

INTRODUCTION AND 1 JOHN

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Introduction

I. Authorship

A. 1 John and Hebrews are the only completely anonymous letters in the N.T. 2 John and 3 John at least refer to the writer as "the elder."

B. The conclusion that the apostle John wrote it is based on several things:

1. Early church tradition is unanimous in attributing the work to John the apostle. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (lee-on, modern France) in the last part of the second century, attributed it to John, the disciple of the Lord and author of the fourth Gospel. This view was shared by Tertullian (Carthage, 200), Clement of Alexandria (200), Origen (Alexandria & Palestine, early third century), and Dionysius of Alexandria (Alexandria, mid-third century).

2. The author was an eyewitness of Jesus. In the opening verses of the letter, he says regarding the Word of life that was manifested that we have heard, seen, looked at, and touched it. Though some have tried to spin this to mean something else, most scholars rightly recognize that the author is claiming to be one of a number of the original eyewitnesses to the incarnate Christ.

3. Similarities of subject matter, style, and vocabulary indicate that the author of 1 John is the same person who authored the Gospel of John. So the arguments that the Fourth Gospel was written by the Apostle John are relevant.

a. Here is how John Piper summarizes the case that the Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John:

At the end of John's Gospel (21:24) we are told explicitly that the apostle who wrote it was the "the beloved disciple"—that is, the disciple who had the most intimate personal friendship with Jesus, the one who at the last supper reclined close to Jesus' breast (13:23), the one to whom Jesus entrusted his mother (19:26), the one who outran Peter to the empty tomb (20:2–4). But the beloved disciple is never named. He had to be one of the inner three, Peter, James, or John. He can't have been Peter because he outran Peter! And according to Acts 12:1 James was killed by Herod about ten years after the death of Jesus. It's very unlikely that the gospel of John was written that early. So the most likely conclusion is that the beloved disciple and the author of the gospel and the epistles was the apostle John.¹

b. Two highly regarded New Testament scholars, D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo conclude in their recent book *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (p. 253), "In short, the most straightforward reading of the evidence is still the traditional one: it is highly probable that John the son of Zebedee wrote the fourth gospel." (Carson's commentary on the Letters of John in the NIGTC series is forthcoming.)

¹ From http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/46/475_Eternal_Life_Has_Appeared_in_Christ/

4. And finally, the author of 1 John is conscious of his authority, which is consistent with his being an apostle, being one through whom Christ continued to teach and command (see, Jn. 14:26, 16:12-13).

II. Nature of the Document

A. 1 John does not open like a normal, first-century Greek letter, but that doesn't mean it was a general tract written to all Christians everywhere. On the contrary, it clearly was addressed to a specific group of Christians. The personal references, the common ties the author shares with his readers, and the explicit historical referents (e.g., 2:19) show that it was meant to be read as a letter of instruction, warning, and encouragement to one or more specific congregations. Carson and Moo, 669. But, of course, the message of this letter written for specific circumstances is intended ultimately for the entire church.

B. Perhaps it is atypical in form because it was meant to be circulated to several congregations in an area with delivery to each being accompanied by a short personal note. Some think that 2 John may be just such a note.

III. Where It Was Written and Circulated

A. 1 John most likely was written from Ephesus. Eusebius (early fourth century) says that Asia, meaning Asia Minor, the western third of modern Turkey, was allotted to John when the apostles were dispersed at the outbreak of the Jewish War (A.D. 66-70). Carson and Moo, 254. This fits with some earlier sources, which lends credence to Eusebius's report.

B. Those earlier sources include Polycrates, who was bishop of Ephesus in the late second century, and Irenaeus, who was bishop of Lyons in the late second century. Irenaeus knew Polycarp of Smyrna, who had had direct contact with the apostle John. See Carson and Moo, 675-676.

C. If 1 John was indeed written from Ephesus, then it probably was sent to churches somewhere in that region, perhaps including the territory of the seven churches of Revelation 2-3.

IV. Occasion

A. 1 John was a response to a crisis in the church caused by the rise and influence of certain false teachers. John refers to these false teachers as antichrists (2:18, 4:3, 2 Jn. 7), as liars (2:4, 22, 4:20), as false prophets (4:1), as being of the world (4:5), and as deceivers (2 Jn. 7, also 2:26, 3:7).

B. These false teachers had arisen from within the church. They started out as orthodox believers but went beyond apostolic doctrine into heresy. John says in 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they were of us they would have remained with us. But [this happened] that they might be exposed, for all [of them] are not of us." In 2 Jn. 9 he refers to them as those "who go ahead and do not remain in the teaching of Christ." Paul's prophecy to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-30 and to Timothy in 2 Tim. 4:3-4 was coming true: "savage wolves" were arising from within the church and ripping the flock.

C. As you see from 2:19, by the time of 1 John these false teachers and their followers had actually separated or seceded from the faithful churches, the churches that were abiding in the truth of John's gospel. The false teachers saw themselves as more enlightened than the faithful. In their minds, they had "transcended" the gospel; they had gone beyond what they had been taught and gained a deeper knowledge than what they thought was possessed by the faithful. You see hints of this in 2:20-21 where John assures the faithful that they have knowledge and know the truth and in 2:27 where he tells them that they do not need anyone to teach them (contrary to what the false teachers were claiming).

D. Having separated from the faithful Christians, the false teachers and their followers showed little, if any, brotherly love toward them. That is why there is such an emphasis in this letter on brotherly love. In failing to love those who were abiding in the apostolic message, abiding in John's gospel, those who boasted about their spirituality, insight, and relationship with God revealed the truth of their condition. As John says in 4:20b, "the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen is not able to love God whom he has not seen" (see also, 2:9, 3:10, 3:17).

E. Though the false teachers had separated from the faithful, some of them still traveled among the churches trying to recruit Christians to their heretical teaching. It is clear from 2:26, 3:7, and 4:1 that they were actively trying to deceive those to whom John is writing. That's why he urges his readers in 2:24 to hold onto what they heard from the beginning and urges them in 4:1 to test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

F. All of this apparently was making some of the faithful insecure about their salvation, worried that they may have missed the boat. So John in a number of places assures them of their standing with God. They have Christ as their advocate (2:1-2), they are forgiven (2:12), they know the Father (2:13), they have overcome the evil one (2:13), they know the truth (2:21), they are God's children (3:2), they have eternal life (5:13), etc.

G. Given these circumstances, John felt compelled to write a careful statement of the apostolic faith for his friends, showing them where it was being distorted by the false teachers.

V. Particulars of the False Teaching

A. We can glean some particulars of the false teaching by inference from what John writes in the letter. The false doctrine seems to center in two areas: the nature of Christ (Christology) and Christian behavior (ethics).

B. Christological errors

1. John makes the following affirmations or confessions: Jesus is the Christ (5:1), Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh (4:2; 2 Jn. 7), Jesus is the Son (2:23, 3:23, 5:11-12), Jesus is the Son of God (1:3, 1:7; 3:8, 3:23; 4:9-10, 4:15; 5:5, 5:9-13, 5:20), and Jesus Christ is the one who came by water *and* blood (5:6). On the other hand, he criticizes any who: deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22), deny the Son (2:23), and do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh (4:2-3; 2 Jn. 7).

2. So it seems pretty clear that the false teachers denied that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh, and come by water *and* blood. In other words, they in some sense denied the incarnation, the truth that the eternal Christ, the Son of God, actually became flesh, became a human being, and marginalized the significance of the man Jesus. (The term "Christ" is used with implications of his divine sonship [Christ = Son in 2:23 & 4:15 with 2 Jn. 9; 5:1 with 5:5], so even the denial that Jesus is the Christ is a denial of the incarnation.)

C. Ethical errors

1. John says: those who claim to have fellowship with God while walking in darkness are lying (1:6); those who claim to know God but do not keep his commandments are lying (2:4); whoever claims communion with God must walk as Jesus did (2:6); if anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him (2:15-17); no one who lives in Christ sins habitually (3:6); he who practices sin is of the devil (3:8); anyone who does not practice righteousness is not a child of God (3:10); those born of God do not sin habitually (5:18). John also says: whoever hates his brother is still in darkness (2:9); those who do not love their brothers are not of God (3:10); whoever does not love does not know God (4:8); anyone who does not love his brother does not love God (4:20).

2. So it seems pretty clear that the false teachers were morally indifferent. How they lived was of little concern to them, even when it came to something as fundamental as practicing Christian love and generosity.

3. And yet, paradoxically, the false teachers also claimed to be sinless. John refers to that claim when he writes in 1:8, "If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us," and in 1:10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

D. Source of This Mix of Errors

1. These false teachers appear to have been influenced by the same kind of ideas that gave rise to the second-century Gnostics. They seem to share the Gnostic distinction between matter and spirit. In Gnosticism, which is an ill-defined collection of various theological and philosophical views, the spiritual was regarded as divine and good, the material as created and evil; no lasting union was possible between them. Thus, a real incarnation of God in human flesh was impossible; it only could be either apparent (i.e., Christ *seemed* to be a human but really was not, as was claimed in that branch of Gnosticism known as Docetism) or temporary (i.e., the spirit temporarily inhabited, not became, the flesh, as was claimed by a heretic named Cerinthus).

2. Cerinthus was a heretical teacher in Asia Minor at the beginning of the second century. Irenaeus, who wrote in the latter part of the second century, tells a story reported by Polycarp, who was bishop of Smyrna for the first half of the second century, that John was once in the public baths at Ephesus and when he discovered Cerinthus was there he cried out, "Let us save ourselves; the bath house may fall down, for inside is Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth." According to Irenaeus, Cerinthus taught that Jesus was the product of a natural union between Joseph and Mary. After his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and then he proclaimed God and performed miracles. Christ departed from Jesus before his suffering, and only the man Jesus suffered and rose again.

3. A radical dualism that regarded matter and physicality as inferior to spirit and a hindrance to it not only would create resistance to the incarnation but easily could lead to devaluing the life and death of the Jesus of human flesh. What mattered was the divine Christ, the heavenly Son of God, the spirit being. The divine Christ was the bearer of revelation and salvation, the one who brought enlightenment so that human spirits might be liberated from the prison of this evil material world. The life and death of the Jesus of human flesh was insignificant in terms of salvation.

4. In addition, if liberation of the spirit through knowledge was the only important thing and if matter itself was evil, it is not a great leap to the view that how one behaved when in the evil material state, especially after the liberation of one's spirit, was spiritually trivial or irrelevant. That would explain how the false teachers could be morally indifferent but claim to be sinless; they had a different definition of sin. Indeed, we see this in the later, full-blown Gnosticism of the second century. As Johannine scholar Gary Burge notes regarding that system ("John, Letter of" in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, 592):

Believers were "reborn," creating a unique union with God that literally brought about a state of sinless perfection. 'Sin' belongs to another nature, our material nature, which no longer matters in God's economy. Hence, enlightened spiritual experiences validated spirituality, while at the same time practical questions of moral conduct were deemed irrelevant.

That may be why John defined sin as "lawlessness" (3:4).

5. Whether the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation 2 could be related to the heresy dealt with in 1 John is an interesting question, especially since Revelation is addressed to churches in Asia Minor.

a. I think the reason the Nicolaitans usually are not considered in the context of 1 John is that the error associated with them in Revelation involves participation in religious feasts in pagan temples (described as eating meat offered to idols), which probably included sexual immorality. Though John closes the letter with "keep yourselves from idols," he doesn't identify that danger with the false teachers, and he nowhere mentions eating food sacrificed to idols or sexual immorality.

b. On the other hand, Irenaeus, writing in the late second century, said the Nicolaitans promoted a doctrine similar in kind to the Gnostic heresy of Cerinthus. Duane Watson says that the Nicolaitans' "teaching could have been based on a dualism claiming that what was done in the body had no bearing on the soul" (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:1107). So, if nothing else, the Nicolaitans of Revelation may be further evidence of the kind of intellectual climate in which the heresy of 1 John arose.

6. It is difficult, if not impossible, to be confident about the origin of the errors promoted by the false teachers. The set of errors doesn't fit squarely with any early heretical teachers mentioned by writers of the early church. In his commentary on the Letters of John, Colin Kruse says the following assessment of German scholar Rudolf Schnackenburg is hard to improve on:

The heresy which occasioned 1 and 2 John cannot be parallel with any other manifestation of heresy known from that era. Yet it has affinities with more than one such movement. They all play down the historic person of Jesus Christ as the unique and true savior. They all deny the way of salvation through his flesh and blood. In their precise christological interpretation of the figure of Jesus, these dangerous heretics, dissolving as they did the substance of the Christian faith, evidently went off in different directions. This can be seen by comparing the views of Cerinthus with those of the docetists in the letters of Ignatius, whose precise teaching, however, remains obscure. The christology of the antichrists in the Johannine epistles also can no longer be described with certainty or precision. But it is one example of that pseudo-Christian tendency which manifested itself in gnosticism and was such a threat to the church.

VI. Date

A. Most scholars are convinced that 1 John was written after the Gospel of John (Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 389-390), and most date 1 John to the last decade of the first century (Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2nd ed., 879). For example, Carson and Moo date it to the early 90s.

B. The errors of the false teachers fit most comfortably in the intellectual climate of the late first century. The ideas that yielded full-blown Gnosticism in the second century were on the rise at the end of the first century.

C. Indeed, many scholars believe that misinterpretations of the Gospel of John were a source of some of these false ideas. With the passage of time and the increase in Gentile membership in the church, some of the ideas in the Gospel were given new (and incorrect) connotations. We know the later Gnostics were attracted to that Gospel, as they wrote the earliest commentaries on it (*Dictionary of the Later New Testament*, 590).

Text

1. Prologue (1:1-4)

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked at and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life – ²the life was manifested, and we have seen [it] and we give testimony and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – ³what we have seen and we have heard we proclaim also to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And indeed our fellowship [is] with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And we write these things so that our joy may be complete.

A. John's Greek usually is rather simple, but that's not true of these four verses. The Catholic scholar Raymond Brown states in his commentary (p. 152), "The initial four verses of 1 John have a good claim to being the most complicated Greek in the Johannine corpus." Many English translations smooth out the difficulties by essentially paraphrasing John's meaning. I think they are accurate, but I wanted you to see a more literal reading of the text. My rendering is closer to what you will find in the ASV, NASU, and ESV.

B. It should jump out at you that John is stressing his firsthand, personal association with the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. In v. 1 John refers to what they heard, what they saw, what they looked at and what they touched concerning the Word of life. In v. 2 he twice says the life was manifested and

says they saw it. In v. 3 he again refers to what they saw and what they heard. By my count, that is nine references to sense perception.

2. John does this to assure his readers that, in contrast to the false teachers, his message is the authentic, original message. It does not rest on lofty speculation but on concrete, firsthand knowledge. This was important for the authority of his message. In that regard, these verses function similarly to Gal. 1:11-12.

3. He uses plural pronouns (we, our, us) because he was one of a group of apostles, those who were eyewitnesses of Christ's life and teachings (see, Acts 1:21-22). He is "declaring the one, common apostolic message based upon the one, common apostolic eyewitness experience" (Stott, 31).

C. The phrase "from the beginning" in v. 1 probably refers to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and his first association with his disciples, not to Christ's eternal existence (see Mk. 1:1; Lk. 3:23; Acts 1:22; Jn. 6:64, 15:27, 16:4). John certainly believes in Christ's eternal existence, as shown by the next verse, but here he is authenticating his own teaching about Jesus in contrast to the message of the false teachers. He's saying that the gospel he preaches is the foundational message that was both embodied by Jesus and preached by him. Jesus is both the preacher of God's message and the message itself. In him God's message was both seen and heard.

D. In v. 2 John affirms the incarnation, the fact the eternal life that was with the Father was manifested in the historical person Jesus of Nazareth. He will make this point several times throughout the letter. This certainly echoes John 1 where he says that the "Word" was with God in the beginning and became flesh and dwelt among us.

1. The incarnation is a profound truth and one over which people have stumbled from John's day to the present. People are constantly resisting and even railing against the truth that Jesus is not merely a great man but God in the flesh.

2. I think John Piper's remarks on this are insightful:

Many are willing to believe in Christ if he remains a merely spiritual reality. But when we preach that Christ has become a particular man in a particular place issuing particular commands and dying on a particular cross exposing the particular sins of our particular lives, then the preaching ceases to be acceptable for many.

I don't think it is so much the mystery of a divine and human nature in one person that causes most people to stumble over the doctrine of the incarnation. The stumbling block is that if the doctrine is true, every single person in the world must obey this one particular Jewish man. Everything he says is law. Everything he did is perfect. And the particularity of his work and word flow out into history in the form of a particular inspired book (written in the particular languages of

Greek and Hebrew) that claims a universal authority over every other book that has ever been written.

This is the stumbling block of the incarnation—when God becomes a man, he strips away every pretense of man to be God. We can no longer do our own thing; we must do what this one Jewish man wants us to do. We can no longer pose as self-sufficient, because this one Jewish man says we are all sick with sin and must come to him for healing. We can no longer depend on our own wisdom to find life, because this one Jewish man who lived for 30 obscure years in a little country in the Middle East says, "I am the way the truth and the life."

When God becomes a man, man ceases to be the measure of all things, and this man becomes the measure of all things. This is simply intolerable to the rebellious heart of men and women. The incarnation is a violation of the bill of human rights written by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is totalitarian. It's authoritarian! Imperialism! Despotism! Usurpation! Absolutism! Who does he think he is!

GOD!²

E. John says in v. 3 that the reason the apostles, as represented by John, proclaim to the readers what they have seen and heard is so that the readers may have fellowship with them, may share in the spiritual bond of the family of God.

1. If John's readers accept his proclamation of the original message, that true message based on firsthand knowledge, as opposed to the twisted message of the false teachers, they will remain (or return to being) his partners in the faith. If they do not accept his message, they will not have fellowship with the apostle.

2. John's notion that fellowship is a product of accepting or abiding in the correct message about Jesus Christ is significant for the modern church.

a. When John wanted to cultivate and preserve the fellowship of his readers, he got theological. In other words, he called people to fellowship in the truth; he didn't try to cultivate and preserve fellowship by reducing theology to the lowest common denominator, by jettisoning every doctrine about which there was disagreement.

b. There are those who use the noble desire of Christian unity to push for extending Christian fellowship to any person who utters the name Jesus, but there cannot be fellowship between persons who differ on central affirmations of the faith. No doubt there will be disagreements over what is in fact central or essential, but that is different from suggesting

² From

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/46/475_Eternal_Life_Has_Appeared_in_Christ/

there are no essential tenets of faith and criticizing every denial of fellowship as "sectarian" or "exclusivist."

c. As British scholar (a Methodist) I. Howard Marshall states (NICNT, 107):

[I]t is not true that there can be fellowship between persons who disagree on the central affirmations of the faith. There cannot be unity between denominations which differ in their understanding of the way of salvation, and there cannot be unity between those who accept and those who do not accept Jesus Christ – crucified for our sins and raised for our justification – as Savior. There is no common ground in such cases.

d. Here's what the Baptist scholar Norman Geisler says in his book *The Battle for the Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992) 171:

[W]hat about those who insist that drawing lines will divide Christians? In response it must be lovingly but firmly maintained that *it is better to be divided by truth than united by error*. There is an unhealthy tendency in evangelical Christianity to hide under the banner of Christian charity while sacrificing doctrinal purity. While we must always manifest love toward those with whom we disagree, there is no necessity to sacrifice orthodoxy on the altar of unity. If push comes to shove, it is better to be divided by a true understanding of [a fundamental truth] than to be united on a false understanding of it. Otherwise, we will be corrupted by compromise.

3. John makes clear that his fellowship is with God, i.e., he is reconciled to and in harmony with God and with God's Son Jesus Christ. He thus affirms Jesus' divinity and implies that there cannot be a distinction between God the Father and Jesus the Son in the matter of fellowship. As he puts it directly in 2:23, "No one who denies the Son has the Father." And as Jesus put it in Jn. 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."

F. John says in v. 4 that his joy would be diminished if they should wander from the faith, out of salvation and out of fellowship. 3 Jn. 3-4: "I was overjoyed when some of the brothers arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth."

II. Ethical implications of the message (1:5 – 2:6)

A. The message heard (1:5)

⁵And this is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

1. ⁵*And this is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you* – John is proclaiming a message he heard from the Lord Jesus. What he's about to announce is a part of that authentic, original message to which he referred in his prologue. As such, it is an element of the gospel which is essential for fellowship to exist; it is something fundamental, at least in concept if not in precise formulation.

2. *God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.*

a. John is using light here primarily to symbolize God's holiness, his flawless perfection. The comparison of good and evil with light and darkness was well known in the ancient world. A prime example from the O.T. is Isa. 5:20, which states: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness." Places in the N.T. where light and darkness are used in moral contrast include Rom. 13:11-14 and Eph. 5:6-14, and there seems to be a moral element to the contrast in Jn. 11:9-10.

b. I think Marshall has it right in stating (p. 109):

The contrast between God and darkness is expressed as strongly as possible. The point is . . . that living in the darkness is incompatible with fellowship with God. This makes it clear that the writer is thinking of light and darkness predominantly in ethical terms; it is his way of saying: "God is good, and evil can have no place beside him."

c. Similarly, Leon Morris says ("1 John," in *New Bible Commentary*, 1400): "To say that God is light is to draw attention to his uprightness, his righteousness. Light is a natural symbol for attractive righteousness, just as darkness is for the blackness of sin."

d. This message, this axiom – that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all – forms the basis of what follows. This is what we are teaching people, in so many words, when we tell them that their sin separates them from God. His absolute, atomic-white purity is incompatible with sin.

B. Implications of that message (1:6-10)

⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not do the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us

from all sin. ⁸If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹[But] if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just so that he forgives us the sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1. ⁶*If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not do the truth.*

a. John is refuting the false teachers' claim to have fellowship with God. They claimed to have fellowship with God but the fact they were "walking in darkness" shows that the claim is a lie. These people had fooled themselves into thinking they were right with God when they were not.

b. Walking is a well-known Jewish metaphor for how one lives. Indeed, one of the definitions given in BDAG (p. 803) for the word (*peripateō*) is "to conduct one's life." To walk in darkness is to conduct one's life without awareness of or regard for the will of God; it is to live in sin.

(1) That's why he says that those who walk in darkness "do not do the truth." He uses that same expression in Jn. 3:21 where it clearly means the opposite of "doing evil." As Colin Kruse points out (p. 63): "[The phrase 'does the truth' in Jn. 3:21] suggests that here in 1 John 'doing the truth' means living in the light of the truth and seeking to avoid sin. It is not enough to claim to know God (as the secessionists did); people also must live in the light of that truth, putting it into practice and avoiding sin."

(2) That walking in the darkness involves living in sin is confirmed by 2:11 where John says, "But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

c. As I indicated, the false teachers had constructed a theological system by which they negated the reality or significance of their sin. Whatever they were telling themselves, they in fact were living in sin, walking in darkness, and since that is incompatible with the character of God as light, their claim to be in fellowship with God while living in sin was a lie. John says much the same thing in 2:4: "The one who says, 'I have known him' and does not keep his commandments is a liar."

d. John is making the same point Jesus made in Mat. 7:21-23 (ESV):

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

2. ⁷*But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*

a. In contrast to the false teachers who lie by claiming they have fellowship with God while walking in darkness, while not doing the truth, those who walk in the light have fellowship with one another and receive an ongoing cleansing of all their sin through Jesus' death on the cross.

b. That walking in the light refers to conducting oneself ethically or morally is apparent not only from the fact it is contrasted to walking in darkness, which as I just argued has an ethical sense, but also from 2:5b-6 where John tells them, "By this we may know we are in him: the one who claims to abide in him ought himself to walk just as that one walked." It is the sense in which Paul tells them in Eph. 5:8-9, "Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)."

c. This verse makes clear, as do the following verses (vv. 8, 10, 2:1), that walking in the light does not mean living sinlessly. On the contrary, if we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves (vv. 8, 10), which is what the false teachers were doing. Walking in the light means that our lives will not be *characterized by* disobedience. It means our sins will be in a context of an overall surrender to the will of God, and because of that we will confess them and renounce them when we recognize them. The one who walks in darkness has accepted his sin and is not interested in bringing his life in line with the will of God. Of course, individuals will vary in how successfully they live out their commitment to obey, but that is different than not having the commitment.

d. It seems obedience has gotten a bad name in the church. If you speak these days as John does here and elsewhere, if you say boldly that those who walk in darkness, who live in sin, will not be saved regardless of whether they claim to have faith in Christ, in some quarters you'll be labeled a legalist, an enemy of grace. Those who think that way have succumbed to an unbiblical view of faith, a view that reduces it to mere mental assent to the truth of a proposition rather than a wholehearted surrender to the Lord who is the object of that faith. In the terminology of Jas. 2:14-26, they have mistaken "dead" faith for the faith that saves.

e. I certainly am not alone in thinking that obedience has fallen on hard times.

(1) New Testament scholar Gary Burge writes (p. 105-106):

Many of us recoil at the mere word "obedience." I often meet students who have grown up in conservative churches and families where obedience and righteousness were pounded home so often that today they have been pushed aside as vehicles of death and suffocation. *Obey?* such students ask. *God loves me. Let me simply enjoy him and live.* For some of us, promoting obedience is difficult particularly

when we ground our salvation in the rich goodness and charity of God. Nevertheless, John could not be clearer.

Sometimes I wonder if our concern to support the Reformation teaching about grace has sabotaged any hope for this call to obedience. We frame the theology of the New Testament as a series of juxtapositions: the synagogue versus the church, Jesus versus Moses, Paul versus the Jerusalem legalists, grace versus law. In doing so, we forget that Paul's first concern was *works of Jewish ritual that were thought to earn some benefit from God*. Paul can at once say that the Christian life should display *good works* and yet that we are not saved *by works*. Paul endorsed no compromise to the believer's pursuit of righteousness. The same is true of Jesus. . . . This is a difficult paradox: Personal righteousness and obedience are an essential component of our faith and yet do not form the basis of our salvation.

(2) The well-known Evangelical preacher John MacArthur wrote in 1988 in his book *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 16 (from Burge, 108):

The gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope to sinners. It promises them they can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God. Indeed, it encourages people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey Him as Lord. It promises salvation from hell but not necessarily freedom from iniquity. It offers false security to people who revel in the sins of the flesh and spurn the way of holiness. By separating faith from faithfulness, it leaves the impression that intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth. Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message Jesus proclaimed.

f. I am afraid that until we expect and insist on holiness from our brothers and sisters, the church will not be the beacon God intended it to be and will fall prey to trying to attract and keep people with superficialities. A world mired in sin needs to know, in the words of the famous hymn "Rock of Ages," that Christ is sin's "double cure" – he cleanses from sin's guilt *and* power. As I have said a number of times, a Christian is not the same person in a new situation; a Christian is a new person in a new situation. Praise God!

g. Remember that John is writing to a specific group of Christians in a specific situation. He is not writing a general tract on how to be saved; his addressees already were saved. John was trying to keep them that way by encouraging them and warning them about the false teachers who were threatening them. Things like the necessity of baptism simply were not an issue. Isolating John's statements from the context of the letter will wreak theological havoc.

h. It is interesting that John says the consequence of faithful living is fellowship with *one another*. The false teachers boasted about their fellowship with God, but they

neglected their fellowship with men, or more specifically, with the faithful Christians. John wants to remind them that they cannot have fellowship with God without having fellowship with other Christians. It's a package deal: to have fellowship with God is to have fellowship with all Christians, with all who are in fellowship with God.

3. ⁸*If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

a. John is here refuting another of the false teachers' claims. Based on John's other uses of the phrase "to have sin," all of which are in the Gospel of John (Jn. 9:41, 15:22, 24, 19:11), it seems he "is warning people who have sinned that they cannot claim 'We are free from the guilt of sin'" (Brown, 206; see also, Kruse, 66). In fact, the ESV translates the phrase in John 9 and 15 as "have guilt" and "be guilty of sin." In Jn. 19:11 it clearly refers to having committed a sinful act.

b. Kruse writes (p. 66):

The expression 'to have sin' (*echō hamartian*) is found only here in 1 John, but it occurs four times in the Fourth Gospel (John 9:41; 15:22, 24; 19:11), and in each case it means to be guilty of sins. Allowing this usage to guide us, we would have to say that what the secessionists were claiming was, not that they were by nature free from the sin principle, but that they were not guilty of committing sins, by which they probably meant they had not sinned since they came to know God and experienced the anointing.

c. As I've indicated, perhaps they got there by thinking that wrong actions were irrelevant (and thus not "sinful" in any meaningful sense) in light of the liberation of their spirits from the prison of this evil material world. Irenaeus says that Carpocrates, a second-century heretic, claimed "that there were no wrong actions for the enlightened and urged wicked deeds with impunity as a way of showing one's freedom from the powers that rule the world" (Brown, 206).

d. John's reply simply is that they are deceiving themselves and the truth is not in them. Denying that sinful conduct is indeed sinful is implicitly to denigrate the absolutely holy God, who is the standard by which sinfulness is judged, and to misjudge the depth of our need for grace. Those who do so do not have the truth in them in the sense the truth has not taken control of their thinking. If it had, they would be conscious of their sin.

e. Piper comments:

In this life we never get beyond the awareness of remaining sin. Therefore one of the great signs of maturity in Christ is a deep and abiding brokenness for sin.

There is much talk today about esteeming ourselves as new creatures in Christ. And so we are. But our newness consists in this: that the true light is shining in our hearts revealing the dreadfulness of our remaining sin and the abundance of God's grace.

Our great joy is that our sin is forgiven in Christ. And our great grief is that so much of this very sin remains and defiles.

The mark of the new creature in Christ is not a rosy self-concept. It is brokenness for remaining sin mingled with a joyful confidence in the superabounding grace of God in Christ.³

f. Our confidence in the amazing grace of God must never lead us to trivialize sin. Mercy certainly is ours in Christ, but we must hold that truth with the truth that sin is monstrous, the very thing for which our Lord suffered. That awareness keeps us humble before the Lord, mindful of our utter lack, and appreciative of his incomparable greatness.

g. The temptation to deny one's sin is common. It is unpleasant to face ourselves in our sin, so we construct ways to deny it.

(1) Our ways tend not to be as theologically complex as those of John's opponents, but the effect is the same. We redefine sin so as to exclude the conduct in which we're engaging or we trivialize it in the name of the grace.

(2) I have told some of you the story of the frontier settlement in the West whose people were engaged in the lumbering business. The town wanted a church, so they built a building and hired a preacher. The preacher had been there several months when one day he saw some members of the congregation intercepting logs that a town upstream had floated down the river. He watched them saw off that town's brand and mark the logs as their own. It was just like cattle rustling but with logs. Well, the next Sunday he preached a forceful sermon on the text, "Thou shalt not steal." At the close of the service people lined, shook his hand, and praised the sermon as usual, but the next week he once again saw the members of the congregation stealing logs. This really bothered him, so the next Sunday his topic was, "Thou shalt not saw off the brands of thy neighbors' logs." At the close of that service, they ran him out of town.

4. ⁹[But]⁴ if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just so that he forgives us the sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

a. The reference to "sins" (plural) indicates John is speaking of sinful acts rather than sin as a general propensity or condition. The fact this is contrasted with "we do not have sin" in the preceding verse reinforces the view that "we do not have sin" refers to being guilty of sinning. Instead of saying "we do not have sin," we are to admit that we commit sins.

³ From

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/46/476_Let_Us_Walk_in_the_Light_of_God/

⁴ Brown states (p. 207), "This is an *ean* condition with the present subjunctive as in v. 7a, but with the adversative idea expressed by asyndeton rather than by a *de* particle as there."

b. The proper Christian attitude toward sins is not to deny them but to confess them. Marshall points out in his commentary (p. 113), "To confess our sins is not merely to admit we are sinners, but to lay them before God and to seek forgiveness." According to the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (2:515), "The intention is not only an inner admission, but also an open confession of sins before God. The author of 1 John shares with ancient Judaism both the conviction that confession of sins is the precondition for God's forgiveness and the certainty that God responds to confession of sin with the comfort of forgiveness." See also, Strecker, 31-32.

c. Confession is the expression of a penitent heart, the reaction to sin of one who is walking in the light. It is the Lord's prayer – forgive us our debts/sins (Mat. 6:12/Lk. 11:4) – applied to concrete cases. If we confess our sins rather than insist on continuing in them, we receive from God forgiveness and cleansing. Praise God!

d. Notice that John speaks of sin as both a debt to be forgiven and as a stain to be cleansed. In sinning we have both denied God his due and defiled ourselves before him.

e. In forgiving our sins and cleansing our unrighteousness, God is both faithful and just. He is faithful because he has promised to forgive and cleanse. He is just in doing so either because it is just or right to honor one's promises or because the death of God's Son has provided for a just forgiveness, i.e., a forgiveness in which sin does not go unpunished.

5. ¹⁰*If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

a. In v. 8 John quoted the false teachers' claim "we do not have sin." Here he quotes their claim "we have not sinned" (perfect instead of present tense). Some think there is a material difference between these claims, but with Colin Kruse and others, I think the essential meaning is the same. John repeats the claim of v. 8 in different words to make the point that those who say that not only deceive themselves (v. 8) but actually make God a liar (v. 10).

b. They call God a liar because they are denying his declaration that all people are sinners. As Marshall says (p. 115), "Paul's statement that 'all have sinned' (Rom. 3:23) is no isolated remark; it sums up the teaching of Scripture on the universality of sin." Indeed, this teaching is implicit in John's statement in 4:10 that God "sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice *for our sins*."

c. Because they contradict God's own testimony on the matter, it is clear his word is not "in them"; they have not internalized or accepted it. You see a parallel to this idea in Jn. 5:37-38 where Jesus says that their refusal to believe in the one God sent shows that his word does not dwell in them.

C. Clarification and assurance (2:1-2)

My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for [the sins] of the whole world.

1. *My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin.*

a. John does not want his comments emphasizing the fact Christians are guilty of sin and receive ongoing forgiveness to be misinterpreted as a license to sin or a reason to be casual about sin. Paul faced the same concern in Rom. 6:1 – "What then shall we say? Should we continue in sin so that grace may increase?" The goal must be to live without sin, as he emphasized in vv. 6-7, and the fact we don't succeed cannot be allowed to invalidate that goal.

b. This is the note I believe the church has become too reluctant to sound. We have in too many cases swallowed the notion that boldly calling people not to sin, calling them to holiness of life, is contrary to the truth that our standing with God is a gift that is not gained by our works or obedience. The idea has taken root that calling people to a radical holiness is done at the expense of proclaiming God's grace. The result of this false conflict is that we tend to understate the horror of sin, which I fear has caused some not to take it as seriously as they should. We need to be clear that our salvation is by grace through faith and not by works, but we also need to be clear that sin is a grave matter.

2. *But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for [the sins] of the whole world.*

a. Though God's call is that we not sin, when we do sin, as vv. 8 & 10 make clear we will, if we will "confess" that sin as mentioned in v. 9, rather than denying it, we can rest assured that we are forgiven. What a promise! Its power is seen more clearly if you substitute specific sins: if anyone does get drunk, steal, fornicate, curse, commit adultery, engage in homosexual conduct, hate, lie, etc. we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

b. That assurance stems from the fact our advocate (*paráklētos*) with the Father is Jesus Christ the righteous one. The one who represents us is the one who died for us in obedience to and in fulfillment of God's plan (4:10). No one he represents is condemned.

c. The fact God the Father sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice, as John says in 4:10, means we cannot think that Jesus has to overcome some reluctance to forgive on the part of the Father. It is clear from Rom. 3:21-26 that God initiated this sacrifice of his Son, this outpouring of wrath, so that he might forgive consistently with his holiness. He is not being

persuaded to forgive, as though he is reluctant to do so; rather, he provided the way to forgive consistently with his nature.

d. Christ's advocacy on our behalf is not a matter of persuasion but an expression of the very plan of the Father. He represents us in the blood of his sacrifice. In the words of Wesley's famous hymn "Arise My Soul Arise":

Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears:
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above, for me to intercede;
His all redeeming love, His precious blood, to plead:
His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

e. His death not only atoned for the sins of all Christians but potentially for the sins of all people (see also, Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 4:14). Its efficacy will never be exhausted. In the words of Kruse (p. 75), "We might suggest that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world because his death was sufficient to deal with the sins of the whole world, but that his sacrifice does not become effective until people believe in him."

D. The ethical point repeated as a condition of that assurance (2:3-6)

³And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴The one who says, "I have come to know him" and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and in this one the truth is not. ⁵But whoever keeps his word, truly in this one the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may know we are in him: ⁶the one who claims to abide in him ought himself to walk just as that one walked.

1. ³*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.*

a. When John says that he and his readers can "know" that they have come to "know" him, he uses "know" in two different senses. They can "know," in the sense of knowing it is the case, that they "know" him, in the sense of being in fellowship with him. In other words, they can be confident they have a relationship or are in fellowship with him.

b. By "him" John probably means God the Father. Though Jesus (God the Son) is the nearest person to the pronoun, both Father and Son are mentioned in v. 2. More

importantly, the false teachers, like the full-blown Gnostics who succeeded them, boasted about their relationship with God the Father. You can see in 1:5-6 that their claim was to have fellowship with God, and in 2:22-23 it is clear that they claimed this relationship in distinction from a relationship with Jesus.

c. The way they can be confident that they have a relationship with God is if they keep his commandments.

(1) John is trying to reassure the faithful, who have been made insecure about their relationship with God by claims of the false teachers, and to expose the false teachers as people who are deceived about their own relationship with God.

(2) Keeping God's commandments is not the way to *gain* a relationship with God; rather, it is a characteristic of those who *have* a relationship with God. In other words, a relationship with God necessarily has moral consequences; it affects the way we live.

(3) John is well aware that no one keeps the commandments flawlessly. He just made that clear in 1:8-10. But failing to keep the commandments flawlessly is a far cry from failing to take them seriously, as the false teachers apparently were doing. As John Stott writes (p. 95): "If it is objected that in this case no-one knows God, because no-one is perfectly obedient, we may reply with Calvin: 'he does not mean that those who wholly satisfy the Law keep His commandments (and no such instance can be found in the world), but those who strive, according to the capacity of human infirmity, to form their life in obedience to God.'" So also Marshall, ("The question is whether I am trying [and to some extent succeeding] to keep God's commandments," 124) and Kruse ("those who know God will not be characterised by disobedience to his commands," 79).

(4) We tend to think that since obedience is inadequate to save anyone, because it is imperfect, it cannot provide any assurance of one's relationship with God, but that's exactly what John says it provides. I'm afraid that in our noble desire to honor God's grace we sometimes have robbed brothers and sisters of a God-given means of assurance. It's not legalistic or prideful for a person to recognize when he keeps God's commandments (in the imperfect sense John means). Indeed, in 2:8 John tells his readers that the new command to love one another in a Christian sense was a reality in their lives as it was in Christ's. One can know whether one's faith in Christ has made a difference in how one lives, whether the Spirit is producing fruit in one's life.

(5) Of course, John is writing to those who make an orthodox profession of faith, those who believe in the true incarnation of Christ. He's not suggesting that obedience divorced from such a confession provides any assurance of a relationship with God.

2. *⁴The one who says, "I have come to know him" and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and in this one the truth is not.*

a. John is here saying essentially the same thing he said in 1:6. Stott explains the verse succinctly (p. 95): "The positive principle of the previous verse is illustrated by a negative example. A person's words must be tested by his works. If he disobeys God's commandments, his claim to have come to know God is a lie (cf. 1:6). His conduct contradicts his profession and proves it to be false." This is what Jesus meant when he said in Lk. 6:46, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?"

b. The thoughts and judgments of the person who claims a relationship with God without obedience are not controlled by the truth.

3. ⁵*But whoever keeps his word, truly in this one the love of God has reached perfection.*

a. With many commentators, I take "of God" as an objective genitive, as in 2:15 and 5:3, rather than a subjective genitive. (The same ambiguity is in a phrase like "appreciation of the workers.") The NIV '84 opted for God's love for us (subjective sense) in the text but footnotes the objective possibility; the TNIV and NIV '11 reverse this. The RSV opts for our love for God (objective sense) in the text.

b. The person who keeps God's word is the one who truly has a mature or complete love for God (unlike the false teachers). Otherwise it is a deformed love, something incomplete and short of true biblical love. That's why Jesus could say in Jn. 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," and 1 Jn. 5:3 states, "for this is love for God, that we keep his commandments." The love of which God speaks is more than mere sentiment or feeling; it is inextricably bound to our conduct.

4. *By this we may know we are in him: ⁶the one who claims to abide in him ought himself to walk just as that one walked.*

a. The way we can know we are "in him," meaning the way we can be assured that we have an intimate communion with God, is by the axiom that the one who claims such a relationship must walk as Jesus did ("that one" being a reference to Jesus elsewhere in the letter – 3:3, 5, 7, 16, 4:17). So if we live as Jesus lived, we can know we have that relationship with God; if we do not live that way, then our claim to have that relationship is a lie.

b. Here is how Kruse (p. 82) states the thrust of vv. 3-6: "Those who keep God's commands may have assurance that they are people who know God; those who claim to know God while not obeying his commands are liars; those who say they live in God must walk as Jesus walked, that is, keeping God's commands to them as Jesus obeyed God's commands to him."

III. An old and new commandment (2:7-11)

A. Writing an old commandment (2:7)

⁷Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard.

1. John has been writing about the Christian obligation to keep God's commandments, and now he narrows the focus to the particular commandment to love one another. That he is referring to that commandment is clear from the fact love is the subject of vv. 9-11, 2 Jn. 5 specifically identifies the "old commandment" as the commandment to love one another, and 3:11 says "For this is the message which we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

2. In John's battle with the false teachers, who showed no brotherly concern for the faithful Christians to whom John is writing, he again is appealing to the origin of the command he is binding. The command to love one another is not something he recently dreamed up but is something they had learned from the very beginning of their Christian experience. It was part of the ethical instruction they received from the very start.

B. Yet a new commandment (2:8)

⁸Yet I am writing you a new commandment which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light already is shining.

1. ⁸*Yet I am writing you a new commandment* – While the command to love one another was old in the sense it was a part of the original message they had received, an original ethical requirement, it was in some sense new with Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Jn. 13:34: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

a. The requirement of love in general was not new with Jesus Christ (see, e.g., Lev. 19:18 – "you shall love your neighbor as yourself").

b. But Jesus enhanced the content of the command, having invested it with a richer and deeper meaning. In other words, he commanded a qualitatively new kind of love, a love that rested on the example of God's supreme love in Jesus himself.

(1) As Kruse states in his commentary on the Gospel of John (TNTC, 293), "In the OT the Israelites were commanded to love their neighbour as they loved themselves (Lv. 19:18), but Jesus said to his disciples, *As I have loved you, so you must love one another*. This raised the ante considerably. The measure of love for their neighbour was no

longer their love for themselves, but Jesus' love for them." And, of course, Jesus' love for us was one of selfless sacrifice even to the point of death.

(2) In addition, a disciple is to love anyone who needs our compassion and help, regardless of race or rank, even to the point of loving our enemies.

2. *which is true in him and in you* – John says that the newness or difference of this command was a reality in the life of Christ *and* in the lives of John's readers. They were exhibiting true Christian love or "kingdom love." In this they differed markedly from the false teachers.

a. Notice that there is power in Christ to live morally distinctive lives. These Christians, like countless others throughout history and today, were doing it. They were, in the terminology of Mat. 5:16, letting their lights shine in this dark world that others may see their good works and give glory to God.

b. We have allowed the danger of self righteousness to muffle the truth that God transforms lives. We rightly emphasize our continual dependence on the grace of God for salvation, but we must not leave the impression that Christ does nothing to free us from the practice of sin, that the only difference between us and the world is that our sins are forgiven and theirs are not. As Paul says in Rom. 6:17-19, we who once were slaves of sin have been set free and become slaves of righteousness. See also, Rom. 8:1-13, Gal. 5:16-24.

c. When we give the impression to converts that they should not expect a changed life but only a changed standing before God we do them a great disservice. By depriving them of the expectation of God's transforming work in their lives, we cause them to lower their sights and to be content with the status quo. They thus miss a rich blessing of God.

3. *because the darkness is passing away and the true light already is shining* – This realization of Christian love or "new love" in their lives was a result of the passing of the old age or old order of reality. Jesus' coming inaugurated the new age, the kingdom of heaven, but its consummation awaits his second coming. Thus, we presently live in an overlap of ages, a time in which the age to come has broken into this present reality. The presence of "kingdom love" is fruit of that invasion.

C. Obeying "the commandment" as a test of being in the light (2:9-11)

⁹The one who claims to be in the light while hating his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰The one who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1. ⁹*The one who claims to be in the light while hating his brother is still in the darkness.*

a. The false teachers apparently did not believe that their unbrotherly treatment of the orthodox (implied at 3:11-17, 4:20-21) was a sin; as far as they were concerned, it did not constitute walking in darkness. John specifically rejects that view. Those who "hate" fellow believers, meaning those who do not love them, are in the darkness and, according to 1:6, are lying about having any fellowship with God.

b. John assumes that if a person does not love his brother or sister he hates them. There is no neutral territory. Marshall states (p. 131), "His concept of love is caring for the needs of others, even to the point of self-sacrifice. If I am unwilling to do that for someone in need, I love myself more than him; I am not merely being neutral, but actually am hating him."

c. John's focus on loving fellow Christians is dictated by the circumstances of his letter. He's dealing with the fact the false teachers were not loving the faithful Christians.

2. ¹⁰*The one who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling.*

a. John states the opposite truth, the other side of the coin: one who loves fellow believers, unlike the false teachers, is in the light.

b. In the light ("it") there are no pitfalls, no traps. There is nothing to cause one to fall short of the blessings given by God in Christ. According to 1:7, the blood of Jesus continually cleanses all who are in the light.

c. The phrase "in it" could be translated "in him," in which case the meaning is that there is nothing in one who is walking in the light that will cause him and/or another to fall into sin.

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

a. Repeats the claim of v. 9 but adds the notion of "walking" in darkness because of the reference to the absence of pitfalls or stumbling blocks in the preceding verse. As there are no pitfalls in the light, no threats to one's security, one who walks in darkness does so at one's peril. Danger lurks with each step because one cannot see.

b. John also adds the idea that those in darkness are blind and therefore do not know the way to go. This is aimed at the false teachers who were claiming the role of spiritual guides. They had evolved beyond the orthodox (to the point of having seceded from

them) and were apparently claiming deeper insights. According to John, anyone who follows these teachers is following a blind guide!

IV. Assurance and warning (2:12-17)

A. Assurance of their salvation (2:12-14)⁵

1. First address (vv. 12-13)

¹²I write to you, little children, that to you the sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ¹³I write to you, fathers, that you have known the one [who is] from [the] beginning. I write to you, young men, that you have overcome the evil one.

a. John addresses his readers in terms of three groups: little children, fathers, and young men. From the order it seems likely that "little children" expresses the whole, the entire group of faithful Christians to whom John is writing. "Fathers" and "young men" are two subdivisions of that group (the old and young). Most modern commentators understand the terms in this way. John elsewhere in the letter addresses *all* his readers as "children" or "little children" (2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), which confirms that it is a collective term.

b. Does *hoti* mean "because" or "that" in this context? In other words, does the *hoti* clause explain why John is writing to his readers or what he is writing to them? The latter seems more consistent with the conclusion that John's audience was demoralized and unsure of their status (so Brown and Kruse). He is writing to assure his children *that* their sins are forgiven, *that* they know the Father, etc.

c. I think John addresses all of his readers in two ways, first with a collective term ("little children") and then by addressing the two groups that were understood to comprise the whole – old and young ("fathers" and "young men"). As Marshall notes (p. 138), there was no category of "middle-aged" in the language of the New Testament times; one was either young or old. This subdivision is, in my view, a rhetorical device through which John emphasizes their security by expressing it in different words. It's as if General Eisenhower wrote to the soldiers who stormed the beaches at Normandy and said: "I say to you *men* that you honored your county; I say to you *officers* that you fought bravely; I say to you *enlisted men* that you won the victory." What he says is true of all, but he divides it up for rhetorical purposes.

⁵ My edition of the ESV has v. 14 begin with "I write to you, fathers" rather than with "I write to you, children."

d. John says to all of them that their sins have been forgiven on account of Jesus Christ. He says to the older men that they have known Jesus Christ, the one on whose account sins are forgiven. ("The one who is from the beginning" is best understood as a reference to Jesus, see Kruse, 90-91.) He says to the young men that they have overcome the evil one, meaning they have overcome his agenda of death through their relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. Second address (v. 14)

¹⁴I write to you, children, that you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, that you have known the one [who is] from [the] beginning. I write to you, young men, that you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one.

a. John varies the statement to the "children" and repeats the statements to the fathers and young men, with an addition with regard to the young men. It seems to me he is going out of his way to emphasize their status. He wants no question that they are right with God. As he states in 5:13, he wants his readers to know they have eternal life, despite any suggestions to the contrary from the false teachers.

b. He says to all of them (referred to now as "children" rather than "little children") that they have known the Father, which relationship is through Jesus Christ. He again says to the fathers that they have known Jesus Christ, the one through whom one receives a relationship with the Father. And he again says to the young men that they have overcome the evil one. But he adds that the young men have done so because they are strong, and they are strong because the word of God abides in them. They allowed the message proclaimed by and embodied in Jesus Christ, the message they heard from the beginning (2:24), to remain in them, despite the efforts of the false teachers, and thus maintained their relationship with Christ and thereby overcame the evil one's agenda of death.

c. It is interesting that the verb tense is changed in the repetition (I "write" or "am writing" to I "wrote" or "have written"). Most commentators see this as just a stylistic variation with no substantive difference.

B. Warning not to love "the world" (vv. 15-17)

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, also its desire, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

1. The command (v. 15a) – ¹⁵*Do not love the world or the things in the world.*

a. This is particularly appropriate in view of the fact the false teachers were "of the world" (4:5). "World" here does not mean the material earth or the people who inhabit it. The word is used in various senses, and often in John it signifies mankind in organized rebellion against God. That's why John refers to Satan as "the prince of the world" (Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11) and says that "the whole world lies in [the power of] the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). Kruse writes (p. 94), "There can be no doubt that in the present context ['world'] means 'worldly attitudes or values that are opposed to God' (cf. Jas. 4:4)."

b. "Things in the world" refers to the specific things that embody those attitudes or values that are opposed to God. It is a particularization of "the world."

c. The word "love" has a different shade of meaning here than in 2:10. There it signifies outgoing care and compassion, a concern for the benefit of the person loved. Here, however, the thought is of the pleasure the person hopes to get from the object of his love; the thought is of appetite and desire (e.g., Jn. 3:19 speaks of people's "love" for darkness; see also, 2 Tim. 4:10).

d. So the exhortation is that we not long for or desire that which is opposed to God. Burge explains (p. 115), "Christians are to avoid an infatuation with worldly godlessness, with the realm of darkness that brings base pleasures."

2. First reason not to love the world: Love for the world is incompatible with love for the Father (v. 15b-16) – *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶*For all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world.*

a. If we are engrossed in the outlook and pursuits of the world, it is obvious to John that we have no love for the Father. Jas. 4:4 says the same thing: "friendship with the world is hatred toward God." In Mat. 6:24 Jesus says that no one can serve two masters, and if we can't serve God and money, neither can we love the Father and the world.

b. Verse 16 elaborates on why love for world is incompatible with love for God – the things in the "world" are not from God. There are two opposing camps: the world and the Father. One cannot love the Father while loving what is opposed to him.

c. Examples of things "in the world"

(1) Desire of the flesh - This may refer to cravings for sensual pleasure or to a more general pursuit of a self-centered independence from God, a selfish human desire.

(2) Desire of the eyes - The basic thought is probably of greed and an improper desire for things that is aroused by seeing them.

(3) Pride in possessions - The idea here is one of boasting and pretentiousness, trying to impress people by one's external situation.

(4) It may be that the first is a broad inclusive concept that is filled out by the other two. Selfish human desire is stimulated by what the eye sees and expresses itself in outward show.

(5) Clearly we all need possessions, and it cannot be wrong to want and to take pleasure in what God has provided for our needs (Marshall, 146). What John is condemning is a warped desire for things, a boasting in possessions (allowing things to cut one off from one's fellow humans), and a false belief of self sufficiency. These types of things characterize the sphere of rebellion, i.e., "the world."

3. Second reason not to love the world: The world is doomed (v. 17) – ¹⁷*And the world is passing away, and the desire of it, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

a. The world, as both the origin and goal of wrong desire, is passing away, and it is a loser's move to hook one's wagon to that which is expiring. Those who opt for the world will suffer the world's fate, but those who opt for God – described as the one who does the will of God – will receive God's gift of eternal life.

b. Kruse explains the verse this way (p. 96-97):

Because of all that has been set in motion by God through the coming of Jesus Christ, the world is passing away and its days are numbered (cf. 1 Cor 7:31). All that is antithetical to God and his grace is passing away; it is doomed. There is no future in worldliness. While the author says that the world and its desires pass away, he adds, **but the man who does the will of God lives** [lit. 'remains'] **forever**. There will come a time when the world which is passing away will have passed away, but those who do the will of God will not have passed away with it, for they will remain forever.

V. Warning against false teachers (2:18-25)

A. False teachers are antichrists of "last hour" (2:18-19)

¹⁸**Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, from which we know that it is [the] last**

hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they were of us they would have remained with us. But [this happened] that they might be exposed, for all [of them] are not of us.

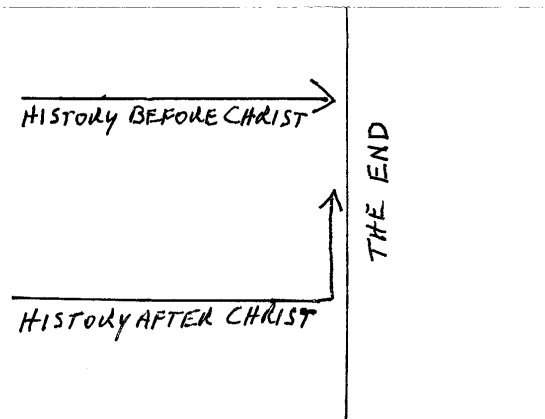
1. John's readers had heard that "antichrist" was coming prior to the consummation of the kingdom of God, prior to Jesus' return when the final, eternal state would be established. This was part of apostolic teaching. In 2 Thess. 2:1-12 Paul speaks of a future coming of "the man of lawlessness," the final opponent of God, whom Jesus will destroy at his second coming. With many commentators and theologians, I believe that is the same figure referred to in Revelation 13 as the beast rising out of the sea. He is a Satan-inspired ruler of a powerful, worldwide, and violently anti-Christian empire who draws people from God through deception.

2. John says that *even now*, before the coming of the antichrist they had heard about, that climactic opponent of God, many antichrists (plural) have come. John is referring to the false teachers. They are "antichrists" in the sense they share the spirit of the antichrist (4:3), that spirit that opposes God and his Christ. This is evident from their denial of Jesus as the Christ (2:22; 2 Jn. 7).

3. When John says it is the "last hour," he is not making a statement about the length of time until Christ's return. The last hour is the time of antichrist, and John says they have entered that time because the spirit of antichrist (4:3) already is present, "Exhibit A" being the false teachers. The "last hour" to John is a theological rather than a chronological category. It is not the moment before Jesus returns but the time when the spirit of the antichrist is at work, a time of unknown duration that will end when Jesus overthrows antichrist himself by the glory of his second coming. Stott writes (p. 113-114):

[John] was expressing a theological truth rather than making a chronological reference. In view of our Lord's clear words about the uncertainty of the day and hour (Mk. 13:32) and of 'times or dates' (Acts 1:7), it is *a priori* most unlikely that the apostles would have presumed to speculate precisely *when* the end would come. John could state on theological grounds that the last hour had struck, but this was not the same as affirming chronologically when the last hour would end.

4. The fact is that since Christ's coming this world has been on the verge of the end. This (poorly drawn) diagram may help you in conceptualize the idea. It's from J. H. Newman, a 19th-century pastor, and was cited in the commentaries by Bruce, Marshall, and Burge. As long as this reality, history as we know it, continues, it does so on the brink of Christ's return and the consummation of all things. However long God in his purposes extends the time since Christ, Christ's coming is ever at our door.



5. Here's how Douglas Moo puts the idea in *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 224:

With the death and resurrection of Jesus and pouring out of the Spirit, the "last days" have been inaugurated. This final age of salvation will find its climax in the return of Christ in glory. But – and here is the crucial point – the length of the age is unknown. Not even Jesus knew how long the "last days" would last (cf. Mark 13:32). What this means is that the return of Christ, as the next event in the salvation-historical timetable, is, from the time of the early church to our own day, "near," or "imminent." Every generation of Christians lives (or should live!) with the consciousness that the *parousia* could occur at any time and that one needs to make decisions and choose values based on that realization. So it was as true in James's day as it is in ours: we need to *be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near*.

6. John clearly identifies these antichrists as the false teachers by stating that "they went out from us." (In 2:26 he specifies he is writing about "those who would deceive you.") Lest this fact of origin be misunderstood as giving the false teachers some legitimacy, John makes clear that the false teachers were not part of the church. They were outside the boundaries of acceptable beliefs; they were heretics.

a. John uses their act of secession to prove this point. By leaving the true church, they demonstrated they were not part of it.

b. John is not concerned here with the doctrine of eternal security. He is not necessarily saying that these false teachers never were part of the church (see Smalley, 103). He just wants his readers to understand that the false teachers are now heretics; they are not a subgroup within the church. He does not want the fact "they went out from us" to mislead anyone into thinking they were an acceptable offshoot. Note v. 19 says their going out made it plain that none of them belongs to (present tense; Gk. "are of") us. See, Heb. 6:4-8, 10:26-31.

B. Readers competent to judge the false teachers (2:20-23)

²⁰But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know [the truth].

²¹I do not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you know it and [know] that every lie is not of the truth. ²²Who is the liar except the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³Everyone who denies the Son also does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

1. John is confident that they have an adequate standard from which to judge heretics. This confidence is based on several facts:

a. ²⁰*But you have an anointing from the Holy One* – I take this to mean they had received the true gospel from Jesus Christ, the original and authentic message to which John referred in the prologue, and in conjunction therewith, had received the Holy Spirit, through whom they became increasingly aware of what was and was not compatible with the gospel. I see it as a single reference to the "word-Spirit package."

(1) Regarding the "word aspect" of the reference, the anointing abides in them (2:27), and the word of God abides in them (1:10, 2:14, 2:24; Jn. 15:7; 2 Jn. 2). Also, the anointing teaches them (2:27), which is obviously true of the word of God. And as Marshall notes (p. 154-155), the word of God provides an objective basis from which to dispute the false teachers' claims of spiritual illumination. "If it is simply a matter of comparing claims to spiritual illumination, one person's claim may be as good as another's. But if John rests his case on his reader's possession of the objective testimony of the Word of God, handed down in the church, then clearly his case rests on a solid foundation."

(2) Regarding the "Spirit aspect" of the reference, the Spirit abides in the disciples (Jn. 14:17). Also, there is precedent for linking "anointing" with reception of the Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1; Acts 10:38; see also 2 Cor. 1:21-22).

(3) That the two aspects are combined gains plausibility from the fact the distinction between the Spirit and the word is not always sharp. In Jn. 6:63 Jesus says, "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Compare Jn. 3:6, "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."

(4) As Smalley (echoing others) states (p. 107): "[I]t may well be that (again ambivalently) John is deliberately using the idea of *chrisma* [anointing] to signify *both* the Spirit and the word of God. The faithful, that is to say, are those who have (inwardly) received the gospel of truth, and made it their own *through* the activity of the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess 1:5-6); thereby they possess the antidote to heresy."

b. *and you all know [the truth].* ²¹*I do not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you know it* – This is the flip side of their anointing, their having accepted and internalized the true gospel.

c. *and [know] that every lie is not of the truth* – They are aware that lies are not part of the truth; they are opposed to one another. It's like light and darkness. Therefore, they will not be deceived into thinking that the false teachers, who lie about Jesus, are part of the true church.

2. The doctrine of the false teachers is contrary to what his readers know is true.

a. ²²*Who is the liar except the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?* The false teachers denied that Jesus is the Christ. This means that they denied that the eternal Christ, the Son of God, actually became the historical person Jesus of Nazareth.

b. *This one is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.* ²³*Everyone who denies the Son also does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father* also – Their denial of the true identity of Jesus was also a denial of God the Father because it was the Father who sent the Son (4:10) and it is the Father who bears testimony to the Son (5:9-10) (Kruse, 106). As a consequence of their denial of Jesus' true identity, their false Christology, they have no relationship with the Father. They are without salvation.

c. John's readers, on the other hand, those who confess the truth about Jesus, are in fellowship with the Father.

C. Exhortation to hold to faith (vv. 24-25) – ²⁴*Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.* ²⁵*And this is the promise which he made to us – eternal life.*

1. If they resist the false teachers and hold to the original message, the message which was first brought to them, they will remain in the Son and in the Father.

2. The result of such faithfulness will be the eternal life which Jesus has promised.

VI. Restatement (characterizes, assures, exhorts) (2:26-27)

²⁶I write these things to you concerning the ones who would deceive you. ²⁷As for you, the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as the same anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it taught you, abide in him.

A. John now (v. 26) labels the false teachers as "ones who would deceive you." He thus makes clear that the false teachers were pressing their doctrine, posing a threat to the faithful.

B. He assures his readers (v. 27a) that they had received the true word of God and, since they were still holding to it, they were not in need of correction from anyone, i.e., from the false teachers. They were not spiritually inferior to these "advanced" thinkers. And he urges them (v. 27b) to adhere to that true, original message delivered to them, just as that message teaches them to do.

VII. *The ethical component of abiding in Christ (2:28 - 3:24)*

A. Abiding involves right living (2:28 - 3:10)

1. Right living and Christ's second coming (2:28 - 3:3)

²⁸And now, little children, remain in him so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming. ²⁹If you know that he is righteous, you know that also everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. ³ See what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and we are. On account of this the world does not know us, because it did not know him. ²Beloved, we now are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as that one is pure.

a. ²⁸*And now, little children, remain in him so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming* – John amplifies on the significance of "remaining," a word he used in 2:27. It is the difference between confidence and shame at Christ's second coming. If they will remain in Christ, following the teaching they heard from the beginning, then when Christ appears to judge, they may be confident and unashamed before him.

b. ²⁹*If you know that he is righteous, you know that also everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him*

(1) Since God is righteous, those who share that characteristic are the ones who have been born of him; they are his sons and daughters. The obvious implication is that the false teachers are not. Burge explains (p. 145):

When we exhibit God's righteous character, we show that we are born of him, just as a child might show the features of his or her parents. Knowing God and his righteous character fully leads to its imitation. But it does not work the other way around. Doing righteousness is not a precondition for being born of him, nor is it the means to divine birth. As Stott says, "A person's righteousness is thus the evidence of his new birth, not the cause or condition of it."

(2) That "he" refers to God the Father is clear from the fact that in the nine other uses in 1 John of the verb "to give birth to" (*gennaō*) God the Father is the only one by whom those concerned are brought to birth.

(3) John is writing to and about Christians, baptized believers, and his "everyone" must be understood in that context. He's certainly not saying that people who "practice righteousness" in the imperfect sense he means (or else no one qualifies) but who deny the truth about Christ or have not been baptized have been born of God.

c. ^{1a}*See what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and we are* – John directly affirms that he and his readers are God's children and marvels at God's love in making them so. God himself has brought us into his family!

d. ^{1b}*On account of this the world does not know us, because it did not know him* – He explains the lack of recognition his readers have received by the false teachers on the basis that the world did not know Jesus. (The "him" probably refers to Jesus "because in 1 John it is always Jesus Christ come in the flesh whose true identity is in question [2:22-23; 4:2-3; 5:1, 5, 10], never that of the Father." Kruse, 115.) John wrote in Jn. 1:10 that Jesus "was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him." Since the false teachers are of the world (4:5), it should not be surprising that they do not recognize Jesus' disciples.

e. ²*Beloved, we now are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.*

(1) The full story of our final state or condition as children of God has not yet been made known. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:9 (NIV), "However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived-- these things God has prepared for those who love him.'" But we do know that when Jesus returns we "will be like him." Note that this was something John's readers knew, something that was part of general Christian knowledge.

(2) At Christ's second coming, we will be like him in that our bodies will be changed to be like his glorious and immortal body (1 Cor. 15:50-55; Phil. 3:20-21; see also, Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17) and the sanctification that began at our conversion, our transformation into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18), will be brought to completion. We then will be fully "conformed

to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). We will be physically and spiritually prepared for eternity in the immediate presence of God Almighty.

(3) This transformation will in some sense be effected by our seeing Jesus "as he is," seeing him in his returning glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Thomas Johnson writes (NIBC, 68-69), "There will be a transforming vision at the return of Jesus in which believers will be purified of all that still separates them from complete likeness to Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18)."

f. ³*And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as that one is pure* – All who have this hope in Christ of ultimate transformation into his likeness strive to live righteously (to purify themselves morally) in the present, the implication being that the false teachers have no such hope.

2. Right living and Christ's first coming (3:4-10)

⁴Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; indeed, sin is lawlessness. ⁵And you know that that one was manifested so that he might take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶Everyone who abides in him does not sin [habitually]; everyone who sins [habitually] has not seen him nor has he known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as that one is righteous. ⁸The one who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this [reason] the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. ⁹Everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin because God's seed abides in him, and he is not able to sin [habitually] because he has been born of God. ¹⁰By this it is evident [who are] the children of God and the children of the devil: everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, including the one who does not love his brother.

a. ⁴*Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; indeed, sin is lawlessness.*

(1) Sin is not something to be taken lightly; it is "lawlessness." And it is "lawlessness" for everyone who commits it; there are no exceptions for the spiritual elite.

(2) John's emphasis in using "lawlessness" is on opposition to God or rebellion against him (implicit in lawbreaking), rather than simply on lawbreaking. You see this flavor of the word in Paul's reference to the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thess. 2:3, the one who stands in direct opposition to Christ at his second coming. It's like saying, in a context of military conflict where some are downplaying the seriousness of disobeying war laws (e.g., blackouts, rationing), "Everyone who disobeys commits treason; in fact, disobedience is treason."

(3) He stresses the seriousness of sin for all who commit it to counter the claim of the false teachers that sin is of little if any consequence to the enlightened and to show clearly the necessity that it be renounced by the children of God.

b. ⁵*And you know that that one was manifested so that he might take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*

(1) They know that Jesus came to take away sins by atoning for them and thus making forgiveness available. That is the heart of the gospel they had received in the beginning.

(2) But as Marshall notes (p. 177), John is not simply assuring them that Christ has provided forgiveness of sins; he is indicating Jesus' opposition to sin by the fact he took sins away. Jesus' opposition to sin is further indicated by his own lack of sin – "in him there is no sin." As John has already said, Jesus is the "righteous one" (2:1) and "is pure" (3:3). Jesus is totally opposed to sin; he is the unique Son of God and God is light, the one in whom there is no darkness at all (1:5-6).

c. ⁶*Everyone who abides in him does not sin [habitually]; everyone who sins [habitually] has not seen him nor has he known him.*

(1) Since sin and Christ are at complete odds with each other, no one who abides in Christ can be at peace with sin. Taken at face value, John's words could mean that Christians do not sin at all, but we know that cannot be his meaning. 1 John 1:8, 10 leave no doubt that John thought all Christians sin. In numerous other verses he urges his readers not to sin but to practice righteousness (2:1, 15, 29; 3:12, 18; 5:21) thus demonstrating he knew it was possible for Christians to sin.

(2) That's why I have added "habitually" in brackets. The word "habitually" is not in the text, but with many others I'm convinced that is how the present tense verb "sin" should be understood in this context. The present tense can express the continuous nature of an action. The NIV and ESV adopt that sense here by translating it "keeps on sinning."

(3) The thought parallels 1:5-6 which employ the verb "walking." This gives the flavor of a pattern of life or course of conduct, as opposed to sporadic and uncharacteristic occurrences. John is emphasizing that ongoing, habitual sin has no place in the believer's life. The idea of coexisting with sin fits the setting of this letter in that the false teachers urged that sin was of little or no consequence.

(4) Commenting on 3:4-9, Stott writes (p. 139-140):

[T]he sin a Christian 'does not' and 'cannot' do is habitual and persistent sin. He may sin sometimes, even with the consent of the mind and the will, but he is

overwhelmed by grief and repentance afterwards (Ps. 51). For the whole direction of his life is towards God and holiness. His mind is set on the Spirit (Rom. 8:6) and on the things above (Col. 3:2), not on earthly things (Phil. 3:19). His eyes are ever focused on the Lord (Ps. 25:15), whom he sets always before him ((Ps. 16:8). His eyes are fixed on all God's commands (Ps. 119:6, RSV); his heart is steadfast also (Ps. 57:7). 'Although the believer sometimes sins, yet not sin, but opposition to sin, is the ruling principle of his life' (Plummer). His whole life is one of 'truceless antagonism to sin' (Law). The 'seed' within the believer's spirit 'fills it with an irreconcilable hate against every sin, and urges it to an unceasing conflict against all unrighteousness' (Alford). It is not that Christians are 'wholly free from all vice' but that they 'heartily strive to form their lives in obedience to God' (Calvin). 'Sin does not reign in them', for the Spirit 'does not let it flourish' (Calvin).

d. ⁷*Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as that one is righteous.*

(1) John urges his children not to be deceived by the false teachers' claim that one can be righteous without bothering to live righteously. As he said earlier, fellowship with God cannot be divorced from walking in the light (1:5-7), knowing God cannot be divorced from keeping his commandments (2:4-6), and being in the light cannot be divorced from loving the faithful (2:9-11).

(2) The truth of the matter is that it is the believer who lives righteously, albeit imperfectly, who is the true believer and thus who by grace is righteous as Jesus is righteous, that is, perfectly. Alternatively, it may be that the false teachers called themselves "righteous" in a sense different from living righteously (e.g., belonging to the divine sphere) and John here says that it is those who practice righteousness who are righteous, which practical righteousness emulates (albeit imperfectly) that of Christ.

e. ⁸*The one who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this [reason] the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

(1) John reinforces his exhortation that they not be deceived by those pushing the lie that one can be righteous while embracing sin. He says that the one who accepts sin, who is involved in it in an ongoing way (present tense), is of the devil in the sense the devil has been sinning from the start of human history. That is his *modus operandi*. One who lives sinfully shows the family likeness. He may claim to be of God but the truth is that he is of the devil. He can be recognized by his fruits (Mat. 7:20).

(2) The very reason Jesus came was to destroy the works of the devil; they are implacable foes. So the one who cooperates with the devil by accepting his enticement to turn from doing God's will and by encouraging others to do so by yawning at the practice of sin cannot be on the side of Christ.

f. ⁹*Everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin because his seed abides in him, and he is not able to sin [habitually] because he has been born of God.*

(1) No Christian peacefully coexists with sin because, having been born of God, God's "seed" remains in him. This "seed" is the divine agency for begetting and maintaining God's children.

(2) As for the specific identification of this divine agency, the choice between God's word and the Holy Spirit is once again (see 2:27 – anointing) difficult to make. As noted previously, we probably make too much of a distinction between the two.

(a) Smalley states (p. 173-174):

In our view, the most satisfactory exegesis of this passage is one which brings together the two concepts of "word" and "Spirit," and explains the expression *sperma autou* ["his seed"] against a Jewish, as well as Christian background. In the OT the ability to renounce sin evidently derives from the word (or law) of God as it indwells the hearts of the faithful (note Ps 119:11, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"; cf. also Ps 37:31; and see further Sir 24:22-23; 1 QS 4:20-23). According to the prophets, the coming messianic age was to be characterized especially by the "cleansing" of believers, in whom abide the law (word) and Spirit of God (Jer 31:33-34; Ezek 36:25-27).

Against such a background, with which John would have been familiar, we may now understand *sperma* ["seed"] to mean the word of God which is received in faith by the Christian, and which (through the inward activity of the Spirit) leads to rebirth, and the experience of increasing holiness by living in Jesus. . . . Such an interpretation harmonizes with John's allusion to the *chrisma* ("anointing") which indwells the believer (2:20, 27), since in our view this term also refers to the word of God received into the hearts of the faithful and activated fruitfully by the Spirit.

(b) Similarly, Marshall states (p. 186-187), "The Spirit is operative in the preaching of the Word which produces the new birth in the hearts of those who hear it and respond in faith (1 Thess. 1:5ff). As a result of the continuing presence of the Word in the believer's heart through the Spirit he cannot sin."

g. ¹⁰*By this it is evident [who are] the children of God and the children of the devil: everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, including the one who does not love his brother.*

(1) Given that those born of God do not live in sin, do not sin as a matter of course or habit, a criterion for recognizing the children of God and the children of the devil is whether they practice righteousness. They are recognized by their fruits (Mat. 7:20).

(2) Of course, this statement must be understood in the context of the letter. The issue John is addressing is whether professing Christians, baptized believers who now deny the need to practice righteousness (i.e., the false teachers and their followers), are indeed children of God. So his words cannot be taken to mean that a diligent pursuit of righteousness by one who is not a baptized believer marks one as a child of God.

(3) In the last clause, John specifies that the practice of righteousness that marks one as a child of God includes loving other Christians. (I take *kai* in the sense "including"; see, e.g., Mat. 8:33; Lk. 23:49.) The mention of this key failure of the false teachers and their followers sets the stage for the comments that follow.

B. Abiding involves loving one another (3:11-24)

1. Importance of loving one another (3:11-15)

¹¹For this is the message which we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹²not like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And [for] what reason did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil but the ones of his brother [were] righteous. ¹³Do not be amazed, brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. The one who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that every murderer does not have eternal life abiding in him.

a. ¹¹*For this is the message which we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another* – The command to love one another was part of their foundational ethical instruction, something that was passed on to them when they first heard the gospel.

b. ¹²*not like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And [for] what reason did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil but the ones of his brother [were] righteous* – This implies that not loving one's brother would make one like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother (this is made explicit in 3:15). Cain's sin was prompted by spiritual jealousy; his own deeds were evil (giving an unacceptable offering) but Abel's were righteous (giving an acceptable offering) (see Gen. 4:1-7).

c. ¹³*Do not be amazed, brothers, if the world hates you* – In light of that precedent, they should not be surprised that the world, which includes the false teachers (4:5), hates (which is murderous in principle – Mat. 5:21-22) them. After all, their lives are righteous but the lives of those in the world are evil.

d. ¹⁴*We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. The one who does not love abides in death* – The command to love is so fundamental that it can serve as a test for salvation (i.e., as a test for the presence of saving faith). The presence of love attests to the genuineness of his and his reader's faith, and hence attests to their passage from death to life. The absence of love in the lives of the false teachers proves that they abide in death.

e. ¹⁵*Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that every murderer does not have eternal life abiding in him* – All who hate (do not love) a brother or sister are murderers, and no one who lives as a murderer has eternal life. On the contrary, they abide in death, as he just stated.

2. Love involves action (3:16-18)

¹⁶In this we have known love, that that one laid down his life on our behalf; and we ought to lay down the lives [of us] on behalf of the brothers. ¹⁷But whoever has the goods of the world and sees his brother having need and closes his innards to him, how [does] the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or tongue but in action and truth.

a. ¹⁶*In this we have known love, that that one laid down his life on our behalf; and we ought to lay down the lives [of us] on behalf of the brothers* – Jesus showed the way of love, what it means to love, by giving up his own life to benefit others (see Jn. 15:13). Love means the readiness to sacrifice, even lay down our lives, for the benefit of other people. This is how we are to love one another!

b. ¹⁷*But whoever has the goods of the world and sees his brother having need and closes his innards to him, how [does] the love of God abide in him?*

(1) Marshall comments (p. 194-195):

Readiness to lay down one's life is a high ideal, to which we may enthusiastically consent: it is a fairly remote possibility, and, if it did arise, we would probably make the supreme effort that would be required. Meanwhile, however, we are content to live our present comfortable life until that supreme sacrifice is demanded. No, says John, the moment is here now. If you have the means of livelihood in the world – and everybody who can afford to buy this book comes into this category – *and* you see a brother in want, *and* you show no pity to him, then the love of God cannot possibly be in you. . . . Christian love is love which gives to those in need, and so long as we have, while our brothers have little or nothing, and we do nothing to help them, we are lacking in the love which is the essential evidence that we are truly children of God.

(2) Listen to what Aristides, a Christian in Athens, wrote to Emperor Hadrian around A.D. 125 (*Early Christians Speak*, 207):

They [Christians] love one another. They do not overlook the widow, and they save the orphan. He who has ministers ungrudgingly to him who does not have. When they see strangers, they take him under their own roof and rejoice over him as a true brother, for they do not call themselves brothers according to the flesh but according to the soul. And whenever they see one of their poor has died, each one of them according to his ability contributes ungrudgingly and they bury him. And if they hear that some are condemned or imprisoned on account of the name of their Lord, they contribute for those condemned and send to them what they need, and if it is possible, they redeem them. And if there is any that is a slave or a poor man, they fast two or three days and what they were going to set before themselves they send to them, considering themselves to give good cheer even as they were called to good cheer.

c. ¹⁸*Little children, let us not love in word or tongue but in action and truth –* We must render true love, love that involves deeds not merely talk. As James wrote in Jas. 2:15-16: "If a brother or sister is naked and lacking daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' but you do not give to them what is necessary for the body, what good is it?"

3. Reassurance from loving one another (3:19-24)

¹⁹**By this we will know that we are of the truth and will reassure our heart before him** ²⁰**whenever our heart condemns us, for God is greater than our heart and knows everything.** ²¹**Beloved, if our* heart does not condemn [us] we have confidence before God,** ²²**and we receive from him whatever we ask because we keep his commandments and practice the things [that are] pleasing before him.** ²³**And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he gave commandment to us.** ²⁴**The one who keeps his commandments abides in him and he in him. And in this we know that he abides in us, from the Spirit whom he gave to us.**

a. ¹⁹*By this we will know that we are of the truth and will reassure our heart before him* ²⁰*whenever our heart condemns us, for God is greater than our heart and knows everything.*

(1) "By this" refers to the example of faithful living John has just mentioned, to loving the brothers and sisters in deeds and not merely words. By living that way, we will know that we are of the truth. This parallels what he said in 2:3 (*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments*).

(2) And that knowledge that we are of the truth will reassure or pacify our hearts before God whenever our hearts condemn us (for sins we commit). The reason that knowledge will pacify our hearts whenever they condemn us is that the God, to whom we know we belong because we are of the truth, is greater than our condemning heart (in the sense he is more merciful) and knows everything (including the fact we belong to him - see 2 Tim. 2:19). In other words, the fruit of our faith testifies that we are God's children – that is the implication of being "of the truth" – and to be God's child is to have peace despite our sin because of the nature of God, because of his mercy and omniscience.

b. ²¹*Beloved, if our* heart does not condemn [us] we have confidence before God* – This reassurance or pacification of our condemning heart generates confidence before God, the confidence of a son before a father, which expresses itself in making requests of him.

c. ²²*and we receive from him whatever we ask because we keep his commandments and practice the things [that are] pleasing before him*

(1) Faithfulness or covenant loyalty is a requirement to being heard by God. As the Psalmist wrote, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). That is why James said "The prayer of a *righteous* man is powerful and effective" (Jas. 5:16b; see also, Ps. 34:15; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 59:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:12; 1 Jn. 3:21-22). We will not be living sinlessly, but we must be living righteously, meaning genuinely and not hypocritically. This is not the only condition of effective prayer, but it is the one John wants to stress at this juncture (because of the false teachers' de-emphasis on obedience).

(2) To be effective, prayer also must be: according to God's will (1 Jn. 5:14; Jn. 15:7), which dovetails with the requirement that it be in Christ's name (Jn. 16:23-24); with proper motives, meaning out of a sincere heart rather than "to be seen by men" (e.g., Mat. 6:5-6); from a desire to glorify God rather than to indulge our selfishness (Jas. 4:3); by one who forgives others (Mk. 11:25; see also, Mat. 6:12-15); and by one who believes God's promises (Mt. 21:22; Mk. 11:24). See Stott, 153.

d. ²³*And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he gave commandment to us.*

(1) The commandment (singular) of God has two parts: to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and to love one another. These form a unity, making explicit what John has assumed all along about the indispensability of faith.

(2) As David Rensberger remarks (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, 106), by "believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ" John "means maintaining the full incarnational Christology that the opponents have called into question."

(3) The love component of this singular commandment encompasses a multitude of duties. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). So the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, that set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included in that law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). It is this ongoing moral law centered in love that is the "law of Christ." (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

e. ²⁴*The one who keeps his commandments abides in him and he in him. And in this we know that he abides in us, from the Spirit whom he gave to us*

(1) All who keep God's commandments (plural), which are subsets of or are encompassed by "the commandment" of faith and loving one another, abide in him and he abides in them. The implication is that those who do not keep God's commandments do not abide in him nor does he abide in them.

(a) Stott writes (p. 154) that abiding in God "is not a mystical experience which anyone may claim; its indispensable accompaniments are the confession of Jesus as the Son of God come in the flesh, and a consistent life of holiness and love."

(b) Marshall states (p. 202):

It is noteworthy that in 2:6 we were told that the person who lives in him ought to walk as Jesus did. Now we are told that the person who obeys his commands lives in him. Later we shall read that if we love one another, God lives in us (4:12). It would seem to follow that obeying God's commands is not so much the condition of living in him, as rather the expression of our spiritual life; yet this expression may fail to appear, with the result that our spiritual life is in jeopardy, and therefore we can be commanded to obey God's commands. Spiritual life and obedience are thus two sides of the one coin.

(2) The consequences of abiding have been spelled out elsewhere, e.g., 2:24-25 (eternal life), 28 (confidence at second coming).

(3) John says in v. 24b that he and his readers know that God abides in them from (or by) the Spirit God gave to them, but he does not explain how the Spirit they received produces that knowledge. I think he means that they know God dwells in them because his Spirit dwells in them and they know his Spirit dwells in them because, unlike the false teachers, they confess the truth about Jesus (4:2-3, 6) and exhibit Christlike behavior (2:28, 3:9). In other words, the Spirit confirms his presence in certain ways, and by his confirmed presence they know God abides in them. Smalley writes (p. 212):

John's criterion of spiritual confidence – "we can be sure that he lives in us by (*ek*) the Spirit he has given us" – may seem too "inward" and subjective after the practical teaching of vv 16-23. However, the Spirit, according to John, manifests himself objectively in the life and conduct of the believer, inspiring true confession of Jesus (4:1-3) and enabling his followers to act righteously (cf. 2:29) and lovingly (cf. 4:12-13; . . .). Obedience is both the condition and expression of dwelling in God (v 24a); and the creative gift of the Spirit provides us with factual evidence of that abiding (cf. Stott, 151).

VIII. A threat to faith: the need to test the spirits (4:1-6)

A. Test the spirits (4:1)

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits [to see] if they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1. John's opponents, the secessionists, also claimed to have the Spirit of God and to speak in his name. Indeed, they saw themselves as more spiritual or enlightened than the faithful Christians. They were vessel or oracles of divine truth.

2. John commands his readers not to be gullible, not to believe that everyone who claims to be representing God, to be speaking on his behalf, actually is doing so. On the contrary, he says that many false prophets have gone out into the world. John may be speaking generally, but if so, I think there at least is a secondary allusion to the false teachers who had gone out "into the world," into the enemy camp, from within the faithful church.

(a) John speaks of their not believing and testing "spirits" rather than not believing and testing the false prophets because demonic powers ultimately are behind the false prophets. What they are selling has its origin in evil spirit(s), those opposed to God. As Paul says in 1 Tim. 4:1, *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will abandon the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*. And he says famously in Eph. 6:12 that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil. We are not told the mechanics of how spirits use people as their spokesmen, but they somehow are able to inject their ideas into the human stream.

(b) There are, of course, several warnings in the N. T. about false prophets operating in and around the Christian community. In Mat. 7:15 Jesus describes false prophets as wolves in sheep's clothing. They appear innocent and to be part of the group, but the reality is that they are ferocious wolves seeking the death of the sheep. Peter tells his readers in 2 Pet. 2:1 that

there will be false teachers among them who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them.

(c) There is a spiritual war going on, and a large weapon in the enemy's arsenal is false doctrine. That is why Paul told Titus in Tit. 1:9 that an elder "must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (ESV).

(d) Of course, not all erroneous teaching is heresy that threatens one's spiritual life. That doesn't mean that some doctrinal errors are trivial or insignificant; no aspect of God's revealed truth or will is insignificant. It means that some things are more central or fundamental than other things. As we grope together for the whole counsel of God, errors about central or fundamental things – true heresies – must be dealt with decisively.

3. Rather than gullibly believing the false teachers who claim to speak from God, John commands his readers to test their representations. This is similar to Paul's command in 1 Thess. 5:19-21. In the following verses, John gives them a testing criterion for their situation.

B. Criterion of testing (4:2-3)

²In this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not of God. Indeed, this is the [spirit] of the antichrist, which you have heard that it is coming and now already is in the world.

1. The acid test relevant to their situation is whether the teacher or prophet confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. The one who does not confess the true incarnation of the eternal Christ (confessing "Jesus" is here a shorthand for confessing "Jesus Christ having come in the flesh"), i.e., the false teachers, is speaking by the spirit of the antichrist, all claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

2. John refers to "every *spirit*" that confesses or does not confess because in making or refusing to make that confession we are acting under the influence of the divine Spirit or the spirit of antichrist (the diabolical spirit). Kruse writes (p. 148):

In 2:18ff. the secessionists were identified as antichrists who had already gone out into the world. Here in 4:3 the secessionists are said to be activated by 'the spirit of the antichrist', of whose coming the readers had already heard (as part of common early Christian teaching to which the author has already referred in 2:18). The spirit of antichrist, the author says, is 'even now in the world', and active in people like the secessionists who are now part of 'the world', that is, those people who are motivated by those desires which are not of God (cf. 2:15-17). The aim of the antichrist is to

deceive people by denying the truth about Jesus Christ, and in particular, within the context of 1 John, by denying the true humanity of Christ (that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh). As Strecker notes, evil reveals itself in false teaching.

3. Note that in 1 Cor. 12:1-3 Paul dichotomizes the world into opponents (Jesus be cursed) and disciples (Jesus is Lord) to make the point that the presence of the Spirit in one's life is a function of one's relationship with Christ. Those who denounce Christ do not speak by (i.e., do not have) the Spirit; those who confess Jesus' lordship speak by (i.e., do have) the Spirit.

4. Again, this test cannot be divorced from its context. John is speaking into a specific situation and assumes certain things.

C. Overcame the false teachers (4:4)

⁴You are of God, little children, and have overcome them because the one in you is greater than the one in the world.

1. John reassures his readers, as those who confess Jesus as having come in the flesh, that they are of God. He reminds them that they have overcome or conquered the false teachers, which is probably a reference to the fact they had resisted the temptation to swallow the false doctrine.

2. They were able to gain this victory because the one in them (God, 2:5-6, 3:24, 4:12, 15) is more powerful than the one in the world (Satan, the inspiring force of the antichrists). Though they had a role to play in the victory (e.g., John warns them not to be taken in by the false teachers in 2:24 and 2 Jn. 7-11), it ultimately was won by the power of God in their lives. To him be the glory!

D. False teachers are of the world (4:5)

⁵They are of the world. Therefore, they speak of the world and the world listens to them.

1. The false teachers have cast their lot with the world; they belong to the enemy camp. As a result, they speak from that camp's perspective (rather than from God's) and have a following within that camp.

2. I think John is discounting the significance of the fact the false teachers had achieved a following by pointing out that gaining adherents is not necessarily proof that one's message is approved by God; it may only be a sign that the message is palatable to the world.

E. We are of God (4:6)

⁶We are of God. The one who knows God listens to us; [the one] who is not of God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

1. In contrast to the false teachers, John and his readers are of God. Those in fellowship with God continue to heed the true teaching about Christ. They remain with John's community, the faithful church.

2. Those who join up with the heretics, who heed the heretics' words rather than John's, reveal that they are not, if they ever were, animated by or under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit (the spirit of truth). Rather, they are animated by the evil spirit (the spirit of falsehood). As he indicated in 2:19, the act of leaving the faithful church demonstrates that one is not at that time (if one ever was) part of it.

3. That doesn't mean the faithful are immune to all harmful effects of the false teaching. Otherwise, John would have no need to warn them not to be deceived etc. It means that one who goes over to the secessionists is not at that time a true believer. Whether he previously had been a true believer who was pulled from the faith by the corrupting effect of the heresy and/or other things is not addressed.

IX. Further discussion on loving one another (4:7-12)

A. Importance of loving one another (4:7-8)

⁷Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1. John urges them to love one another on the basis that love is of (or from) God as they are of (or from) God (v. 6). It is natural and fitting that those born of God reflect the qualities he radiates as a child reflects the qualities of his or her father.

2. Indeed, that nexus is so powerful that the presence or absence of love provides a basis for distinguishing the children of God from those who do not know God. Those who love have been born of God and know God; those who do not love have not known God (see, 3:11-20).

3. Again, John's seemingly absolute statement ("*everyone* who loves") cannot be ripped from its context to mean that the loving non-Christian is in fellowship with God. The necessity of faith in Christ is made clear elsewhere in the letter. John is contrasting two groups of

purported believers: his readers whose claim of faith is accompanied by love for the faithful and the secessionists whose claim of faith is not accompanied by that love.

4. And remember that love includes the set of duties to one's fellow man that the one who claims a relationship with God must take seriously.

B. Definition of love (4:9-10)

⁹In this the love of God was manifested among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1. God manifested or revealed to us *the nature of his love* by sending his only Son into the world in order that we might live through him. This is where love finds its true definition, not in our love for God, but in his love for us revealed in the sending of his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Love involves action; it sacrifices to bless its object.

2. That John's focus is on the revelation of the *nature* of God's love rather than simply the fact of God's love is supported by parallel with 3:11-18 (esp. 3:16), by the use of "manifested" in 4:9, and by "this way" in 4:11.

3. The older translations rendered the Greek word *monogenēs* in 4:9 as "only begotten," but it is correctly translated in the newer versions as "one and only" or "only." As Gary Burge notes (p. 187, n. 7), "The suggestion 'only begotten' understands the latter half of the word as derived from the Greek verb *gennaō* ('to give birth'). This is incorrect. Rather, the word would derive from *genos*, meaning 'type' or 'kind.'" See BDAG, 658.

C. Exhortation to love one another (4:11-12)

¹¹Beloved, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and the love of him is perfected in us.

1. Since God loved us in this way, we also (in the same way) must love the brothers and sisters. If we are of God, how can we treat them differently than God has treated them?

2. Though God is invisible, believers who love one another reveal that God is living in them. That love is fruit of his abiding. Therefore, the fact this love was a reality in their lives (2:8) should reassure them that they really do know God, despite what the secessionists may claim.

3. John says that if they love one another, God abides in them and "the love of him" is perfected or completed in them. As in 2:5, this could mean God's love for us or our love for God.

a. In this instance, I (slightly) favor a subjective sense of the genitive ("of him") – *his* love for us is perfected. God's love for us reaches its intended effect when it reverberates horizontally in the body of Christ. I think Georg Strecker is on the right track (p. 157):

The love of the brothers and sisters that is now and is to be practiced in the future by the Christian community is the love demanded by God, the love that is in accordance with God's nature. The author wishes to say that in the love of the sisters and brothers achieved by human beings, God's *agapē* reaches its goal. It is not because human love is superior to divine love . . . but because the love of God for human beings intends, by its very nature, to actualize itself in the Christian community in the form of mutual love of human beings for one another.

b. If it means our love for God, he is saying essentially what he said in 2:5. An obedient love for God is a mature or complete love for him, and a key part of that obedience is loving one another.

X. Reassurance from having the Spirit, confessing the truth, and loving (4:13-18)

A. The manifested Spirit as assurance of reciprocal indwelling (4:13)

¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

1. If "by this" has a backward reference, then he is saying that the reason their loving one another lets them know they abide in God and he in them is because it confirms that God has given them (a share in) his Spirit (who fills the whole church). This love is fruit of his Spirit.

2. If "by this" has a forward reference, then he is saying that they know they abide in God and he in them because God has given them his Spirit. But even in that case, I think their knowledge of the Spirit's presence is based at least in part on the Spirit's fruit in their lives (see 3:24, 4:2, 4:12, 4:15, 4:16b). The false teachers' claim to have the Spirit is shown to be false by their lack of love for the brothers and sisters and their rejection of the truth about Christ.

B. Reassurance from correct confession (4:14-16a)

¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son [as] Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him

and he in God. ¹⁶And we have known and have believed the love which God has in us.

1. John and others were eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and they testify about that coming and its purpose – that God the Father sent the Son as the Savior of the world. In these few words, we see the Father's love in sending the Son, which love we are to reflect; we see that Jesus was sent from heaven, is the Son of God incarnate; and we see that he came to save us from our sin, which means we must forsake them.

2. In light of this apostolic testimony, John in v. 15 brings assurance to his readers by stating: Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. One wonders why John speaks here of confessing that Jesus is the Son of God rather than repeating what he just said about God sending his Son to be the savior of the world. I think Kruse is probably correct in stating (p. 165):

It is puzzling why the author does not stay with the content of the testimony as he stated it in the previous verse. . . . The reason probably is that the full orthodox confession to be maintained in face of the secessionist denials was the Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh as Savior of the world and gave himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. However, the author did not need to state this fully every time he alluded to the secessionists' teaching. He could call his readers' attention to all that the secessionists denied, and to all that his readers should affirm, by referring to but one aspect of it, as he does in verses 14 and 15. What the author affirms in verse 15 is that those who do acknowledge Jesus in this way are those in whom God lives and who live in God.

3. The apostles and all who accept their testimony, meaning the church at large and John's readers specifically, have known and believe the love that God has for them.

a. That is inherent in accepting the gospel, which is the ultimate revelation of God's love for us.

b. Given the preposition John uses in v. 16 (*en*), which normally means "in" rather than "for," there may be a subtlety to John's statement. Smalley writes (p. 255): "John may be referring not only to God's love shown to us in the life and death of Jesus, but also to that experience of God's love in the life of the Church and the lives of believers which is created by the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5)."

C. Reassurance from loving one another (4:16b-18)

God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷In this love has been perfected among us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment because just as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has [to do with] punishment, and the one who fears has not been perfected in love.

1. Because God is loving by nature, as shown preeminently in his saving action on behalf of mankind, John assures his readers that the one who abides in love abides in God and God in him. Kruse states (p. 166), "They, unlike the secessionists, do love each other, and the author wants them to recognize that this is evidence that God does live in them and they in God, despite the assertions of the secessionists to the contrary."

2. He says that "in this," meaning in loving one another, God's love has been perfected in the sense of 4:12, in the sense that God's love for us reaches completion or its intended effect when it is expressed horizontally in the body of Christ. The result is that believers who are loving one another may have confidence on the day of judgment because already in this world they are the same as Christ is in the sense that they too are in mutual union and indwelling with God. Brown states, "The author is repeating the reason he gave for confidence when he first spoke about the parousia: 'We are God's children right now' (3:2)." As such, they need have no fear as they face the day of judgment.

3. Within the stream of God's perfect or complete love, love that flows from God to mankind and from mankind back to God and to each other, all fear of judgment has been cast out. The reason is that those who abide in this love are in mutual union and indwelling with God and thus can be confident that there is no condemnation for them (4:17). The one who fears judgment has not been perfected in love in that he has not received this intended blessing of God's love. (Note that "perfected" here refers to the person rather than to the love.) When God's love has had its intended effect on us, when it has "perfected" us in that sense, we eagerly look forward to the Lord's return knowing that the judgment will be our entrance into the final state of glory.

XI. Loving God and one another are inseparable (4:19 - 5:2a)

A. God's initiating love (4:19)

¹⁹We love because he first loved us.

The reason John and his readers (the faithful church) love as they do is that God first loved them. Our love was activated by God's love. The priority and initiative are his.

B. Test of true love for God (4:20)

²⁰If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar. For the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen is not able to love God whom he has not seen.

1. John declares flatly that anyone who claims to love God while hating, meaning not loving, his brother is lying. That person's claim is contradicted by his life. John no doubt has the false teachers in mind. Though they profess love for God, that claim is shown to be a delusion by the fact they reject any brotherly duty toward the faithful.

2. The connection between loving God and loving fellow believers is explained by the statement in v. 20b. It's a statement arguing from the lesser to the greater. As Kruse expresses it (p. 170): "If people cannot carry out the lesser requirement (to love their fellow believers whom they have seen), they cannot carry out the greater requirement (to love God whom they have not seen)."

C. Commanded by God (4:21)

²¹And we have this commandment from him: the one who loves God must also love his brother.

Kruse writes (p. 170):

Here the author picks up a major theme from the Last Supper discourse in the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus stresses that his disciples' love for him must express itself in obedience to his command, and that his command is that they should love one another [cites omitted]. The author's purpose in picking up this theme here is to reassure his readers who did love their fellow believers that they really knew God, and to show them that the claims of the secessionists to know him were false.

D. To love God is to love Christians (5:1-2a)

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the one who fathers also* loves the one fathered of him. ²In this we know that we love the children of God when we love God.

1. John concludes this section on the inseparability of loving God and loving one another by stating two truths that together establish the link. First, he says that those who believe the apostolic gospel, as opposed to the Christologically warped message of the false teachers, have been born of God; they are children of God (3:1).

2. Second, he appeals to a maxim drawn from human experience: "everyone who loves the one who fathers (or begets) also loves the one fathered (or begotten) of him." A person who loves the father also will love the father's child. They go together. A child is so precious to a father and the bond between them is so strong, that love for the father cannot be separated from love for his child. It's the same sentiment behind a statement like, "If somebody's got it in for your kid, they've got it in for you."

3. He says in v. 2a that it is "in this," meaning by this maxim, that we know we love the brothers and sisters when we love God. Given that everyone who loves the parent loves his children, those who love God will love his children, their fellow Christians.

XII. Loving God and obeying him are inseparable (5:2b-5)

A. We also obey when we love God (5:2b-3a)

We also do his commandments,³ for this is love of God, that we keep his commandments.

1. It makes more sense to me to start a new sentence with the last clause of v. 2 (but I seem to be alone in thinking so). Not only do we know that we love God's children when we love God (v. 2a), we also obey his commandments when we love him (v. 2b). We do so because keeping his commandments is an essential aspect of loving God. That's why Jesus could say in Jn. 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

2. Stott comments (p. 176): "[W]hether shown to God or to humans, *agapē*, is always practical and active. Love for your brothers and sisters expresses itself 'with actions and in truth', and especially in sacrificial service (3:17-18); love for God in carrying out his commands."

B. Commandments not burdensome (5:3b-4a)

And his commandments are not burdensome,⁴ because everyone having been born of God overcomes the world.

1. And his commandments are not burdensome (as the false teachers may have claimed or implied) because everyone born of God (John's readers) conquers the world. The new birth produces an empowering new perspective (see 4:4-6).

2. In Stott's words (p. 176), "The spell of the old life has been broken. The fascination of the world has lost its appeal." Obeying God is not a chore; it is an expression of a grateful heart.

C. Faith is the victory (5:4b-5)

And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. ⁵But* who is the one who overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1. John identifies their faith as the means by which they overcame the world. It is the means of the new birth that produced the victorious new perspective.

2. And then he specifies, by a rhetorical question, the nature of that faith in distinction from the warped faith of the false teachers. It is no wonder that obedience strikes them as a burden.

XIII. Testimony concerning the Son of God (5:6-12)

A. With water and blood (5:6a)

⁶This is the one who came with water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and with the blood.

1. Gary Burge writes (p. 201), "First John 5:6 is perhaps the most perplexing verse in all of the Johannine letters." Raymond Brown (p. 598) describes the verse as "enigmatic," and Colin Kruse calls it (p. 175) "a very difficult text to interpret." That's a clue that one needs to tread lightly here. I've given a lot of thought to what I'm about to tell you, but the same could be said for many who have reached different conclusions.

2. First, notice that I have taken the prepositions in the first (*dia*) and second (*en*) clauses of v. 6a as denoting accompaniment rather than means and thus translated them "with." Both words can have that meaning. See, e.g., BDAG, 224, 328; NIDNTT 3:1182. Thus Kenneth Grayston notes (NCBC, 136) that the first clause of v. 6 means that Jesus Christ came **by or with** water and blood and David Rensberger asks (p. 131), "How did Jesus come 'by' or 'with' these things?"

3. John clearly is taking issue with the false teachers' claim that Jesus came *only* with water *not* with water *and* blood. John agrees that Jesus came with water but he insists, contrary to the heretics, that he came *not only* with water but with water *and* with blood. So however one

understands the meaning of coming with water and coming with blood that understanding must fit that framework.

4. I think John is saying that Jesus' effort to rescue mankind, his coming, involved not only the baptism he instituted (water) but also, and centrally, his atoning death (blood).

a. Most scholars recognize that Jesus' coming by or with water refers in some way to baptism. To quote David Rensberger (ANTC, 132), "[I]n a Christian context 'water' must surely refer in some way to baptism." Most, however, believe it refers to Jesus' baptism by John. With Colin Kruse, I consider it more likely that it refers to the baptism Jesus instituted.

(1) The phrase "with water" is used three times in the Gospel of John in reference to John the Baptist's baptizing ministry. Most tellingly, in Jn. 1:31 John reports the statement of John the Baptist that he "came baptizing with water." I don't think it is a stretch to believe the apostle's statement in 1 Jn. 5:6 that Jesus "came with water" was a shortened reference to the same concept, the fact that Jesus came baptizing with water.

(2) John certainly was aware that Jesus instituted a water baptism. He refers to Jesus' baptizing ministry at a number of places in his Gospel (Jn. 3:22-26; 4:1), though Jesus entrusted the actual baptizing of people to his disciples (Jn. 4:2).

(3) The contrast John the Baptist draws between his baptizing with water and Jesus' baptizing with the Holy Spirit (e.g., Jn. 1:26-33) does not negate the fact Jesus instituted a water baptism. John is clear that he did, not to mention Mat. 28:19 and what is said about Christian baptism throughout the rest of the N.T. Jesus now baptizes with the Spirit *in conjunction with* the water baptism he instituted. That is the birth of "water and Spirit" (Jn. 3:5).

(a) As Martinus C. de Boer remarked in a 1988 article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (cited in Kruse, p. 176 n. 203), "unlike the baptism of that other baptizer, John, his baptism 'with water' was also baptism 'with the holy spirit.'"

(b) Kruse states (p. 175-176), "Jesus once baptized with water but now baptizes with the Spirit, and it has been suggested that those in the author's community understood that Jesus now baptized people with the Spirit when they baptized them with water in Jesus' name." I think that suggestion is correct.

(4) Perhaps most importantly, the statement that Jesus came "with blood" clearly refers to his giving his life in sacrifice for the sins of mankind. That is the meaning of "blood" in its only reference in 1 John outside the immediate context (in 1:7). Since his coming "with blood" refers to something Jesus did rather than to something done to him – he laid his life down for us (1 Jn. 3:16; see also, Jn. 10:17-18) – the parallel of his coming "with water" is better understood as something he did (instituted a baptism) rather than something done to him (was baptized by John).

b. We know that at least some second-century Gnostics considered baptism to be very important. John Harris writes in his book *Gnosticism: Beliefs and Practices* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 1999) 121:

As far as the meaning of [baptism] goes the gnostics seemed to regard it as a rite of purification or of cleansing in preparation for admission to the *pleroma* [the ultimate realm of the true God]. It also had an element of initiation into the mysteries of *gnosis*. The Valentinians viewed baptism as a redemption rite, and both they and the Sethian gnostics regarded baptism as the assurance of immortality. Through baptism the baptized received the spirit of immortality, and thereby the baptized became a *pneumatic* (spiritual being). This was equivalent to receiving the immortal spirit of Christ.

Bentley Layton and David Brakke state in *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 19:

Like other Christians, the gnostics laid great stress on Christian baptism and made strong use of baptismal rhetoric when speaking of salvation. To judge from the texts, gnostic baptism marked a decisive step in the spiritual life of the gnostic, involving renunciation, instruction, learning, and initiation into a new "kinship" and new state of life. Reception of gnostic baptism was closely associated with reception of *gnōsis* and was believed to enable the gnostic to overcome death.

So it is not unreasonable to think that John's opponents combined a Gnostic-like Christology with an emphasis on the baptism instituted by the Christ.

c. John agrees with the false teachers that Jesus came baptizing and that one's submission to that baptism is a pivotal spiritual event, however they may disagree about the particulars of its significance, but he rejects the notion that the blessings received at baptism can be separated from Christ's death on the cross. They are inextricably linked: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came *not only* with water but with the water *and* with the blood.

(1) As I've argued, the false teachers in some sense denied the incarnation, denied that the eternal Son of God actually became the man Jesus of Nazareth. The eternal Son only *appeared* to be Jesus or only inhabited him *temporarily*. It was only the man Jesus who suffered on the cross, not God in the flesh.

(2) This denial that the eternal Son of God died on the cross as the man Jesus of Nazareth eviscerated the gospel by eliminating the atonement and thus eliminated the blessings associated with baptism. Given their denial of the Son's atoning death, the false teachers' promise of baptismal blessings was a theological fraud.

B. The Spirit testifies (5:6b)

And the Spirit is the one who testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

The Spirit is the one who testifies to this truth in and through the apostolic witness, most immediately through John, and what he says can be trusted because he speaks God's truth (see 4:2-3, 6).

C. Three witnesses (5:7-8)

⁷For there are three that testify, ⁸the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in accord.

1. In fact, there are three that testify to the truth that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came with water and blood – the Spirit, the water, and the blood – and these three are consistent (as required by the Law).

2. I suspect what John means is that the Spirit testifies to this truth through the message of the apostles that is preached in the church and now repeated by John. The water of baptism and the blood shed on the cross bear silent testimony to the same truth. The fact the false teachers deny the significance of the blood, deny that it was blood of the Christ, does not alter the fact that the blood stands as a witness to the truth. It did in fact flow from the veins of Christ, and no amount of denial can change the truth.

3. If you have a KJV or a NKJV, you will notice that there is additional text at the end of v. 7 and the beginning of v. 8. Here is the additional text highlighted in bold type: **[7] For there are three that testify [in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. [8] And there are three that testify on earth]:** the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. It is universally recognized that this was not part of the original text. Kruse comments (p. 180 n. 211):

This longer version, known as the Johannine Comma ('comma' meaning 'sentence'), is preserved in only a few later Greek manuscripts (dating from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries). It is thought that the Johannine Comma found its way into the Greek manuscripts via the Latin manuscripts of the ninth century. The Johannine Comma is found in no early Greek manuscripts and is not found in the Old Latin versions before the seventh century, nor in the Vulgate before the eighth century. It is correctly omitted from all modern translations of the NT.

Rensberger states (p. 131): "Unfortunately, the added words were incorporated into the Greek text commonly printed from the sixteenth century until the rise of modern critical editions (the "Textus Receptus"), and so were also included in the KJV."

D. Superiority of God's testimony (5:9)

⁹If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater because this is God's testimony that he has testified concerning his Son.

We accept human testimony, but surely God's testimony (via the Spirit) is more compelling because it is God's testimony, testimony he has given about his Son.

E. Believing in the Son of God (5:10)

¹⁰The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made him a liar, for he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning his Son.

The person who believes in the Son of God, meaning believes that Jesus was the divine Christ, has this testimony in himself (his heart), the testimony that the Christ died (since no one doubted that Jesus died). Those who do not believe God's testimony about his Son have made him out to be a liar.

F. The testimony (5:11-12)

¹¹And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son. ¹²The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

The testimony God has given about his Son is that God gave us eternal life in him (through his atoning sacrifice). The one who has the Son of God (meaning accepts the truth that Jesus who died was the Son of God) has life, and the one who does not have the Son does not have life.

XIV. Conclusion (5:13-21)

A. Purpose summarized (5:13)

¹³I write these things to you, the ones believing in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

John summarizes his purpose for writing, just as he did in Jn. 20:31. He wants his readers to know that, contrary to whatever suggestions the false teachers may have made, they have eternal life. They are not to allow these self-proclaimed "spiritual heavyweights" to rob them of their peace and security.

B. Assurance regarding prayer (5:14-15)

¹⁴And this is the confidence which we have before him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that he has the requests which we have asked from him.

1. Being in Christ, being children of God, they can be bold in approaching God and confident that he will favorably hear whatever they ask "according to his will." As noted in the discussion of 3:22, to be effective prayer also must be offered by one living in faithfulness or covenant loyalty; by one praying with proper motives, meaning out of a sincere heart rather than "to be seen by men" (e.g., Mat. 6:5-6); by one praying from a desire to glorify God rather than to indulge our selfishness (Jas. 4:3); by one who forgives others (Mk. 11:25; see also, Mat. 6:12-15); and by one who believes God's promises (Mt. 21:22; Mk. 11:24). See Stott, 153. John here simply assumes that these are part of a Christian's prayer.

2. Since God favorably hears such prayer, they (and we) can be sure they have obtained whatever they ask for.

C. Prayer for a sinning brother (5:16-17)

¹⁶If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he will ask and he will give him life, to the ones who sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that you should make a request about that. ¹⁷All wrongdoing is sin, yet there is sin not unto death.

1. In light of the efficacy of prayer according to God's will, John says that if they see a brother (or sister) committing a sin "not unto death" they need to pray to God and God will give that sinner life.

a. It is difficult to know what John meant by his references to a sin "not unto death" and a sin "unto death." Many different interpretations have been offered. This is another of those instances where one must tread lightly.

b. My understanding is that a sin "not unto death" is a sin committed by a faithful Christian, one who is walking in the light and thus is penitent. That sin is forgiven and

therefore is not in itself spiritually fatal to the sinner because it does not separate him or her from God. It is "not unto death" in that sense.

c. You say, "Well, if the sin is forgiven, why does God need to give life to the one who commits it?" The fact a sin is forgiven does not mean it can pose no danger to one's spiritual life. As Marshall notes, sin is dangerous "because it is the characteristic of life apart from God." Sinning has the potential for corroding one's faith and ultimately for pulling one from Christ, even beyond the point of no return. Sin is a tool of the devil; it can desensitize one to the will of God. The violation of one's conscience can facilitate its further violation.

d. One who sees a faithful brother or sister committing a sin needs to pray that God will protect that brother or sister's faith from any lingering, corrosive effect so that the sin not become a step on the road to apostasy. God will answer that prayer, the result of which is that the sinning brother or sister will be given resurrection life at Christ's return.

2. John simply notes that there is a sin "unto death" and that he's not saying one should make a request about that.

a. I think the sin "unto death" is a knowing, willful, and final rejection of Christ. It is "unto death" in that the person is beyond repentance; his open-eyed rejection of Christ is proof that his repenting apparatus is nonfunctional. See, e.g., Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31; Mk. 3:29; Mat. 12:22-32.

b. God will not give blessed resurrection life to one in that state because he will not give such life to the impenitent. So John does not advocate prayer in that case. Note that he doesn't forbid it; he just doesn't advocate it. That's significant because we often cannot tell whether someone is over that line. If we pray for someone who is in fact over the line, we are not violating John's words. Craig Blomberg writes in *From Pentecost to Patmos* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006) 497:

[W]hat John writes is that he is *not saying* that people *should* pray in those situations, rather than *saying* that they should *not* pray. In other words, he is just not discussing the situation of what to do with people who have so hardened their hearts that they will never repent. But since we do not have God's ability to know who may have crossed such a line, we must pray for everyone on the assumption that they may still have a chance!

c. The implication is that some or all of the heretics are in that category. John wants to keep the gap between his readers and the false teachers clear and wide to minimize the false teachers' opportunities to adversely influence his readers. The false teachers were not mere sinners in the faith; they were enemies of the faith who had rejected God's forgiveness in Christ and who were seeking to lure others to their view.

D. Three Christian affirmations, things "we know" (5:18-20)

¹⁸We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin [habitually], but the one who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in [the power of] the evil one. ²⁰And 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 one is the true God and eternal life.

1. ¹⁸*We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin [habitually], but the one who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him.*

a. Christians, those in relationship with God, do not accept sin (as do the false teachers); they do not practice it as a lifestyle (see 3:6-10).

b. The debate regarding the second clause – but the one who was born of God protects him – is whether the one who was born of God refers to the Christian mentioned in the first clause or to Jesus Christ.

(1) If the former, the meaning is that rather than sinning habitually, the Christian guards himself (against such a temptation), and the evil one does not harm him. In that interpretation, ὁ γεννηθεὶς ("he who was born") is taken as a reference to the Christian rather than to Christ, and αὐτόν is taken as a reflexive ("himself"). See Brown, 619-622. The idea is similar to what James says in Jas. 4:7 – "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." The fact Jesus is nowhere else referred to as "the one who was born of God" cuts in favor of this view.

(2) The biggest objection to the understanding that "the one who was born of God" refers to a Christian is the shift in tense between the two clauses. In v. 18a Christians are referred to as those "who *have been* born of God"; in v. 18b the reference is to the one "who *was* born of God." This, coupled with the fact Jesus is portrayed in the Gospel of John as the one who keeps his disciples safe, leads most commentators to understand the clause as a reference to Jesus. The meaning in that case is that Jesus protects the faithful from being overpowered by Satan; he does not harm them. This may well be further assurance to the faithful against the threat posed by the false teachers.

2. ¹⁹*We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in [the power of] the evil one* – John and his readers (the faithful), as well as all Christians, know they are God's children and can thus claim the promises made to those born of God. They also know that there are only two sides to this battle and that all who are not Christians are under the control of the evil one (see, e.g., Eph. 6:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:26).

3. ²⁰*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 one*

is the true God and eternal life – Christians know that the Son of God has come in the flesh and has revealed the way to know God. He came from God and taught us the way of salvation, namely, that he, through his redeeming work, is the only path to the Father. Christians, having believed Christ's words, are in the Father in that they are in Christ who *is* the true God and eternal life.

E. Keep yourselves from idols (5:21)

²¹Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

The false teachers had left the faithful Christians and gone into the world because they had a false notion about Jesus Christ. Just as Israel was repeatedly warned against leaving the one true God to go after idols and against abandoning God's commandments for the permissive life of the worshippers of the false gods of the surrounding nations, so John speaks of joining these false teachers and accepting their theology as "going after idols" (Brown, 628-29, 641).