's love perfected in us (5)?
3. What is the "old commandment" (7)? Explain "old".
4. Can someone "walking in the light" hate his brother (9-11)? Why?
5. Who are the "little children" John is addressing (12)?
6. What does John tell the fathers (13-14)?
7. What does John tell the young men (13-14)?
8. What three things does the world offer (16)?
9. Who will live forever (17)?

## *The Tests of Belief*

1<sup>st</sup> John 2.18-27 | 4/16

There is great blessing in the fellowship that Christians share with the Son like the faithfulness of a Father who is ready, faithful and just to forgive us. However, there still remains for all us the blunt reality that having these blessings in the light put us in proximity and in conflict with darkness because the struggle between light and darkness is real because it is the “last time” (or “the last hour”).

Christianity is the new, but final, age that has dawned on the timeline of human history where all prophecy has pointed (He 1:1-3). Since the world began, God was planning a “new thing” in this world and this new thing was the gospel of His crucified Son and our risen Lord. This good news or new thing is the message that sharply divides people. And with that great divide in the challenge of our text. The darkness will not accept the light.

Still, how is it “the last hour” in John's day? First, God is not limited by time the way His creatures are. God works in human time but He is above time (cf. 2 Peter 3:8). Second, “the last hour” began back in John's day because it was the final age or dispensation of time called the “latter times” as described in 1 Timothy 4. Paul, like John, observed characteristics of his time illustrating the “latter times” because they were in the “last times.” The age of the gospel in the last age because in these last days God has spoken to us in His son (Hebrews 1:1-3).

In their present conflicts, there were people who left the light. When John says they left “us,” he refers to the Apostles. It is only by extension to our connection to the Apostles that it would be meant that they left the fellowship of believers, the church. They were leaving the message of light—not the people in the light.

The first evidence of their counterfeit faith was their “departure” from God's people. When people share the same divine nature (2Pe 1:4) and the same Spirit (Rom 8:14-16), they will want to enjoy that fellowship and share with one another. But these “counterfeit Christians” (mentioned in 1Jn 2) did not remain in the fellowship because of their Gnostic impression that they were superiors to their Christian-brother-rabble. They went out because they would no longer want the light that the anointing from the Apostles had taught.

One very clear lesson in this is that “Staying in the church” doesn't keep a person saved; rather, staying in the fellowship of light taught by the Apostles will. That is what truly indicates whether a person is truly a Christian.

Those who remained, John says, still have this “anointing” that grants the believer the ability to “know all things” (20) that they have “heard from the beginning” (24). And now, because John reminds these believers that the right testimony involves the person of Jesus Christ, it must be that these “antichrists” are teaching error about the Son of God (c.f. 2John 9). John makes the point that to deny the Son means we ultimately deny the Father. John says that true believers honor both the Father and the Son: “That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (John 5:23). If you say you “worship one God” but leave Jesus Christ out of your worship, you are not worshipping as a true Christian.

So as we confront the challenges of every generation, the solution today is the same as it was then: It is vital that what we “stay with” is what “we have heard” from the Apostles “from the beginning” in that which “abides in us” through “the anointing” we have in us: the truth of God's Word. The Word (or message) Christians have “heard from the beginning” is all we need to keep true to the faith. The Christian's life continues just as it began: through faith in the Bible's message.

Religious leaders and teachers who comes along with “something new,” something that contradicts what Christians have “heard from the beginning,” is not to be trusted. “Try the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). Let the Word abide in you (1 John 2:24), and abide in Christ (1 John 2:28); otherwise you will be led astray by the spirit of antichrist. No matter what false teachers may promise, you have the sure promise of eternal life (1 John 2:25). You need nothing more!

### *Review and Reflection*

1. What does the presence of Antichrists suggest (18)?
2. Who is the “us” these antichrists left (19)?
3. What does the anointing of the Holy One do (20, 27)?
4. What is the Antichrist (22)?
5. What is that thing we are to let “abide in you” what we heard from the beginning (24)?
6. What does the anointing teach us (27)?
7. How can we have confidence at Christ's coming (28)?
8. What does those who are “born of Him” do (29)?

## *The Tests of Holy Living*

1<sup>st</sup> John 2:28-3:18 | 4/23

John had just told readers how the new birth shows in righteous behavior; Now, he invites them to consider God's great love. In so doing, John reasons you will see who the true children of God really are: WE KNOW: What we are called (1); What we will be (2); and what we will do (3). In summary, we have been called His children by love; Become like Him when we see Him by His power; and we will live holy until we do.

In 3:4, John says sin is the very opposition of that purity we must live in because of what we are and what we will become. It is a product of ignorance and blindness because "no one who sins has seen Him or known Him" (v. 6 b). And so those who know God—who truly know God in contrast to the Gnostics—will not practice sin.

He will go on to show what is obvious about the true children of God and those who are fakes. Just as the US Treasury trains people to identify counterfeit bills by being so familiar with the authentic that they can spot the counterfeit, John show what the true children do and don't do. A true child of God practices righteousness and loves other Christians. Read again 1John 3:6-9. What the Greek text really says is: "No one who abides in Him practices sin; no one who practices sin has seen Him or knows Him" (1 John 3:6). "No one who is born of God practices sin ... he cannot practice sin because he is "born of God" (1 John 3:9). To "practice" sin is to sin consistently as a way of life. It does not refer to a single commission, per se. No Christian is sinless (1:8-10) but God expects a true believer to sin less.

True Christians know God. Counterfeit Christians talk about God and get involved in a religious life but does not really know God. The person who has been "born of God" through faith knows God the Father, the Son and the Spirit. And because he knows them, he does not practice sin. Even Jesus' earthly ministry shows why sin is not practiced in the lives of true children: Jesus came to take away our sin (3:4-6) and to destroy the works of the devil (3:7-8). For a child of God to sin (ongoingly) shows he does not understand or appreciate what Jesus did on the cross. Sin is "whatever is not of faith" (Rom 14:23), "the devising of folly" (Prov 24:9), the failure to do what one knows is good (Jam 4:17). In John, it is "unrighteousness" (5:17). And here, it is "lawlessness" (3:4) or defiance. Notice that it is not sins (plural) but sin (singular): "Whosoever practices sin." Sins are the fruit, but sin is the root.

That we are loved by God and called His children does not mean for us there are no rules. "We know that we know Him if we keep His commandments" (2:3). "And... we keep His commandments" (3:22). "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments" (5:2). So, while God's children are not in bondage to Law from which Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1-6), we are not to be lawless! We are "under the law to Christ" (1Cor 9:21). Sin is a matter of the will. For us to assert our will against God's will is rebellion, and rebellion is the root of sin. It is not simply that sin reveals itself in lawless behavior, but that the very essence of sin is lawlessness. No matter what his outward action may be, a sinner's inward attitude is one of rebellion.

"Whoever abides in Him does not practice sin" (1 John 3:6). "Abide" is one of John's favorite words. To abide in Christ means to be in fellowship with Him, to allow nothing to come between ourselves

and Christ. Sonship (being "born of God") should bring us the nature to flee sin and fellowship should bring the power to flee sin.

Christ appeared to destroy the works of the devil (vv. 7-8). The logic here is: if a man belongs to God, he will obey God; if he belongs to the devil, he will obey the devil. It's what he knows. This contrast between Christ (who has no sin, 1 John 3:5) and the devil (who can do nothing but sin). Whose child we will be is evident in our lives.

And, while Christ is God, He was willing to become a servant. Satan was a servant and wanted to become God. From the beginning of his career, Satan has been rebellious. Christ, obedient. "Little children, let no man deceive you!" False teachers in John's day taught that a Christian did not have to worry about sin because only the body sinned and what the body did in no way affected the spirit. Some of them went so far as to teach that sin is natural to the body, because the body is sinful. But John says, when you know whose child you are—you will see that in your life. And then you know whose you really are.

John has reminded them of the commands he already taught, namely, "love brethren" (2:7-11). That love is anchored in the fellowship we have that began with our fellowship with God (1:8) as children, a fellowship that manifest itself in obediently "walking in the light." You cannot love as children without walking in the Light.

Here, however, the emphasis is on the familial relationship that should exist between believers as brothers. Christians love one another because they have all been born of God, which makes all of us brothers and sisters in Christ. You cannot love without being brothers and sisters, John says, and as brothers and sisters, we should love each other.

John says that our true identity as Christians manifests itself in our obedience and love. That is the evidence John says that shows our sonship and brotherhood.

Then, John went on to say that a true child of God will practice righteousness (1John 3:1-10). It will not be that we are merely sons, not that we are merely brothers, but it will be obvious in the practice of our lives if we are true children of God. This truth is first stated in the negative: "anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). And with this he returned to the theme of obedience.

Now, in this section, he returns to the theme of love (3:11-24). In this section (1 John 3:11-24), we are told that loving fellow children of God is a matter of life and death. "He who does not love his brother abides in death" (3:14). When it comes to this, John mentions four possible relationships we may have with others based on how we treat them: One is murder (3:11-12), another is hatred (3:13-15), another is indifference (3:16-17), and the last—that every believer should manifest in their lives—is compassionate love (3:18-24).

Of course, the first two are clearly sin and what "children of the devil" (8-10) would manifest. The third, while it may be evident in the lives of Christians (c.f. Revelation 2:10), is nothing of what a Christian should be, be content in, or even consider understandable. It is incompatible with what a real Christian is because of who we are as sons of God.

True Christianity is a matter of deed, not the tongue. We know the love God had by the deed He showed. We know the love a brother has by the deeds he shows (3:17-18).



*Review and Reflection*

1. Why does the world not know us (1)?
2. What has been revealed as what we will be (2)?
3. What does hope do (3)?
4. What is sin (4)? Explain.
5. Why was the Son of God manifested (5)?
6. What can we not see or know in “sin” (6)?
7. Why is righteous (7)?
8. Why did the Son of God appear (8)?
9. Will one who is “born of God” “sin” (8-10)? Explain.
10. What message has been taught from the beginning (11)?
11. Who “abides in death” (14)? How?
12. How do we know love (16)?

## *Assurances and Testing Spirits*

1<sup>st</sup> John 3.19-4.6 | 4/30

Christians need to cultivate their assurance. "Make your calling and election sure" is what Peter wrote (2Peter 1:10). John wrote that we will "keep the commandment" and "believe in the name of Jesus Christ and love one another" (3:23). From this we "know" we are of the truth, we will "know" the assurance in our heart (3:19); and we will overcome our own self-doubt because we know God is greater (3:20). Sadly, there are times that our hearts do "condemn" us because we know we have not always loved the brethren as we should, kept the commandment as we should—but John reaffirms the apostolic teaching and salvation by grace through faith (c.f. Romans 5:6-8). If we were loved and offered salvation while we yet sinners, God will most certainly welcome us to his presence on the basis of the same faith. And this assurance (3:21) promises that the Christian with an assured heart can pray with boldness, even if there is sin in our hearts and we come with penitence and confession (1:8), God will be faithful. If we do not, then we cannot pray with confidence (Ps 66:18-19).

Faith and love will always go together (3:23). If we trust God, we love one another. We love other Christians because they are God's children, and we have the same Father. How happy earthly parents are when their children love one another! Imagine how please God is when we do the same! God abides in us by His Spirit; we ought to abide in Him by yielding to the Spirit's teaching and obeying the Word. If we claim to be sons of God and brothers in His family, but we persist in disobedience, we need to re-examine who it is we are trying to please.

The themes of light, love, and truth are interwoven throughout this brief letter. Later in this chapter, John will reassert—but in even more stark language—that those who are born of God prove it by their love (4:8, 21).

John also states again that the motives for obedience (3:1ff) and the motives for love (4:7ff) are the same sonship and the brotherhood. Even in this short section, he returns to the subject of sonship with, "You are from God". In this chapter, he will say that true believers will have love for one another for these reasons. In this section, he addresses the first reason is because we are "from God" (4) and because love is "from God" (7) and everyone who is "born from God" (sonship) and "knows God" truly "loves" (7).

But first, John begins with a warning about false spirits, or these teachers who say false things about Christ in the flesh (2-3) and knowledge (7-8). Since the early church still had the truth being revealed in parts (c.f. 1Corinthians 13:8-13), they were reliant on what the apostles had verbally taught (1Thessalonians 4:2; Hebrews 2:3), what they had written (Ephesians 3:1-4; Colossians 4:16), they would be reliant for a time on those people who were granted spiritual, miraculous gifts until they would grow into the maturity God wanted (Ephesians 4:16).

Keep in mind that the challenge to "test the spirits" was therefore, dynamically more challenging. How could a believer know when a preacher or a teacher was from God and that his message could be trusted (See 1Thessalonians 5:19-21). Since Satan is an imitator, John says that the false spirits will not confess that Jesus is the Christ (see 1Corinthians 12:3).

The proof will be in what they do. So too today, false cults who deny the deity of Christ and make Him a mere man or an inspired teacher will evidence their error in their deeds and practices. But

the Christian who has the 'anointing' from the Spirit within, evidences it by the lives they lead and "overcome" because of who is within them (4:4).

And just as he said in chapter one that there is walking in the light or walking in the darkness, or in chapter 3 that there are children of God and children of the devil, John continues the same brush stroke of that there are just two spirits in the world today: God's Spirit of Truth, who speaks through the inspired Word, and Satan's spirit of error that teaches lies (1Timothy 4:1ff). Teachers sent by God will speak from God, and God's children will recognize them. Satan's workers will speak from and depend on worldly wisdom (1Corinthians 1:7-2:16).

The true sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd (John 10:1-5,27-28). And these same true sheep also recognize and love one another. Satan is a divider and destroyer; Christ unites people in love.

### *Review and Reflection*

1. How do we know love (16)?
2. How can we know we are of the truth have assure our heart before Him (19)?
3. How does our heart condemn us (20)?
4. What is His commandment (23)?
5. What two things does John say that we should do with "the spirits" (1)?
6. How do we know the Spirit of God (2)?
7. Who/What is the spirit of the Antichrist (3)?
8. What have Christians overcome (4)? How?
9. What is the test that someone "knows God?"

## *The Source of Love*

1<sup>st</sup> John 4:7-5:5 | 5/7

As we noted in the last lesson, themes of light, love, and truth are interwoven throughout. Also, John states that the motives for obedience (3:1ff) and the motives for love (4:7ff) are the same: “sonship” and “brotherhood”. In this chapter, he will say that true believers will have love for one another for these reasons: We are “from God” (4) and because love is “from God” (7) and everyone who is “born from God” (sonship) and “knows God” truly “loves” (7). Read the whole section first and then reflect on what John says about love. To know the reasons we should love like that, John says that...

We know love came from God (7-8). It is only by knowing God that we learn to love and it is only by loving that we learn to know God. Clement of Alexandria said that the true “Gnostic”, by which he means the true Christian, practice through love “being God” (quoted in Barclay, 115). Love makes us relatives of God and to be His children—we must love like Him.

We know love because Christ died for us (4:9-11). The world does not really believe that God is love. They look at the awful ravages of sin in the world and say, “How can a God of love permit these things to happen?” or they look at God’s justice in the Old Testament and can’t believe He is love at all. But God demonstrated love at the cross. Christ died that we might live “through” Him (1John 4:9), “for” Him (2Corinthians 5:15), and “with” Him (1Thessalonians 5:9-10). The logic is clear: “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” We should love each other the way He loves us.

We know love because His love is perfected in us by the Spirit (4:12-16). People cannot see God, but they can see in God’s children their manifestation of who God is and His love in them. If love abides in us, God does. Then John adds that we abide in God and God abides in because (we know) that He has given us His Spirit (4:13) - the anointing (2:20) and the witness He bears in the gospel message (4:14).

We love with fear as His love is perfected in us (4:17-18). Christians who obey God have boldness with God now (3:21-22); and Christians who love one another will have confidence when Christ returns. Some, however, will be ashamed at His coming (2:28). Christians will have to get along with each other in heaven, so why not begin by loving one another down here? Where there is true love for God and His people, there need be no fear of future judgment. God may have to discipline us in love during this life because we are His children (Hebrews 12:7-11), but we need not fear to face Him when He returns. Even if we are ashamed, we need not be afraid if we are loving God, loving our brothers and striving to obey His commandments. As long as He is there in heaven, we have nothing to fear (2Timothy 1:7; Romans 8:15).

We know love because God first loved us (4:19-21). The theme of God’s love began chapter 3, and here it closes the chapter: “We love, because He first loved us.” By nature, we know little about love (Titus 3:3-6); God had to show it to us on the cross (Romans 5:8) and plant it in our hearts (Romans 5:5). “There is none who seeks after God,” says Romans 3:11 (NKJV), so God came seeking man (Genesis 3:8; Luke 19:10).

John reminds us that there is absurd to say that we love God while we hate others, especially other Christians. How can we love God in heaven when we do not love God’s children here on earth? John uses the term “brethren” or “brother” seventeen times in his letter, referring, of course, to all of

God's children, male and female. Christians are expected to love each other because they have experienced the love of God in their own hearts.

God commands us to love one another in case we try to wiggle out if it. How ironic that something so good for us and all is something that God has keep reminding us to keep. This love does not mean we must agree with everything a brother or sister thinks or does. We may not like some of their personal characteristics—we may even have to address a brother's sin (c.f Galatians 6:1). But, because they are in Christ, we love them for Jesus' sake.

As John begins to cycle down to his conclusion, he wants his readers to know that true Christians have indeed, by the testimony of God within them, overcome the world. And not only that, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (5:12). The teaching of who Jesus was really was is paramount to know who Christians really are.

After repeating the themes of what God is, John returns to the marks of what a real Christian is. First, he says that a Christian believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (cf. "born of God" in 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18). And because of the love God's child has experienced from God, that same child should love all other children of his Father. Also, this love for God's children is not mere sentiment or verbal expression (cf. 3:18), but is inseparable from loving God and obeying His commands (5:2; cf. 2:3; 3:22,24; 5:3). For the Apostles, love for God and one's fellows is fundamentally visible because actions show it (cf. 3:16-17).

Additionally, John adds, as a matter of fact, God's commands are not burdensome (cf. Matt 11:30). How can it be when every believer "overcomes the world" (1John 4:4, 2Cor 4:3-4). Who is it then that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. This means that faith is the key of continuing victory and, for that reason, obedience to God's commands need not be burdensome.

The obvious application to "water" (v.6) is the baptism of Jesus by which His public ministry was initiated (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). "Blood" would then refer to His death, by which His earthly work was terminated. John's insistence that He did not come by water only, but by water and blood, is likely a refutation of another false view held by a Cerinthus, who taught that the divine Christ descended on the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him before His crucifixion. John says that the Christ was present at the Crucifixion.

### *Review and Reflection*

1. "Everyone who loves is ..." (4:7).
2. How did God manifest love is us (9)?
3. What should make us love each other (11)?
4. How does God abide in us (12)?

5. What does John know and believe in (16)?
  
6. What gives confidence in the day of judgment (17)?
  
7. Love contains no \_\_\_\_\_ (18). Explain.
  
8. He who hates his brother and says he loves God is a \_\_\_\_\_ (20). Why?
  
9. Is loving your brother a commandment (21)?

## *We Can Know*

1<sup>st</sup> John 5.6-21 | 5/14

Indeed, there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement. The Spirit's witness may be thought of as coming through the prophets (including John the Baptist). The Spirit's witness, then, was augmented by the historical realities involved in "the water" and "the blood." Both the baptism and the crucifixion of Jesus are strongly attested historical facts (cf. John 1:32-34; 19:33-37). All three witnesses ("water" and "blood" are personified) "are in agreement" that a single divine Person, Jesus Christ, was involved in these events.

As a side note, this short passage (5:7-8) has given rise to more discussion in regard to its genuineness than nearly any other, namely v.8. The supposed importance of the verse in its bearing on the doctrine of the Trinity has contributed to this. On the one hand, what appears to be clear testimony that there is Trinity has made believers very reluctant to abandon it; on the other, the same clarity on that doctrine has made those who deny the teaching even less reluctant to admit the genuineness of the passage.

What we know is that in the earlier Greek manuscripts, it is missing. According to Barnes, it is found in only two Greek manuscripts of any age—one the Codex Montfortianus, or Britannicus, written in the beginning of the sixteenth century, and the other the Codex Ravianus. Further, it is missing in the earliest versions. And even most significant, it is never quoted by early Christians who never quote or reference it in the earliest controversies on the doctrine of the Trinity—a passage which would be so much in point as it is today. However, it does appear in "a fourth century Latin treatise entitled *Liber Apologeticus*" (from *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*) and then appears in about eight Greek manuscripts dated in the 10th, 14th and 16th century where it appears in their margins as a later addition (*ibid*). While the wording was original to the inspired pen of John, there is still no good reason why this passage cannot be found that would explain its omission, accidentally or intentionally, by copyists

5:9-12. One therefore has no reason for not accepting God's testimony to the person of Christ. If man's testimony can be accepted when adequately attested (Deut 19:15), God's testimony, being greater, should be accepted. It might be paraphrased "Here then is God's testimony about His Son (which we ought to accept because of its greatness)."

But before specifying the content of God's testimony (which is done in 1 John 5:11-12), John paused parenthetically to say that accepting this testimony internalizes it for the one who believes or, "has the testimony in himself". Each believer has God's truth in his heart. By contrast, anyone who disbelieves God has made Him out to be a liar (cf. 1:10). For the Apostle, there was no middle ground. One either believes or in his belief, challenges God's truthfulness.

Then, John says that the content of the testimony is that God has given us eternal life (Cf. 5:13,20) and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. In the light of 2:25-26, John's statement is probably directed against a claim by some antichrists that the readers did not really have eternal life through God's Son. But God has directly affirmed that eternal life is precisely what He has given in His Son. To deny this is to call God a liar. Either God is a God of truth – or He is not.

Here we know with certainty the reason for John's letter—in his own words (5:13). John wrote these things so that Christians would know that they had eternal life (cf. vv. 12,20). The words "these things" are connected to what John had just written about God's testimony (5:9-12) which aims to assure his readers that, despite anything the antichrists have said, believers do indeed possess eternal life. It may be pointed out, in fact, that our assurance rests on the testimony of God. The condition for prayer (5:14-15). After the words that you have eternal life, "and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God" in the KJV may seem redundant. Perhaps this statement seemed redundant to some early scribe or editor and for that reason was eliminated from his manuscript. But actually, it does prepare the ground for the discussion about prayer which follows. Prayer is an expression of trust in the name of God's Son (1John 3:23).

John says that requests made in accordance with God's will are heard by Him and a Christian can be certain of receiving answers to them. Naturally, Christians today discern God's will through the Scriptures and ask accordingly. In this context, then, it is natural to suppose that John was thinking especially, though not exclusively, of a Christian's right to ask God for help in keeping His commands. That kind of prayer is transparently according to His will.

The practice of Love (5:16-17). But if a Christian's own needs may be met by prayerful reliance on the name of Jesus, what about the needs of other Christians? Extending his discussion of prayer, John once again wove together his dual theme of faith and love. A Christian who truly loves his brother and sister cannot be indifferent to their spiritual needs. Sometimes a Christian may sin so seriously that God judges that sin with swift physical death: "a sin that leads to death." Ananias and Sapphira are cases in point (Acts 5:1-11). But most of the sins which one sees a Christian brother commit are not of such a nature, as their common occurrence shows. For these, a believer ought to pray, knowing that any sin - if continued in long enough - is a threat to a fellow Christian's life and will lead to spiritual death (cf. James 5:19-20; also cf. Prov 10:27; 11:19; 13:14; 19:16). Thus the restoration of a brother may secure a prolonging of his physical life.

The words, a sin that does not lead to death, can be easily misunderstood. All sin ultimately leads to death, but the expression "that does not lead to death" could be understood in the sense, "not punished by death." The distinction is between sins for which death is a rapid consequence and sins for which it is not. Or, it could compare sins that are followed with penitence and will then not lead to death.

When a Christian sees another Christian sin in a way that is not fatal, he is instructed to pray for him and God will give him life. However, John reminded his readers that there is...sin that leads to (i.e., "is punished by") death. John was not likely thinking of only one kind of sin. The New Testament example cited earlier (Acts 5:1-11) was a flagrant violation of the sanctity of righteousness. Even for other sins, where a greater seriousness seems attached to them, Christians have the freedom to pray. John's words about fatal sin are, I am not saying that he should pray about that. But this clearly does not forbid prayer even in the most serious cases. But naturally in such cases believers will submit their prayers to the will of God. In contrast, with regard to sins not punished swiftly by death, Christians, on the basis of this verse, should be able to pray with confidence.

John's emphasis is on this sin not thus punished. It is for this that a believer should pray. When he does so, he is demonstrating his love for his brother and is thus obeying the frequently repeated command of this letter to do so. At the same time, he is exercising faith in the name of God's Son, since his loving request for his brother is in Jesus' name. Prayer for one's sinning brother is therefore in obedience to the single two-pronged command of 3:23.



Conclusion (5:18-21). In a quick conclusion, the Apostle reinforced some of the basic truths in his epistle. The "we" (six times) is the apostolic troop of truth tellers (in contrast to the Gnostic false teachers), as also in the prologue (1:1-4; cf. the "we" of John 21:24). But no doubt John hoped and expected that his readers could fully identify with the assertions he was making. Each verse in 1 John 5:18-20 begins with "we know".

- No Christian sins.
- God protects Christians from sinning.
- The devil cannot touch a Christian,
- Christians belong to God.
- The entire world is in the power of the Devil.
- But we know, God in the flesh has come and given us understanding.

With this grand affirmation of the deity of Christ, John concluded his summary of apostolic truths which stand against the falsehoods of the antichrists with a final, surprising admonition, "Dear children (teknia, "born-ones"; cf. 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 4:4), keep yourselves from idols." In the Greco-Roman world of John's day, any moral compromise with worldly perspectives was likely to lead to some involvement with idolatry, since idolatry permeated pagan life at every level. To follow "the true God and eternal life" (5:20) - and to seek to express one's life as holy and sinless as God's child - would necessarily mean avoiding idolatry and the moral laxness which went with it. The apostle's closing admonition was thus relevant to his initial readers since Gnosticism allowed the moral debauchery to go unchecked. And God's children must be true.

### *Review and Reflection*

1. What are the three "witnesses" (7) and what is their testimony (9)?
2. Where can eternal life be found (11)?
3. Without the Son what do we have (12)?
4. Why did John write (13)?
5. What is the confidence we have (14-15)?
6. What is unrighteousness (17)?
7. In verse 18-20, what does John say we "know"?

8. For one born of God, how is it that “the evil one does not touch him” (18)?
  
9. The entire world lies in the power of who (19)? Explain.
  
10. What are little children to guard themselves from (21)? How?

## *Walk In Truth*

2<sup>nd</sup> John | 5/21

This letter is addressed "to the chosen lady and her children" (v. 1; cf. vv. 4-5). No personal names are found in it, and while the suggestions that the recipient was named either Eklekta or Kyria, it is likely he is personifying a local church. In 3John, he names people but here since he drops the singular number for his pronouns after verse 5 and uses a singular again only in verse 13. Also, the epistle's content is most appropriate to a community. If so, the problems confronted by this church do not differ much from the ones confronted by the readers of 1 John. Here too the author warned against antichrists (2 John 7; cf. 1 John 2:18,22). The error of which they were guilty was, as also in 1 John, a denial of the person of Christ (2 John 7; cf. 1 John 2:22-23; 4:1-3). The epistle likewise insists on obedience to God's commands, especially the command to love one another (2 John 5-6; cf. 1 John 2:3-9; 3:14-18,23; 4:7,11,20-21).

John begins in the way ancient letters usually began. The preamble stresses that "truth" and "love" are the two major concerns of this letter ("truth": vv. 1 [twice], 2-4; "love": vv. 1,3,5-6 [twice in v. 6]) and of 3 John.

The elder loves the lady (2-3). The elder (i.e., John) began by asserting that he loved this church (the chosen lady; cf. "dear lady," v. 5) and its members (her children; cf. v. 4) in the truth. The love of John and others for this community of believers was founded on God's truth. Christian love is by no means mere sentimentalism or humanistic compassion, but is motivated by a knowledge of the truth which has been revealed in Christ. Truth is the basis of love. Instead of just wishing grace, mercy, and peace for his readers, John announced that they would be experiencing these things in truth and love (cf. v. 1). The fact that these blessings stem from both the Father and the Son affirms the deity of Christ.

Keep walking in the truth (4-11). Getting to his point immediately, John expressed his concerns that the church would continue to be obedient to God and that the believers would resist all inroads by false teachers. These two objectives, of course, are inseparable.

In, 4-6, John had encountered members of this church (some of your children) somewhere and was delighted to observe their obedience to the truth. He used their fidelity, which he had observed, as a positive starting point. What they were doing (walking in the truth; cf. 3 John 3-4) was precisely what the Father commanded. To walk in the truth is to be obedient to the truth God has made known. John wanted the whole church to do the same. In his final reference to the church under personification (5, until v. 13), John said that what he wrote to the church was not some new requirement but one the church has had from the beginning (cf. v. 6). It is nothing other than the command that we love one another. But what does it mean to "love one another"? The answer: This is love, that we walk in obedience to His commands.

This is how the truth is practiced and protected (7-11). The reason for John's previous admonition is that many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. As in the first epistle, the apostle expressed his concern that many false teachers had arisen (cf. 1 John 2:18; 4:1). These teachers were "deceivers" (1John 2:26; 3:7). The danger is now spelled out clearly. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God. These words suggest strongly that the apostle was thinking here of defection from the truth by those who had once held to it. A person who "does not continue" in a thing has evidently

once been in it. The New Testament writers were realists about the possibility of true Christians falling prey to heresy and warned against it (Hebrews 3:12). To deviate from the truth is to leave God behind.

In contrast with the defector from the truth, whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. This says that God is with those who persist in the true doctrine about Christ. This "continuing" in the truth calls for a firm action consistent with love. Hence John added, If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. In the Greco-Roman world of John's day, a traveling philosopher or religious teacher was a familiar phenomenon. Christian preachers also traveled and relied on local believers for support and hospitality (3 John 5-8). But the readers of 2 John were urged to be discriminating. If someone "comes" to them (the implication is "in the role of a traveling teacher") without also bringing sound doctrine (didachen), he should be refused help. The Greek verb for "bring" is phero ("to carry"), which continues the travel motif. If the truth is not part of his "baggage," he should receive no hospitality from those who are loyal to that truth. (By contrast, hospitality is to be shown to true believers [3 John 5,8].)

"Welcome him" (2 John 10-11) is literally, "Say 'Greetings' to him." To some modern minds these instructions seem unduly rigid and harsh. A great part of the problem, however, lies in the modern inclination to be highly tolerant of religious differences. One must frankly face the fact that the New Testament writers did not share this spirit of toleration. Their commitment to the truth and their consciousness of the dangers of religious error called forth many stern denunciations of false teachers. Not surprisingly, this modern age, having a diminishing sense of the dangers of heresy, has lost its convictions about the truth. But the passage ought not to be taken beyond the writer's intent. He was thinking about false teachers actively engaged in disseminating error. In this activity they are not to be helped at all.

The author's farewell is similar to his words in 3 John 13 (cf. "I have much to write you"; "I do not want to use [do so with] pen and ink"; "I hope to visit [see] you"; "talk...face to face"). John gave farewell greetings from the children of your chosen sister. This latter greeting to the church suggests the strong connection and interaction between Apostles and churches. It was not merely a bond—it was an interactive relationship that shaped them into children of God who knew how to walk in truth.

### *Review and Reflection*

1. Who is the elect lady and her children (1)?
2. Who does John say he loves (2)?
3. How were these "children walking" (4)? Explain.
4. What commandment did John write about (5)?

5. How does John illustrate love (6)?
  
6. How does John describe “deceives” (7)?
  
7. Who has God (9)?
  
8. How can we have a share in the evil deeds of deceivers (10-11)?
  
9. What was John’s hope (12)?

## *Welcome And Support Each Other*

3<sup>rd</sup> John | 5/28

When John, “the elder” (see lesson 1) briefly greets, it is unlike most epistles that begin with “grace and peace.” However, that John ends this letter with “peace to you” (14) suggests it is a theme he still addresses as in other letters.

John calls Gaius his “dear friend” or “beloved” (2,5,11) whom he “loves in truth.” This love, John said, should express itself in hospitality (6) as well as in the support of workers of truth (8). Just like his earlier epistles, John’s concern for the truth and the love of the gospel dominates his teaching (c.f. “truth”: vv. 1,3 [twice], 4,8,12; “true”: v. 12; “love”: vv. 1,6).

Additionally, the Apostle is pleased with Gaius’ spiritual condition because he was “walking in the truth” (4, 1Jn 1:7). John says that Gaius was a man of the truth and nothing made him happier (3). His children (c.f. 2Jn 4), the progeny of the gospel he declares, naturally include Gaius because he was probably converted to the gospel by John (cf. Paul’s use in 1Cor 4:14; Gal 4:19; Phil 2:22). If this is not the case, then John the Aged felt all Christians were his children by the same source, the gospel.

After praising Gaius, John moves directly to the matter that those who preach the truth need the support of Christians in the places where they travel. Unlike those like Diotrephes, Gaius gave this kind of hospitality (6) and assistance and John wanted to assure him that this was the proper action. This is an interesting contrast to the emphasis that he made in 2John 10-11 where he recommends that a Christian not offer hospitality—but only to those who do not preach the doctrine of Christ. John’s words obligated Gaius to be openhanded and generous to traveling brothers “for” (because) they have gone out for the sake of “the Name.” The name is, of course, Jesus who is now exalted above every name (Phil 2:9-11). If faithful preachers sought no help from the unsaved, it was because Christians were under a special obligation to assist them and “be fellow workers with the truth” (NASB), a partnership with what the truth accomplishes in people’s hearts and lives.

Then, there was Diotrephes (9-11), a man who loved to be first and granted no help to travelling workers (5) - all expressions of the opposite of what the gospel should generate in the heart of a believer (see 1John 3-4). The statement that he “will have nothing to do with us,” may also be translated, “does not welcome us as guests.” Because of his personal ambitions, Diotrephes may have resisted the Apostle’s wishes and in so doing, demonstrated that he was rejecting God (cf. John 13:20). John was confident that he would handle this when he came (10). Diotrephes had been guilty of three things: 1) gossiping false charges against Apostles; 2) refusing to welcome brothers; 3) and, like many other ecclesiastical dictators, forcing his will on others.

Then John reminds Gaius “not to imitate what is evil but what is good”. Diotrephes’ behavior, the very evil just illustrated, was to be avoided and not copied.

If Gaius would indeed “imitate what is...good” (11), he would extend hospitality to Demetrius (not to be confused with the Demetrius of Acts 19:24). While this is not explicitly requested, it seems the obvious implication as to why John offers his recommendation. Demetrius was well spoken of by everyone who knew him; was also vouched for by the truth itself; And the highest of all qualification, the Apostles spoke well of him, “and you know that our testimony is true”. Gaius had

no reason to hesitate showing Demetrius the kind of hospitality he had shown others and should “do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God” (6).

John was now finished with what he wished to write in this short letter, but he still had much to say to Gaius. He could have said much more in writing, but as he had also written in 2 John, he hoped to be able soon to communicate those things face to face because of their personal nature or because their reception would be better received in person.

The use of the term “friends” twice in these closing statements is perhaps one final reminder to Gaius that Christians in every place are or should be a network of friends who are ready to help one another whenever a need arises. It is part of the genius of Christianity that one can meet people whom he has never seen before, in places far from home, and discover through a shared faith an immediate bond of friendship because we all share an elder brother (Hebrews 2:11,17-18) and a Father of light (c.f. James 1:17-18).

### *Review and Reflection*

1. What did John pray for Gaius (2)?
2. What was John’s greatest joy (4)?
3. What did brethren testify “before the church” (6)? Explain.
4. Who were these “strangers” (5)?
5. What did these fellow workers of the truth do (7-8)?
6. Who was Diotrephes (9)?
7. What four accusations does John make regarding him (10)?
8. What should we imitate (11)?
9. Who was Demetrius (12)?